

E.L. Leembruggen,

**Acting Administrative Officer,
Fanning Island District,**

1936 / 1938

**Report on the situation on
Christmas Island
and on
Frantisek Jerabek**

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GILBERT AND ELLICE ISLANDS COLONY.

Fanning Island,
28th September, 1936

Sir,

With reference to my letter No. 12 of today's date, I have the honour to report as follows on the operations, the prospects and the area of planted and unplanted land on Christmas Island of Messrs. the Central Pacific Coconut Plantations, Limited.

2. The affairs of the Company on the Island are looked after by its local Manager, Mr. Jerabek, under the direction of Monsieur Rougier at Papeete. Mr Jerabek is assisted by Mr Williams, a Czech engineer named Hardtman, and 11 Tahitian labourers.

3. Mr. Jerabek is a native of Czecho-Slovakia, aged about 50 years, who served with the Montenegrins in the War, has travelled extensively in Europe, and speaks Tahitian in addition to several European languages, except English. He is accompanied by his wife and young son.

He was for five years Manager of a firm at Raiatea, one of the French Leeward Isles, and there met Monsieur Coulon, at that time Manager of Christmas Island. About the end of 1934 Mr Jerabek's firm went into liquidation, and shortly afterwards Monsieur Coulon, having left Christmas Island, recommended to Monsieur Rougier that Mr. Jerabek should go to Christmas Island as Manager. Mr Jerabek saw Monsieur Rougier at Tahiti, and was in due course sent to

The Acting Secretary to the Government,
OCEAN ISLAND.

Christmas Island on one year's probation. There he met Mr. Percy Varney, born about 45 years ago of an American father and a Marquesan mother. He himself became a Naturalized Frenchman, and served with the French in the War. Assistant Manager at Christmas Island for eight years, he fell out with Mr. Jerabek after a short time and wrote to Mr. Rougier a letter of vilification concerning the new Manager. Mr. Rougier thereupon sent Mr. Coulon to inspect Mr. Jerabek's work. The report on this was so satisfactory that Mr. Varney was recalled. The conditions of Mr. Jerabek's appointment are not actually fixed, but he understands that he will receive leave of two months at the end of two years and probably six months at the end of five years. He draws salary in the meantime on the incremental scale of 1,000 francs to 1,500 francs per mensem, plus 5 francs per ton of copra exported.

4. Mr David Williams is the son of Dr. W.J. Williams, a Canadian Dentist and erstwhile British Consul at Tahiti, who left for America about 1934. I understand from Mr. Jerabek that Dr. Williams was married to a French woman; that Mrs Williams had her children educated at a French school in Tahiti; that they, through some estrangement, had little contact with their father, and are thus today without a knowledge of the English language. I am informed that Dr. and Mrs. Williams are now divorced. Mr Williams is about 33 years of age and lives at Christmas Island in the Tahitian mode with a girl from the island of Huahine in the Leeward Group who

speaks Tahitian but has neither English nor French. He relieved Mr. Varney as Assistant Manager, and appears to be firm but fair with the natives, and has more to do with them practically than has Mr. Jerabek, who gives them a wider supervision.

5. Mr. Joseph Hardtman, a Czech and an Engineer, aged about 34 years, of reserved disposition, is employed in keeping in repair the machinery of the launch, motor cars, etc,

6. Of the 11 Tahitian labourers, eight arrived at Christmas Island on the 6th June, 1935, about a month after Mr Jerabek, and the remaining three were men of long experience on the island who had re-engaged themselves.

7. Six of the seven women live with their husbands, but only one of them, the wife of the Manager, is legally married. The seventh woman is one of the two Penrhyn Islanders who refuses to take unto herself a helpmeet, and earns her keep by acting as nurse-maid to the only Tahitian child on the island. Mr Jerabek explained that nothing was thought of these elastic unions in Tahiti, and that so long as a woman was not promiscuous the Company treated the couples as if they were legally married, paying their joint fares from and to Papeete, etc.

8. Two schooners connected with the Company visit the island about twice a year. One, the "Tooya", net tonnage 597, is the property of Monsieur Rougier and calls in Januarys the other, the "oiseau des Iles", of 250 tons net, is chartered from the French Phosphate Company of Oceania.

9. The main settlement is at London, at the Northern point of the passage into the lagoon, the second at Paris at the Southern arm of the entrance distant from London 6 1/4 miles by water and 46-3/4 miles by land, while the other camps are named Motu Manu, Rapa and Marquises.

Attached is a list giving details of certain property at these places.

10. A motor truck usually carries the labour to their point of work in the morning, and returns them to the Camp in the afternoon. But the motors have such a habit of breaking down that standing orders have been issued that a second car should set out in search of the gang if the sun sets before their return. The average labourer is able to prepare 400 lbs. of green copra a day. I append two tables showing the quantities of green and dried copra produced and sold during the years 1920 to 1936, from which it will be seen that the smallest amount of dried copra disposed of was in 1922 with 105 tons, while 1932 was the peak year with the sale of 606 English tons.

11. The last planting of coconuts was in the year 1932 and it is estimated that 600,000 trees have now been planted on Christmas Island. On the assumption that 25% at least, of trees planted die, it would perhaps be unwise to say that the trees now living would number more than 450,000. Of these 50% are too young to bear and 5% unproductive, leaving 45% in production. If one considers Tahiti a very good field for copra I consider that Christmas Island should be placed in the mediocre class, and on that comparison while Tahiti's 3 best trees would

each yield, say, 15 lbs. of dried copra Christmas Island would perhaps give 6 lbs. per tree. Thus from the 202,500 productive trees would be derived 542 English tons of copra. Recent exports would however seem to indicate that this figure is likely to be exceeded in the future. Moreover, the price of copra at Papeete has advanced from 42 to 60 centimes a kilo, to 65 centimes a kilo, a year ago, and the last advice received was that it was standing at 75 centimes a kilo, Mr. Jerabek is an extremely energetic and business-like man, with retentive memory and keen observation. He is well liked by his men, and I am confident that the affairs of the Eastate will prosper under his management. On the other hand, the French Colonial policy at the present time seems to be to prevent or to discourage firms established on Non-French soil from returning to their estate of employment as re-engaged workers any French Nationals, and Monsieur Rougier fears that he will not be permitted to send back any more Tahitians as labourers for his plantations, and it is alleged that he is desirous of selling Christmas Island to Messrs. Burns, Philp and Company, Limited.

12. The maximum storage capacity of the Copra House is 300 tons of unbagged dried copra. 75 tons are in the shed at present, and it is expected that capacity will have been reached by January, when the next loading vessel is due. Loading can be effected at the rate of 100 tons per working day of eight hours.

13. It is difficult to determine with any exactitude the relative areas of planted and unplanted land, but working on the basis of 100 trees to the hectare it would appear that the extent of the Estate under coconut is between 14 and 15 thousand acres. According to Sailing Directions for the Pacific Islands, Christmas Island is supposed to comprise a total land area of 200 square miles, or 128,000 acres. Therefore if the cultivated area be taken to be 15,000 acres its proportion to the total area is 11.8 per cent. If this is assumed to be correct, then it is estimated that 29.4 per cent. is unplanted and that 58.8 per cent. of the Island remains to be planted.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your obedient servant,
(signed) E.L.Leembruggen,
Acting Administrative Officer,
Fanning Island District,

A report furnished by Mr Leembruggen, Acting Administrative Officer, Fanning Island, gives the only information on the coconut plantations of Christmas Island.

2. Neither the manager or other persons in the employ of the Central Pacific Plantation and living on Christmas Island have any available data, or other information that would assist me to enlarge or improve Mr Leembruggen's report, which is as follows:

“Number of trees growing on the island - 450,000. Of which 45% are productive, 5% are unproductive and 50% too young to bear!” (Mr Winchester, the manager,(since July 16th 1938) says that the above percentages still apply.

3. “Allowing 100 trees to the hectare (approx 2.5 acres) there are about 14 or 15 thousand acres under coconut.

The sailing Directions for the Pacific give the land area of Christmas Island as 128,000 acres, so that approximately 11.8 per cent of the island is planted and if it is estimated that 29.4 per cent is unplantable, then 58,8 per cent remains to be planted”

4. According to the above figures we have ;

15,000 acres planted,
37,000 acres unplantable,
76,000 acres remain to be planted.

5. Copra exported for three years ending 1938:

1936	371 tons
1937	515 tons
1938	535 tons.