

LABOUR RECRUITING: DOCUMENTS C131 to C133

C131 Missionaries and Labour Recruiters, Bismarck Archipelago, 1880

The following is a literal translation of my orders to the teachers concerning their conduct in connection with the labour traffic.

You must not, on any account, speak evil of Mr. Blohm or any other white men engaged in the labour traffic unless you can prove what you say to be true. Teach the people the following:—

1. The white man's year is equal to two of yours.
2. You cannot come back again until the term for which you have agreed to serve has expired.
3. The Samoan climate may not suit your constitution and you may possibly die in a far off land, away from home and friends.
4. You will be expected to work on plantations and to give your whole time to it.
5. If you get under a good master, a foreman, you will be well cared for and happy, but if you get placed under a bad master, a foreman, you will be miserable.

6. You will receive food and clothes while there and whatever pay you may have been promised.

7. You will be brought back again at the expiration of the term for which you signed and receive what has been promised you as payment for your labour.

This order was issued in consequence of Mr. Blohm having written me a very nasty letter accusing the Mission of telling 'dirty lies' to the natives concerning the treatment of labour on board the vessels and plantations of Messrs. Godeffroy and Co. in Samoa. He also intimated to me that he will complain to a British Man-of-War of my conduct in this matter and also represent matters to a German Man-of-War when one arrives. May God help me to do what is right in spite of all that men can do or say. Amen.

SOURCE *Methodist Church Papers*, Rev B. Danks; Daily Journal, New Britain, 1878-1882, Mitchell Library, MS. Meth. Ch. 616, listed at A5015; entry for 27 January, 1880, pp. 161-2

C132 H. H. Romilly Reports, Bismarck Archipelago, 1883

1. I have the honor to forward for your Excellency's information a general report of the relations at present existing between the white population and natives of this group, and of the manner of trading pursued by the former, and the good and evil results of the largely increasing labour trade.

2. The white population is at present limited to some thirty individuals. About twenty of them are in employment of two German firms, Messrs. Hensheim and Robertson, of Hamburg, and the German Trading Company of Samoa. There are three English missionaries and altogether ten white British subjects in the group. There are also, I believe, about twenty five Fijians. Since my arrival no complaints have been made to me either by whites or natives, and things seem to have been going on very smoothly between them.

The natives seem to understand my position among them, and I am sure they would come to me with any grievance they might have. I have taken much trouble seeing that I have no means of locomotion in making the acquaintance of all the principal natives within a two days walk of this place.

This has been accomplished not without considerable hardship and risk.

I have explained to them the nature of the labour trade, and have not in any way endeavoured to dissuade the men from leaving their homes. I have, however, given them information as to the length of time they are expected to work, and told them many other things of which they were previously ignorant. I have in every case found the natives civil and willing to talk to me, even though some of them had the worst possible reputations, and were generally supposed to hate white men.

I will, however, touch on one or two other matters before

again referring to the subject of the labour trade.

3. The only article of native produce which is largely bought is copra. The profits are very large, as it can be bought extremely cheap. It is no doubt owing to this fact that so many men are contented to risk their lives by living entirely amongst a most savage population. There is, however, but little more to be said on the subject. Muskets and Snider rifles are much in demand among the natives. To obtain a Snider a native will work for a year, or sometimes for a much longer period. It is, to my mind, an improper practice on the part of the Germans to supply them with these articles.

There is no exaggeration in saying that since the introduction of breech-loading rifles the natives fight more among themselves and murder each other more often than was their habit when spears and clubs and slings were their only weapons.

The muzzle-loading musket, which is also largely supplied, is not to my mind, so formidable a weapon as the sling. The bullet used is a small conical one, with a diameter about half that of the barrel. Accurate position cannot be expected with this weapon at a greater distance than 60 yards.

Dynamite is not supplied to the natives, though they are anxious to buy it.

The German firms very properly consider that it will be unwise with them to trade in this article.

It is, however, a fine distinction which makes breech-loading rifles a safe article of trade and dynamite an unsafe one. In all other respects the copra trade carried on in New Britain differs in no material way from that carried on in other groups.

4. The labour trade has increased largely since last year. In

1882 only three vessels visited this group, while in 1883 up to the date under which I am writing (September, 1883) over thirty have come for the purpose of recruiting capital labour. That is to say, over thirty shiploads have been taken away, as some of them came two or three times.

The history of the trade in New Britain is somewhat curious. For more than a year before the arrival of any Queensland or Fijian labour ship it was the habit of Mr. Hershheim, Imperial German Consul, to send ships to Neuss, a small island at the northern end of New Ireland. This spot he had discovered, and had stationed a trader there.

These ships used to bring from ten to twenty men every voyage to Matupi, where they would be kept at the head station for three months, at the expiration of which time they would receive trade goods to a small extent and be returned to their homes. As his ships were constantly working backwards and forwards between Neuss and Matupi, and each one either brought men or took men back, it came to pass that in course of time a great number of them had worked at Matupi and could speak a few words of English. Their anxiety was so great to go there that hundreds would rush on board the ships and would have to be turned off again. While things were in this state the first labour ships visited the group, when they pursued their trade with but little success till they arrived at Neuss. At this place it is not to be wondered they filled their ships immediately.

The natives were under the impression that, as usual, they were going to Matupi to return in a few months. No particular pains were taken to deceive them, and thus the fame of the first three ships to visit New Ireland was soon spread among the labour-engaging portion of the Queensland colonists. The result is the rush of ships this year.

It has most unfortunately been out of my power to visit this place. It is 150 miles from where my head-quarters are situated, and, as I said before, I have not even an open boat to go about in. The mischief, however, is now done. I am told that there were as many as ten ships at once at anchor opposite this spot. I do not assert that every native who left Neuss imagined that he was going to Matupi, but I do assert that I do not believe a single man who has been engaged from New Ireland this year knew in the least what he was going to do, where he was going to, or how long he would be away from his home.

The Queensland Agents go through a farce of producing an agreement, to which every native puts his mark.

He then has to listen to the following address: 'You are now going by your own free will and consent to Queensland, to work for three years in the sugar plantations; at the expiration of that time you will receive £18, and be returned to your home.' I conclude that though the native cannot speak a word of English, with the exception of a few Neuss men, who know a few words, and though there is not a single interpreter to be obtained, with the exception of my own, in the whole group, still he is supposed to know where Queensland is, and to be acquainted with sugar and pounds. Neither is the year a division of time employed by them, and the three fingers held up by the Government Agent are taken to represent three moons or sometimes even three days.

When the native who has been shipped as interpreter has pretended to translate this, every one is satisfied that the men have been recruited according to the provisions of the Act, and it is most unlikely that any one will afterwards question either the morality or legality of the proceedings.

It is impossible for any labour ships to obtain interpreters

for any part of the New Ireland coast, for the sufficient reason that such persons do not exist. The tribes of that coast know their own languages and no others. Their relations with their neighbours are hostile. Some natives of New Britain make a practice of shipping for a few months in this capacity; they know that their fraud will not be noticed, and that at the expiration of their stay on board they will receive a liberal gift of trade goods.

5. When I commenced to write this report, I informed your Excellency that I had no means of visiting the New Ireland coast. I have now, I am happy to say, been able to charter a vessel from Mr Hershheim, and have therefore now had opportunities of holding many conversations with the chiefs of the tribes from which men have been recruited. I not only see no reason to alter my former opinions, but I can say that they have been in every particular confirmed.

On the 2nd of October I sailed in the *Montiara* for Neuss, the island I have alluded to above, and I arrived there on 4th of the same month. Lying at anchor there I found the *Ariel* a labour schooner from Queensland. She had nothing at the time of any interest to report. I was, however informed by Mr Brandt, trader, in the employment of Mr Hershheim, that the *Mary*, a labour ship, sailing from Fiji, had had much trouble with the natives at Neuss. From his account it appeared that whilst this ship was lying at anchor there, some fifty engaged labourers who were on board took advantage of a heavy rain-squall to jump overboard and swim ashore. The captain of the *Mary* at once gave orders for his men to fire on them in the water, and for ten minutes this was done. Probably owing to the difficulty of clearly seeing in the rain, none were killed. Whilst this was going on, the Government agent of the *Clara*, another labour vessel at anchor there, pulled alongside the *Mary*, and told the Captain that if he did not cease firing at once he would report him on arrival in Queensland. As by this time the run-away men had reached the shore the request was complied with.

Next day, however, in the early morning the Captain organised a warlike expedition for the purpose of forcibly recapturing his men. He was met on the beach before he had time to land, by an armed party of natives, who at once threw spears at the boats. The Captain was wounded slightly by a spear handle and his men began to fire from the boats. I was informed on my arrival there by the natives with whom he had been engaged that the white men were, on account of the spears, lying in the bottom of the boats, and therefore the elevation of their fire was too high to do any damage. After a few minutes the boats were driven off, none of the natives were killed, on the side of the white men the Captain was very slightly wounded.

I unfortunately did not fall in with the *Mary* after this occurrence. Had I done so, I should have felt it my duty to arrest the Captain, and sent his ship at once back to Fiji. Neither did I come across the *Clara* at that time. I am therefore unable to send your Excellency any sworn statement of an eyewitness. The statement of Mr Brandt is second-hand, and it is to him I am indebted for the above story.

On my arrival at Neuss I called a meeting of the natives. They looked at me with the deepest distrust, and I had much difficulty in inducing them to hold any communication with me. Finally they came from the bush in the greatest strength they could muster, in their fighting paint, and fully armed. For a long time it was impossible for me to speak to them, as they were intensely excited. They imagined that I was there for the purpose of judging their strength, in order that I might come later in a man-of-war

to punish them for fighting the white man. At last, after I had sat in their midst for an hour, I managed to induce them to listen to me.

I first asked them to tell me why some of them had run away from the ship. They said they were very badly treated on board. Sometimes they were put in irons and the hatches were put on. One white man on board used constantly to strike them. They accordingly made the plan which they afterwards carried into effect, of running away. Having succeeded in this, it was not to be expected, they said, that they should tamely submit to be taken on board again, once more to undergo much treatment. I then repeated over and over again to them, in as many different ways as I could express it, that if the white men wished to fight, it was better for them to run into the bush, where they could not be followed, than to engage in a contest in which they would be generally defeated. I said I was there for the purpose of making the white man treat the natives in a proper and legal manner, and that I was always anxious to hear any complaints they had against the white man. For a long time however they would not lay aside their suspicion; they evidently thought that it was merely another device for 'stealing' men. I therefore broke up the meeting, and told them I would speak to them again next day.

Next morning they assembled in a far more quiet manner, and without arms. They had been talking over what I had said, and seemed inclined to believe me. I told them again what I had said on the previous day, and explained the length of time they were expected to stay away if they went on board labour ships, the manner of work, the amount of pay, and the nature of the climate they would have to live in. They expressed the profoundest astonishment, and for some moments I could not hold them in check, as they leaped to their feet, and appeared madly excited by the intelligence I had just given them. They had supposed that the men who had left them were only going for a few months as had formerly always been the case. They asked if the ship which had taken them did not belong to Matupi. It was true they had heard of Queensland, but the name conveyed no idea to their minds. I then told them that I had not given them this information to prevent their going, if they still desired to do so, but that I knew that the ships which

came to take them away had no interpreters who could speak to them. There were men who attended this meeting who came to it from a distance of 30 miles. It will therefore have the effect of letting the natives of at least 60 miles of coast know what I have said. Though it has produced a great impression on them for the time, it is not unlikely that in a few months time they will have forgotten all about it.

I left Neuss on 15th October, and arrived at Matupi on 23rd of that month. The cruise had the effect of confirming the opinions I formerly held on the subject of the labour trade in this group. In my conversations with the natives I have always most carefully avoided any expression which they might understand as an attempt to dissuade them from recruiting on board labour ships. I feel confident, however, that your Excellency will approve my attempts to enlighten their ignorance on this subject. They cannot for an instant be compared with the natives of the Solomon or New Hebrides group, as in those places the natives know exactly what to expect if they go to Queensland or Fiji. In New Ireland the trade is still of so recent a date that no men have yet returned to their homes, save a few, rejected by the medical officer in Fiji. The recruiting season for this year is nearly at an end. I understand that next year there will be nearly double the ships fitted out from Queensland to New Ireland, as the success this year of most of them has raised an impression that there is still an inexhaustible supply of labour. This they will find is not the case. Some islands have been completely depopulated, and others have barely men enough to enable them to defend themselves against the attacks of the New Ireland natives.

SOURCE *Great Britain Royal Navy—Australia Station, Records of the Commander-in-Chief*, National Archives, Wellington, Vol. 16, Pacific islands 1881-4, Vol. 4, p. 71, microfilm reel 15, FM4/1658, Mitchell Library; report H.H. Romilly, Deputy Commissioner for the Western Pacific to the Acting High Commissioner for the Western Pacific, dated, Matupi, 15 September, 1883 in H.M.S. 'Diamond'—Proceedings during cruise in Banks' Islands, Santa Cruz, Solomon Islands, New Britain, New Ireland, New Guinea, etc., May to July, 1884

C133 Resistance at Nodup to Labour Recruiters, 1883

I have the honor to communicate to Your Excellency the following:

On the voyage from Samoa to New Britain, on the 6th June, when in the neighbourhood of the Solomon Islands, I fell in with the English schooner *Fanny*, of Brisbane, with a shipload of labourers from New Britain and New Ireland. She requested by signal, and was afforded medical assistance for the Captain and Government Agent, who had, when landing at Nodup, near Cape Stephens, in New Britain, been wounded by gunshots and throwing spears.

On arrival at Matupi, I was informed by the German Consul there, Mr. Hershheim, that he had received a report of this occurrence, and that the resident French Missionary at Nodup had requested his assistance. At the same time he begged me to accompany him to Nodup, and in the interests of all the white people residing in the district, to caution the natives and warn them against making fur-

ther transgressions. As the natives in those regions do not know the differences of nationality, but rather regard all white men as one nation, it was to be feared that the visit of a ship of war, unaccompanied by punishment inflicted, would only make them more insolent. I believe, therefore, as S.M.S. *Carola* was the first vessel of war to visit the neighbourhood after the occurrence, that it was my duty, for the before mentioned reason, to accede to the Consul's request, although the matter did not directly effect German affairs, but specially touched English subjects, and accordingly proceeded on a short visit to Nodup on the 11th June.

The following is an account of the case as related to me by the wounded Captain and Government Agent of the vessel:—

The *Fanny* had recruited 144 labourers, her full allowance, on the coast of New Ireland, New Britain and Duke of York. Of this number, fourteen had, whilst the ship was

lying becalmed near the coast of New Ireland, jumped overboard in the dark. Of these several were recaptured, some drowned or shot on their flight, and about seven had reached the shore, and proceeded thence in a canoe to their homes. The vessel had then, after obtaining by the help of the French Missionary at Nodup, some interpreters, amongst whom was a young chief, proceeded to Man Island, in order to make good the loss sustained. On landing there, the chief was killed by the natives, and was taken into the boat by the Captain, but the corpse was shortly afterwards thrown overboard. On landing with the other interpreters in Nodup, the Captain was, according to him, without cause, attacked by the natives, and wounded, together with the Government's Agent. At the same time the natives plundered the house of the French Missionary and stole his property. By the intercession of the German Consul, and with the assistance of a trader of the 'Handels und Plantagen-Gesellschaft' resident at Nodup, an Englishman named Buckley, the chiefs had previous to my arrival, returned a great part of the stolen goods of the Consul, and they had likewise offered to surrender the offenders, as they had not authorised the attack. According to the trader and the two highest chiefs of the tribe, the cause of the attack on the Captain of the *Fanny* was given to the Consul as follows:

The Captain had placed himself in communication with the French priest respecting the services of interpreters; the priest had sent the young chief on board with a letter telling him to get him something off the ship, which immediately proceeded to sea, without landing the native. When the Captain on his return to Nodup, desired, according to custom, to pay compensation for the dead man, the natives refused to accept it, and were put into such a state of excitement by the abduction of their man, which appeared to them quite unjustifiable, and by the fact of the body not being returned to them, that the family refused all compensation, and, in spite of the contrary advice of the two chiefs, attacked the Europeans and tried to kill them, so that the latter with difficulty reached the vessel. The natives are now said to have the intention to attack the next boat of labour vessel with a white man in it which may attempt to land there, and to murder all the whites in revenge.

Taking into consideration the fact that, according to the Consul the chiefs of the tribe were themselves innocent and had done all in their power to make good the damage done, and also that no definite complaint on the part of the Captain of the *Fanny* was in my possession, I contented myself with cautioning the chiefs, in similar cases where they had received injury from white men, not to endeavour to obtain redress themselves by force of arms, but to apply to the Consul, but especially not to wreak their vengeance for an injury done to a white man on other unoffending whites. I told them that as soon as an English ship arrived the affair would be investigated further and again demanded the restitution of the remainder of the property stolen from the French priest. This was promised and before we left one rifle was returned.

The commercial agent residing at Nodup asserted that otherwise he lived quite peaceably and on good terms with the natives, and attributed the cause of this misadventure partly to the existing enmity between the Catholic and some Protestant missionaries. That the people in this case were unconscious of any guilt, and acted, as they thought, only according to their idea of justice, seems to be evident by the fact that the trader lived with them peaceably both before and after the affair, and that one of the chiefs went fearlessly to the Consul at Matupi and also met me when I landed, whilst the natives usually take to the bush immediately on the arrival of a ship of war.

I have requested Mr Hershheim to acquaint the Captain of the next English man-of-war touching at the islands in question with the action taken by me, and to explain to him the causes which led me to take that action; but I nevertheless feel it to be also my duty to acquaint you, sir, of the facts of the case.

SOURCE *Great Britain Royal Navy—Australia Station, Records of the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Islands, 1881-84, Vol. 4, National Archives, Wellington, N.Z., Volume 16, microfilm reel, Mitchell Library, No. FM4/1658; letter, Commander Karcher (Corvetten-Capitain) to Commodore Erskine, dated Batavia, 5 July, 1883*