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DIE KAROLINEN-INSELN IN DEUTSCHER ZEIT

Eine kolonialgeschichtliche Fallstudie

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Central to all official reports is the theme of native labour capacity. The small number of people on the high islands, who mostly were not interested in doing wage labour for whites, was regretted again and again by the Germans. Thus attention was drawn more and more to the low islands, where one hoped to find the necessary labour resources. Administration voyages and inspections in the Island Sphere were thus designed primarily to find out whether and how many labourers existed. The comment of the government doctor Buse on the occasion of his visit to the 'islands south of Palau' was typical: 'A visit to Tobi at least annually will take the shyness from the people and make them amenable to more numerous recruitment.'[43]

Graphics: Trade in the Eastern and in the Western Carolines (p. 71)

Ordinances soon regulated how recruiting was to be carried out.[44] Principally no approval of the District Office was needed for the recruitment of labourers who stayed in the Western Carolines. However the number, homeland, approximate age, sex and associated details had to be reported to the District Office. If native labour was brought into another district of the colonial region then prior approval from the District Office was required.

The instructions for the Eastern Carolines were even more detailed. Here the 'export' of labour was only possible within the Island Sphere of the Carolines, Palaus, Marianas and Marshalls. Contracts had to be concluded in writing and the content had to be made clear 'by a reliable translator before execution' (of the contract). Clause 5 said: 'The length of the contract may not exceed three years. It must make provision for place and type of work, length of the average daily period of labour, amount and method of payment of wages, accommodation and board, care in sickness and transport home.' Infringements were liable to cash fines and imprisonment up to three months.[45]

Naturally the transfer of locals for the purpose of labouring on other islands was also advantageous for the colonial authorities for other reasons. It was not just a matter of 'a valuable growth in political economy',[46] but 'the still existing caste lines, the difference between the free and the bond man (will) disappear, the power of the chiefs founded on nothing but superstition and custom (will) be broken.'[47]

hot sun on the beach with salt water mixed in to make it as sharp as possible.[76]

But the prohibition on toddy drinking did not much help, for another danger was immediately apparent: the use of European alcohol. The import of this 'blessing' of European civilization did not begin with German colonial rule but with the traders long before. Senfft observed: 'It is a distressing fact that in regard to drink the white traders show the natives a bad example.'[77] Two things follow from such a remark: firstly the same problem ruled on the lower islands and secondly, the regulations[78] designed to hinder the sale of alcohol did not particularly bite.

One suspects that the Germans strove to restrict the enjoyment of toddy because it damaged the palm stands, but tolerated European alcohol, for the usual reasons. It was 1909 before the Germans decided to ban 'the delivery of alcoholic drinks to natives' - but only with 'the tribes' in 'the Bismarck Archipelago, in Kaiser Wilhelmsland and in the German Solomon Islands.' In the Carolines, the Palaus, the Marianas and the Marshall Islands the islanders could continue to drink alcohol if they had the necessary means to get it from the traders.[79]

The curious situation on Pohnpei must be mentioned. While Catholic islanders were allowed to drink alcohol, the Protestants, though taking on European clothing, were absolutely forbidden to consume it.[80]

The import of diseases was just as ravaging as the import of alcohol. Sexually transmitted diseases, pneumonia and illnesses of the digestive system, as well as measles and similar complaints were the worst. Epidemics recurred, like influenza which on Yap alone in October 1903 carried off 50 elderly people.[81]

Nonetheless on the high islands (Pohnpei and Yap, later also Truk and Belau) there were hospitals with relatively experienced personnel. The situation was worse on the low islands. The islanders knew often better than many German doctors who had imported the bacilli. Thus the government doctor on Yap, Dr. Buse, reported on the occasion of a visit to Tobi, that in 1909 an epidemic had carried off 200 people. The steamer Peiho had brought the