

Parliament Buildings, Wellington, 17th August, 1936.

The Hon. the Minister of Industries and Commerce, Wellington.

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**REPORT ON THE COOK ISLANDS FRUIT INDUSTRY BY PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION
WHICH VISITED THE COOK ISLANDS, JULY-AUGUST, 1936.**

PART I.—INTRODUCTORY.

IN accordance with the decision of Cabinet arising out of the hearing in Wellington of two petitions from the fruitgrowers of the Cook Islands, Messrs. J. Robertson, M.P. (Chairman), S. G. Holland, M.P., and C. L. Hunter, M.P., were appointed a Delegation from the Industries and Commerce Committee to proceed to the Cook Islands to continue investigations on the spot on behalf of the Committee.

The Delegation left Wellington on 7th July, 1936, and, after spending a month in Rarotonga and the Lower Cook Islands, returned to Wellington on 17th August, 1936.

PART II.—THE COOK ISLANDS AN INTEGRAL PORTION OF NEW ZEALAND.

As a result of this visit the conviction is strongly held by the members of the Delegation that there is not in New Zealand an adequate realization of the fact that the Cook Islands became part and parcel of the Dominion of New Zealand when in 1901, under the provisions of the Colonial Boundaries Act, 1895, its boundaries were extended to include the Cook Islands, and, in consequence, the inhabitants of these islands are New-Zealanders and are fellow-citizens with ourselves in the British Commonwealth of Nations.

A fuller realization of this fact would bring about a closer relationship between the Islands and the mainland, and would probably lead to a better understanding of the problems confronting the New Zealand Parliament in the discharge of its responsibilities to the people of those Islands.

PART III.—DESCRIPTIVE.

GEOGRAPHICAL.

The Cook Islands comprise twelve inhabited islands (not including Niue) and carry a population of over 12,000 Polynesian people. They cover an ocean area of some 850,000 square miles, extending from Penrhyn Island, situated 9 degrees south of the equator, to Mangaia, situated just north of the Tropic of Capricorn.

Rarotonga, the headquarters of the Group, is situated 1,800 miles from Wellington. The outlying islands of the Lower Group range between Aitutaki (140 miles due north of Rarotonga) to Mangaia (110 miles south-east of that island). In addition to the two named are Mitiaro, Atiu, and Mauke.

The greatest distance between any island and Rarotonga is 140 miles.

The Northern Islands, situated some 600 to 700 miles farther north, are coral atolls, and are not capable of producing fruit for the New Zealand markets; and their problems are not discussed in this report. Neither is the Island of Niue, which, although geographically included in the Cook Islands, has no sea connection with the remaining islands of the Group, and is administered separately.

METEOROLOGICAL.

The year may be divided into two seasons—from December to March being the rainy season. During the remainder of the year fine weather generally prevails. Frequent tropical rains, together with plentiful sunshine, combined with a fertile and bountiful soil, induce wonderful growth.

Rarotonga is well provided with running streams, but all the Outer Islands suffer through insufficiency of the same.

HURRICANES.

The whole of the Group is within the hurricane zone, and during the past ten years has had several destructive visitations, the most serious for many years occurring in 1935, doing very heavy damage to all plantations.

The death—during the storm—of the late Director of Agriculture was a severe loss, and set back the work of agriculture in the Group, particularly in regard to the renovation of orange plantations. Owing also to the destruction of the Agricultural Office and the loss of all records, the value of the experimental work being carried out in regard to suitable citrus stock and culture was lost.

PART IV.—THE PROGRAMME OF INVESTIGATIONS.

The Delegation was in possession of certain evidence already presented to the Committee in Wellington. That evidence indicated—

- (1) A pronounced difference in the price received by the Island grower and that paid by the New Zealand consumer:
- (2) The difference was not accounted for by the various items comprising costs of packing, shipping, and selling:
- (3) There was a general inclination on the part of grower witnesses to account for it by alleging undue exploitation by Island traders:
- (4) There was an equally general tendency on the part of the traders to attribute the cause to faulty methods in growing, handling, and packing the fruit.