

THAT AITUTAKI DEAL IS FORGOTTEN FOR NOW

From a Rarotonga correspondent

"You can forget the \$60,000,000 American syndicate deal for Aitutaki for the present," declared Mr. Albert Henry, Premier of the Cook Islands, at a dinner given to mark his return from talks with the New Zealand Government. (An American syndicate wants to lease Aitutaki for \$60,000,000 and develop it as a tourist resort. See picture on p. 53.)

He added: "We will not give any air rights to anyone but New Zealand. The New Zealand Government says it is all right for the Americans to build hotels here, but not an airport.

"One hundred million dollars is not enough to take away the heritage of the Cook Islanders. No amount of money can do that."

A less emotional approach to the American offer to lease Aitutaki was made by NZ High Commissioner Mr. L. J. Davis in an interview outlining the purpose of the Cooks mission to NZ. He said that he had noticed Press references to the fact that an American-backed offer to develop Aitutaki as a tourist resort may have been used by Mr. Henry to extract more financial aid for his government.

"Press got it wrong"

"These reports are quite incorrect," said Mr. Davis. "The reputed '\$64,000,000' deal was certainly raised in our discussions, as if it proceeded in its entirety it could possibly affect NZ's sole air traffic rights to and from the Cook Islands.

"The proposal was left on the basis that the Aitutaki development scheme would be fully discussed between our two governments after it had been examined in detail in Rarotonga," Mr. Davis added.

While in New Zealand, Mr. Henry and his mission had talks with the New Zealand Government about plans for Rarotonga's new jet airport (to be built at a cost of more than \$NZ6,000,000), as well as the American syndicate's multi-million Aitutaki offer. After leaving NZ, Mr. Henry's mission attended the eighth South Pacific Conference in Noumea.

The outcome of Mr. Henry's visit to NZ was that an agreement bet-

ween NZ and the Cooks has been reached on the proposed airport. A bill outlining the agreement was to go before the Cook Islands Legislative Assembly in November, and nothing was to be done about the airport until the bill had been passed.

"Not quite true"

Mr. Henry told the diners: "Somehow, before we arrived in New Zealand, a lot of controversial statements had been sent there from the Cook Islands. They gave a story one-fifth true and four-fifths not quite true. The New Zealand Press took up the four-fifths part. I don't know what the motives of these people were who gave this news out. Acts can never be changed—therefore all this controversial news was later proved to be mainly false.

"When we arrived in Auckland there were big headlines in the papers. One headline read—'Cook Islands Premier is going to have a tough time in Wellington'. The story said that 'Mr. Henry is selling Aitutaki to the Americans'.

"This was good. It showed that the Cook Islands were on the map again. The TV people wanted to interview me, but I said I had no time, so they came to see me at my home in Mangere."

Brought together

Mr. Henry went on to thank Mr. L. J. Davis for his help in NZ. Although the High Commissioner represented the New Zealand Government there were times when he thought he was on the Cook Islands' side. "He helped us when things really got tough," Mr. Henry said.

Mr. Henry then talked about the South Pacific Commission Conference in Noumea which he had at-

TAHITI'S EXILED POLITICAL LEADER COMES HOME

Pouvanaa a Oopa, the most influential figure in Tahitian politics over the past two decades, was pardoned by President de Gaulle in November after serving more than nine years of a 15-year term of exile in France. Three of his nine years of banishment were spent in prison.

President de Gaulle used the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the World War I armistice to sign a decree of pardon for Pouvanaa, who served in the Pacific Battalion of the French Army at the Battle of Chemin des Dames in 1917.

The decree gave Pouvanaa, now 73, permission to return to his native land, and this he was expected to do towards the end of November.

In Tahiti and the rest of French Polynesia, Pouvanaa is known among the people as Te Metua (parent) and is looked upon by many as an oracle, a Tahitian David "challenging the Goliath of French rule".

tended with Mr. William Estall, the Cook Islands' Minister of Works and Communications, and Mr. George Ellis of the Treasury Department.

He said that the South Pacific Commission intends to guard and promote the "togetherness" of the Pacific Basin. The people living in this area must be brought together in their thinking and understanding, and the heads of Pacific territories appeared to understand this.

Mr. Henry said Tonga "now realises that it is not much use to break away from her Pacific neighbours to join the United Nations."

Meanwhile, a development plan for Mauke Island has been accepted in principle by the Cook Islands Cabinet. The plan was worked out by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Mr. T. A. Henry (son of the Premier and member for Mauke), after discussion between a Mauke delegation to Rarotonga, the government and the Agriculture Department.

The main points of his plan:

- An extensive orange planting programme.
- The expansion of coconut growing and cattle farming.
- The consolidation of ginger growing.
- Introduction of market garden-

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