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{ REPORT
No. 160.

CONDITIONS IN THE VIRGIN ISLANDS.

AUGUST 23, 1919.—Ordered to be printed.

Mr. KENYON, from the Committee on Pacific Islands and Porto Rico,
submitted the following

REPORT.

[To accompany S. J. Res. 69.]

The Committee on Pacific Islands and Porto Rico, to whom was referred the joint resolution (S. J. Res. 69) appointing a commission to report on conditions in the Virgin Islands, having had the same under consideration, report thereon with the recommendation that the joint resolution do pass with an amendment.

On page 2, line 7, strike out "\$3,000" and insert "\$2,500."

The following testimony is appended and made a part of this report:

The history of the acquisition of the Virgin Islands by the United States is well known. The government of these islands is now conducted under an act passed March 3, 1917, which provided a temporary government for them. Undoubtedly the United States would have paid more attention to the Virgin Islands had it not been that shortly thereafter we were precipitated into war, and these islands seem almost to have been forgotten.

The committee heard Mr. Francis, who had been selected at a mass meeting held at St. Thomas to come to Congress and present the situation in behalf of the working people of the islands. It is apparent from his testimony and from other sources of information that there is urgent need for the United States to pass laws for the government of the Virgin Islands. Danish customs, Danish laws, Danish methods of judicial procedure are still in vogue in the islands. There is a great need to Americanize them. The land question needs serious attention. According to the testimony of Mr. Francis, the natives own but 3 per cent of the land of the islands. The rest is owned by Danes or by those to whom the Germans have transferred title. Under their system of taxation unoccupied land bears no tax. The owners of the land will not lease it or sell it. This is resulting in a condition where the inhabitants of these islands have no part in the sale of the land and no chance to make a living out of agriculture. Denmark had contemplated some kind of a homestead law shortly before turning the islands over to us, but the intention was not consummated into action.

Most of the food comes from the United States. On the island of St. Croix considerable sugar is raised. St. Thomas is famous for its port, but American ships pass by St. Thomas and coal at the Barbados. The reason of this the committee does not know, but presumably it is because of the high charges at the coal docks at St. Thomas, which are not the property of the United States. Some agricultural interests can be developed in the islands. On the island of St. John bay leaves are prolific and out of these comes the bay rum for which the islands are famous.

The people of the islands, at least many of them believe, that some form of government should be adopted instead of the present system of government under the Navy. The testimony before the committee showed that the judge of the islands was also a member of the council making the laws; a member of the city council, chief of police, and collector of taxes. This kind of government is not in keeping with American ideals. An income of \$300 per year is required in order to exercise the right of suffrage. Under this only 321 people in the islands can vote. It puts a few men in control practically of the islands.

According to one witness conditions were better 40 years ago than they are now. Originally the islands produced pineapples, sugar, and everything that grows in tropical countries. Now that the Danes and their friends have taken all the lands practically the islands have gone into a decline. The great necessity is some land law that will enable the people to acquire land. The Americans since their occupation have done considerable work along lines of sanitation. Apparently there has been no improvement as to education. The people of the islands feel that they have been neglected by the United States; that when the American flag went up in the Virgin Islands it should have been followed by American laws, customs, and ideals as soon as possible. These people are pleading to be Americanized. There are great possibilities in these islands. They should no longer be neglected. Congress is without sufficient information to act in these matters and there would be great benefit in the opinion of the committee in having a small commission visit the islands for the purpose of studying conditions and reporting to Congress on a plan of action covering land laws, methods of taxation, and everything else that might be helpful in solving the problems.

This resolution provides for three Members of the Senate to be appointed by the Vice President and three Members of the House to be appointed by the Speaker. The expenses are limited to the actual expense of the members of the commission and limited to the sum of \$2,500. Commissions of this character are oftentimes opposed, and rightfully opposed, as mere joy-riding expeditions. Such is not the purpose of this resolution or the purpose of the committee in recommending it. Its number is limited to a very few. The appropriation is limited to a very small sum, and appointments will undoubtedly be made by the Vice President and the Speaker of Members who are earnestly desirous of doing something for the people of the islands.

According to one witness the people would greatly welcome the visit of a commission to the islands. He stated that the people were approaching a condition of starvation. There is not work enough for men to support their families and they can not secure land upon which to raise products for a family's support.