

118-

I attach a note of the meeting held on the 29th December to consider this question of the Pacific islands. It was contemplated, I think, that copies of this note, when approved by those present at the meeting, should be circulated for consideration to the Warren Fisher Committee.

If the note is approved here I suggest that copies should be sent for approval or amendment to Mr. Seal, Mr. Galpin, Mr. Syers and Mr. Shuckburgh semi-officially, with an indication that final copies will be circulated to the Warren Fisher Committee.

Mr. Galpin was very insistent that something should be done quickly about Christmas Island, and I am inclined to suggest that we should put in hand provisional inquiries at once, and telegraph to the High Commissioner telling him of the action it may be decided to take and asking him to make provisional inquiries as regards

A

- (a) getting an officer for temporary appointment to Christmas Island;
- (b) ways and means of getting him there; and
- (c) the probable cost.

J. Creary.

30/12/36.

and
light

I shall like to support the suggestion of 'A'. With regard to the suggestion by Mr. Seal, recorded on page 5 of the note, my impression was that the meeting was generally of the opinion that the addressing of a note on these lines to the U.S. Govt. was undesirable or might have certain disadvantages. Should not this be indicated? Personally, I shall have thought that it would be desirable for the F.O. to send a note of some kind to our Ambassador in Washington giving him some indication of the line he should take if necessary with the U.S. Govt. if they tackle him on the subject - as they may well do.

Shuckburgh
30/12

I have made two minor alterations in the
note

W. J. B. S. J.

30/12

My interest in this is a
diminishing one, as I am not
now in the P. & M. Department. But
it may be helpful if I put on
record some points which I put
to the meeting -

(i) that overt action
to attach the Phoenix group
to the Gilbert & Ellice Islands
Colony would be better
deferred until policy had
been defined with regard
to other British islands in
the Pacific which would be
left "unattached"; and

(ii) that mere attachment
of the Phoenix group to the
Gilberts would not be
likely to be recognised
by the U.S. Government,
who would probably look
~~also~~ for some effective
occupation & administration.

As to (i), the act of "attaching"
some of our islands (such as the Phoenix
group) & leaving others "unattached"
might materially weaken our
hold

held over the "unattached" islands. And the U.S. Government might be encouraged to repeat (in a southern direction) their recent action in taking up Jarvis Island (declared in 1889 to ~~be~~ under British protection & subsequently leased, but left unoccupied since surrender of lease in 1921). Or perhaps some other Power (e.g. Japan), in the interests of securing a footing in the Eastern Pacific, might be led to seize Malden or Starbuck or some other of our "unattached" islands.

It may be that there is no further British use for the "unattached" islands which are being left unoccupied, and that no importance would be attached to their acquisition by another Power. If, however, any of the "unattached" islands are to be, in effect, abandoned, then the decision should be deliberate, and it will be advantageous to be prepared in good time with lists of (a) those islands which we are readily prepared to abandon to another Power & (b) those which we are not.

Pitcairn is
"unattached"
but is occupied.

James
31/12/36

As

As to (ii) above, any overt linking of the Phoenix group with the Gilberts might be expected to receive a good deal of attention in the U.S. Press, & we might be bombarded with enquiries as to whether there was any intention to occupy or administer the islands. And there might be some sharp comment if & when the hollowness of our action was detected.

—

Alternatives to leaving the Group without any administration would be ^{continuous} (i) supervision by a Colony official stationed in the Group (who might have to be provided with a vessel for inter-island travelling) or (ii) ^{occasional} supervision by ~~an~~ an official sent in at reasonably frequent intervals. If some such supervision over the Phoenix group were to be envisaged, it would be worth considering whether,

Whether, in order to improve the British position in respect of some of the other islands, New Zealand should not be invited to assume a corresponding responsibility for say Malden, Starbuck, Flint, ~~Cape~~ Caroline & Vostok islands. They are reasonably close to Penrhyn Island, which is administered as a Dependency of New Zealand.

And the question whether New Zealand should also be invited to take over Piteaison, & the neighbouring islets, might also be explored.

Care should be taken that F.O. are carried with us in ~~an~~ action concerning such of our "unattached" islands as are included in the U.S. list of guano islands "pertaining to the United States". Christmas Island is in that list, and that may be one reason why the United States Government (if the Press reports be correct) are challenging

challenging the British acquisition of that island, or it may be that the U.S. contention is that they are justified in ignoring the British claim because we have not in their opinion adequately supervised the affairs of the island.

Labour for Christmas Island has heretofore been obtained from Tahiti, but that source has ^{recently} ~~not~~ been cut off: there is reason to believe that the existing lessees (a Company registered in London, though really French-owned) would sell out if they could get a reasonable offer. An embarrassing situation might therefore develop if an American Company were to attempt to buy out the existing Company and either (i) our consent to the transfer were withheld or (ii) the U.S. Govt. were to advise the American purchaser not

to apply for British consent. Our position in this respect will of course be helped if prompt action is taken on the proposal to station a Colony official on Christmas Island. The Air Ministry (who are concerned on the expenditure side) might be prepared for action on that proposal to be taken in advance of a decision on the Phoenix group plan.



31/12/36

I have had no opportunity really to study our title to any of the Islands, but that is mainly a matter for F.O. They are prepared to go to the League in the case of Christmas Island but our title to most of the others appears to be anything but secure, and I agree with Mr Jones. Even the posting of an administrative officer to Christmas Island may provoke U.S.A. into taking claims in any other islands for which they take a liking. The only real, satisfactory course would appear to be to establish some sort of

occupation in every island is an end
prepared to abandon forthwith. Such
far-sighted policy, though it might
pay in the long run would, I have
no doubt, be regarded as quite
impracticable.

T. G. M. Maffey.
11/13/37

A. M. Maffey

1.1

Sir John Maffey.

I am afraid that I ought to trouble you with this. The Warren Fisher Committee on International Aviation has been studying the question of a trans-Pacific civil aviation service. It is contemplated that sooner or later there shall be such a service from New Zealand to (probably) Vancouver. This will certainly have to call at Honolulu. The route from New Zealand to Honolulu would probably be by way of Fiji. We had a meeting some time ago of the representatives of interested Departments at which I took the Chair, and the ultimate outcome of that meeting was a survey of various islands in which we were interested made by vessels of the New Zealand Navy. We had another meeting on December 29th to consider the results of that survey and all that is now put forward is a record of that meeting for communication to the other Departments concerned (Admiralty, Air Ministry, Dominions Office and Foreign Office). The
general

general results are that we recommend some definite action to secure our title to Hull Island and Christmas Island more effectively than is at present secured. The action which we propose is as follows:-

(1) Send to Christmas Island a Government Officer in order to establish what will be ^{not much} more than a fiction of administration.

(2) Include Hull Island and a number of neighbouring islands in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony by Order-in-Council under the Colonial Boundaries Act.

The Air Ministry regard the action proposed with regard to Christmas Island as rather urgent. They contemplate sending out a flying boat this year to survey the route. Meanwhile, there have been disquieting indications that the United States Government may put in some kind of a claim to Christmas Island. We had before us at the meeting a very good new map of the Pacific Ocean issued with the (American) National Geographic Journal, in which Christmas Island was marked as "U.S. and British", and the New Zealand Government telegraphed on November 30th drawing attention to a Press message from Washington which stated that United States Government officials were devoting attention to Christmas Island and that State Department officials declared "The United States do not recognise British sovereignty there". The Foreign Office consider that our claim to Christmas Island is irresistible. It has actually been made part of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony and the

Americans

Americans were definitely told it was British in 1888 and have never sent any reply. Nevertheless, it is not in any way administered and is only occupied by a company, the financial interests in which are French, which employs Tahitian natives. It will cost something to send and keep an Administrative officer there and there is really no justification at all for asking the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony to pay. Therefore, we agreed at the meeting that the Home Government would have to pay. In the ordinary course our proceedings would be reported to the Warren Fisher Committee. That Committee however will very likely not meet for some considerable time and Sir Francis Sheilmerdine, the Director of Civil Aviation, who is the person most directly interested, is going away next week. What seems to be wanted is a talk between the Colonial Office, the Air Ministry and the Treasury, and I will try to arrange this if authorised. Meanwhile, I think that we should telegraph to the High Commissioner as Mr. Creasy proposes in his minute above.

(3) The question of attaching the Phoenix Group of islands, including Hull Island, to the Gilbert and Ellice Islands is less urgent. Mr. Jones criticises the recommendation, partly on the ground that to take action of this kind with regard to the Phoenix Group would weaken our claim to various other islands with regard to which no such action is suggested. I do not feel able to agree with him. We have previously
been

been advised by the Law Officers to include in some British Colony any island to the ownership ^{of which} we attach any importance. We attach definite importance at the present moment to Hull Island and I propose to include its neighbours for the sake of consistency and uniformity. It is quite impossible to say that there may not be other islands in the Pacific to which we have at present a rather vague claim which may hereafter assume a definite importance; but there is no means of accelerating the date of that "hereafter". I do not think that definite annexation of the Phoenix Group will weaken our claim to those various other stray islands.

This may be accelerated by somebody else installing us
J.H.

Agree perhaps on statement in addition to
Canton
1937

Secondly, Mr. Jones thinks ^x that the Americans will not recognise our title to the Phoenix ^{group} on account of annexation and would look for some effective occupation and administration. Again I do not agree. I do not think there is any particular evidence that the Americans are interested in the Phoenix Group which do not, like Christmas Island, lie on the route between America and Honolulu. In any case, occupation and administration are impracticable, for the islands are uninhabited and practically uninhabitable. In the circumstances annexation to a Colony is the best thing we can do, and I think it does something to strengthen our title.

P. V. Vernon

1. 1. 37

1. A telegram on the lines suggested by Mr. Creasy in his minute of 30.12 should be sent at once.

2. A meeting between the Colonial Office, the Air Ministry and the Treasury, as indicated by Mr. Vernon, should be arranged. The Foreign Office should be kept in touch with all that takes place as American susceptibilities may be touched at any moment.

Action on 1. and 2. above may be taken at once.

3. With regard to (3) in Mr. Vernon's minute, I am in some doubt. There is obviously something to be said for the plan of annexing the Phoenix Group of Islands forthwith to the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, but we must be careful to avoid a false step. It may be that we shall find ourselves unable to hold our position against American and world criticism if we simply annex odd pieces of territory without administering them in some way. I understand the American view to be that these unadministered solitudes are for general use and outside any national or Imperial scheme. Mr. Vernon, in his minute, speaks of the possibility of ~~the~~ other islands in the Pacific to which we have at present a rather vague claim, which may hereafter assume a definite importance. It would appear that this question requires studying as a whole, so that policy may be framed and action taken all along the line in the interests of our posterity. Mr. Vernon evidently holds the view that there is no need

to hold up the attachment of the Phoenix Group of Islands because these other vague claims exist. I am not sure about this, and, as there are important questions of policy involved, I should like the Secretary of State to know of the position which is developing.

J.M.
4/1/36

- 119 To: Linn (Army)
 - 120 .. Galpin (Am)
 - 121 .. Lyles (G.O.)
 - 122 .. Shudlow (G.O.)
- } (L 118) 5. 1. 37

123 Galpin (Am) 4 Jan/37

at Mr Vernon's request, I spoke to Mr Galpin about his letter of the 4th of Jan & suggested a meeting at the C.O. on Thursday or Friday next to discuss the question of sending an officer to Christmas Island

He promised to speak to Sir F. Shelmerdine & to me self on the subject & to ring me up later to suggest a suitable time for the meeting. He agreed

meeting
now fixed
for 11.15 on
Friday
W.P.S.

126

D.O.

6. 1. 37

Acts 121.

- Subsequent cases & action
will be forward on 56059/1/37
to Pac Section. —