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(SECOND SESSION.)

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THE PARLIAMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

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NORTHERN TERRITORY.

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REPORT OF ADMINISTRATOR

FOR THE

YEAR ENDED 30<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 1922.

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On the 3rd of June, 1922, adult suffrage in connexion with municipal elections was abolished, and a franchise based on property qualification substituted therefor.

This was a most beneficial enactment, the good effects of which were speedily manifest, as at the next municipal election a Council with fair representation of property-holders was returned instead of as formerly a continuous majority of socialistic extremists whose tender mercies towards property-owners were indeed cruel.

The Darwin Council now consists for the most part of moderate, reasonable, and earnest citizens most willing and anxious to do all for the town that their means will allow; but unfortunately, owing to the general depression, their means are so small that their energies can find but very limited expression, and much necessary work in the streets of Darwin has of necessity to wait for the arrival of better times.

The Government shipping trade has been carried on as in 1920-21, with the same results of dissatisfaction to settlers and heavy loss to the Government. The loss is principally due to the unsuitability and inadequacy of the *John Alce*, the vessel provided for carrying on the trade. Her very poor sailing qualities and low engine speed cause her voyages to outports to be of inordinate length and highly expensive in the matters of payments for petrol and high wages and overtime to the crew, while her register being only 33 tons, nearly one-third of which is taken up by water, fuel, and ship's stores, the result is that, to the injury and quite legitimate dissatisfaction of settlers, cargo has frequently to be left behind at Darwin, and more voyages have to be undertaken than would be necessary with an efficient vessel which an amount considerably less than the total loss on the *John Alce* for the last two years should easily provide.

The continuance of this enterprise by means of the *John Alce* must inevitably continue to result in heavy loss to the Government and general inconvenience to and dissatisfaction among those whose interests it is the intention to serve. The best solution of the difficulty would be for the service to be carried out by a private firm contracting on reasonable terms with the Government, but the call for tenders with this end in view has had no result, and the only alternative seems to be to provide an efficient and economical vessel, and with her improve the service and reduce the losses.

A most unfortunate and regrettable accident occurred on the 6th of April, 1922, when a motor launch carrying the members of an oil-prospecting party to the Victoria River country was swamped off Point Pearce, and two out of four European members of the party were drowned and the whole of their plant and equipment was lost.

Search was made by the police, accompanied by aboriginals, along the coast for the missing members of the party, but no trace of them could be found.

I am glad to be able to report that the native blacks were most friendly and helpful to the survivors, who were thrown up on the shore in a state of complete destitution, and action was subsequently taken to distribute rations and tobacco to these aboriginals in acknowledgment of their helpfulness to the castaways.

Notwithstanding this disaster the survivors re-organized their party and proceeded in another vessel to complete their investigations, and it is to be deplored that their tenacity and courage were not satisfactorily rewarded, the more so as they are among the few out of many people who, having taken up coal and mineral oil prospecting areas, have made any real effort to actually prospect them.

#### ABORIGINES.

Wherever it can be done without danger or serious inconvenience to neighbouring white residents, I am of opinion that it is best to as much as possible leave aboriginals alone to lead their own free and natural lives until, if it is really desired to attempt their civilization, efficient agencies for the purpose are organized and set in motion.

In regard to the half-caste side of the question, the discreditable fact cannot be ignored that the number of half-castes in the Territory is increasing, and so far as can be seen must inevitably for many years yet continue to increase. I can conceive of no legislation less drastic than such as would be intolerable to any Australian community that would be effective in putting an end to the present prevailing miscegenation, and since this cannot be stopped it only remains to do the best that is possible for the unfortunate products of it.

With this end in view I have been collecting information and making personal inquiries the results of which embodied in a report will have reached you before this Report is published.

It is fairly certain that if the cotton-growing industry develops in the Territory some amount of employment will offer for aboriginals, and no doubt a number of them would accept such work for a time, but I would not have prospective cotton-growers infer from this that they can rely on aboriginal labour. Although there are now and then exceptions to the rule, the average aboriginal will not work continuously for any lengthened period, especially at any manual employment of a monotonous nature.