

THE VIRGIN ISLANDS CITIZENSHIP ACT

FEBRUARY 12, 1927.—Referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed

Mr. KIESS, from the Committee on Insular Affairs, submitted the following

REPORT

[To accompany H. R. 16996]

The Committee on Insular Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (H. R. 16996) to confer United States citizenship upon certain inhabitants of the Virgin Islands and to extend the naturalization laws thereto, and for other purposes, having considered the same, report it back to the House without amendment and unanimously recommend that the bill do pass.

This bill confers United States citizenship upon certain inhabitants of the Virgin Islands and also extends the opportunity for naturalization to certain other former inhabitants of the Virgin Islands. It will be recalled that the Virgin Islands were acquired by purchase under a treaty with Denmark in January, 1917. At the time it was understood by all that when the United States purchased these islands the citizenship of the inhabitants thereof was transferred to the United States.

The Navy Department, who have been administering the islands ever since 1917, have always contended that this was the case. The State Department, however, have put a different interpretation upon the treaty, with the result that ever since 1917 the inhabitants of the Virgin Islands, formerly citizens of Denmark, have been people "without a country." Whatever the correct interpretation of the treaty may be, it has been admitted by all that there is a moral obligation on the part of the United States to confer United States citizenship on these inhabitants of the Virgin Islands formerly citizens and subjects of Denmark.

The people of Porto Rico are full citizens of the United States, and your committee sees no reason why the inhabitants of the Virgin Islands should not be placed in the same category. The entire population of the Virgin Islands is 23,000 and there are approximately 3,500 residing in the United States who will be affected by this bill.

The first four sections of the bill deal entirely with the grant of citizenship and the privilege of naturalization. They have been checked by the legislative counsel of the House and the bill as drafted will dovetail with our present naturalization laws. Your committee has had this proposal under consideration continually during the first and second sessions of this Congress, have held extensive hearings, and feel that a long-standing injustice will be corrected by its passage.

Section 5 of the bill reduces the export tax on sugar from \$8 per ton to \$5 per ton. This export tax was established by the organic act of March 3, 1917, which provided for the government by the United States of the Virgin Islands. It was originally imposed in order to provide revenue for the islands. Its effect has been to work a great hardship on the sugar growers of the islands, who are placed at a great disadvantage to the sugar growers of Porto Rico. The entire amount collected under this tax averages under \$50,000 a year, but nevertheless it is becoming increasingly evident that unless some relief is given to the sugar growers that they will be forced to discontinue. Should this happen it would cause great hardship in the islands, as the sugar growers provide practically the only employment available. Your committee feels that the entire sugar export duty should eventually be removed. The levy of such a duty is repugnant to our principles of government and directly contrary in spirit, at least, to the clause in the Constitution that "no tax or duty shall be laid on articles exported from any State." While your committee feels that this export duty can not be eliminated entirely at once because of the loss of revenue to the islands, it does recommend its reduction from \$8 per ton to \$5 per ton at this time, as a means of temporary relief to the sugar industry of the islands.

Your committee has held extensive hearings during both sessions of this Congress, and inhabitants from the Virgin Islands, representing various factions, and officials of the Navy Department were heard at length. It is felt that this bill meets with the entire approval of all concerned.

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treaty may be it has been assumed by all that these islands
obligations on the part of the United States to confer United States
citizenship on these inhabitants of the Virgin Islands formerly citizens
and subjects of Denmark.

The people of Porto Rico are full citizens of the United States, and
your committee sees no reason why the inhabitants of the Virgin
Islands should not be placed in the same category. The entire
population of the Virgin Islands is 25,000 and there are approx-
imately 2,500 residing in the United States who will be affected by
this bill.