

**Hon. J COOK** Mr President It appears to me there is some misapprehension in the minds of hon. members regarding the purport of my resolution. It goes no further than the resolution embodying the conditions of the Wellington Conference, with the exception that the resolution carried at this Conference makes the position a little more definite with regard to the employment of coloured labour, and that is the point taken by those who object to the form in which the resolution appears. Let me say, first of all, that the figures supplied by the Hon. Mr Fysh as to the advantages derived from the present contracts by the Home Authorities are very surprising indeed, and indicate to my mind all the more clearly the duty of the Home Government to as far as possible meet the wishes of the Conference, in view of the very generous terms to which we consent for the next two years. If we pay £75,000 a year, and the Home Office £95,000, they get four or five times the matter carried we do for the money. This seems to me a very strong reason why they should meet us as far as possible with respect to the conditions we desire. In regard to the question of coloured labour, Sir, it is not because it is coloured labour, not because their skins are black or white, that we object to them. No such narrow views as those influence us. We object because with these companies it is made an exclusive matter, they will not employ white labour. I respectfully submit, if all the employers of the Colonies took the same stand, Mr Fysh and Sir John Forrest would protest as loudly as anyone else. It is not because they are blacks that we object, but because of their habits, and because of their particular relations with this company. For instance, there is no freedom in the attitude assumed by these men. They keep them the whole year round. They pay them a very small wage, and they are never out of the employment of the company. There is, consequently, no freedom with respect to the relations of these blacks to the company. The company employ no white labour at all, so that it is a matter of the total exclusion of white labour on these particular boats.

**Sir JOHN FORREST** The stewards are white.

**Mr COOK** All the particular labour they employ whites for, and fill the other with blacks. The reason blacks are employed, as alleged in a letter from Mr Michie himself, is that after many years of experience of both they have proved themselves in every way more satisfactory. The main reason for doing away with the European crews in the lower grades was that they caused infinite trouble from drunkenness and disobedience. The Lascars cost the company more for the reason that they are kept and paid all the year round, whereas the white crews are paid off upon arrival in London. This company practically keeps, as they would have kept a lot of slaves in the olden times, these Lascars upon the mail boats. These are the reasons we have for objecting to their being employed. It has been said they are British subjects. I admit the strength of that argument; but I submit that when the black portion of the British subject comes into conflict with the interests of the white subject anywhere in the way it does upon these boats, we ought to make our preference in favour of those most like ourselves; that is to say, if these various kinds of labour, black and white, were mingled, paid the same rate of wages, worked in the same way, had the same ideas and aspirations, and entered into all the things which make up our civilisation in the same way that the whites do, I for one would have no objection on account of their skin, I would look upon them just the same as white men. Because these subjects do not commingle, because one will have nothing to do with the other, we are compelled to take our preference of the two. This company has taken its preference, because they are more manageable, and because they can keep them in close subjection practically as slaves. Reference was made to Queensland employing black labour—that was an unfortunate reference. Queensland tells us, and let me not be understood as agreeing with the statement, that they employ black labour only because white is not suitable for the work.

The Hon. P. O. FYSH: Not in the stoke-hole.

**Mr COOK** No, the Queensland people employ black labour because they say they cannot employ white. With respect to the P & O Company, there is plenty of white labour willing, and, in fact, begging to do the work, but this company absolutely refuses to employ them. There is absolutely no parallel between the two cases. Sir John Forrest says the company may be speaking with respect to the two years' extension.

**Sir JOHN FORREST** Not the two years' extension,—afterwards.

**Mr COOK** We simply express disappointment at not being able to do anything before that period. The resolution is emphasised by the surprising figures quoted by Mr Fysh. With respect to the attitude of New Zealand I have nothing to say. I only repeat that we are driven to take up the attitude we have taken up by the company. They say they will only employ one kind of labour, and that not of the most desirable kind. That is the position I take up. It is not because they are blacks, but because of the exclusiveness with which they are employed, and because of the general conditions of their life which makes it impossible that the two races can commingle. We are compelled by the company to take our choice—my choice is for white men in preference to the black.

The **CHAIRMAN**: I think it is to be generally regretted that the discussion on this motion should have turned altogether on the point of the employment of coloured labour, which is not, after all, immediately before us. I may say that it is with the greatest and deepest regret that I have to put this motion that the Hon. Mr Cook has laid before this Conference. I was in hopes that this Conference would not have agreed to an extension of the present contract without having