

Memorandum.

The Inception of the Scheme for Colonizing the
Central Pacific Islands.

The following notes on the origins of the project for colonizing the various uninhabited atolls and islands of the Central Pacific with natives from the Gilbert and Ellice Islands are compiled at the request of His Excellency the High Commissioner.

1. The possibility of solving the problem of over-population in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands by colonization was apparently first suggested independantly by both Mr S.F. Anderson, District Officer in charge of the Ellice Islands, and myself during the course of the year 1930. The matter was brought to the attention of Sir Murchison Fletcher during his tour of the Colony in July and August, 1931, and as a result His Excellency considered the possibilities of settlement in Fiji, and later in Samoa; nothing, however, came of these exploratory schemes. The first written report mentioning the subject would appear to be the Census Report on the Phoenix Islands written in 1931. In this report I predicted that "the islands, with their comparatively fertile soil and abundant supply of fish, may well become of great value in the not distant future as an outlet for the population of the Gilbert Islands, which threatens to increase rapidly beyond the slender means of subsistence afforded by the inhospitable environment". The value of the Phoenix Group from the air point of view was also stressed.

④ of 3118/31

⑤a of 1122/32

2. By 1933 I had become greatly impressed by the seriousness of the over-population problem, and a study of lands settlement work convinced me that the cause of the 56,000 land disputes then pending was in the majority of cases the same: land-hunger due to land-scarcity. In 1934 Washington Island was abandoned by Fanning Island Ltd., thus affording the Government a unique opportunity to take over the island for settlement purposes, for which it is ideally suited. During the latter part of the year discussions on colonization were held with various natives, and at a large meeting held on Beru Island a petition to the Resident Commissioner was drawn up pointing out the extreme poverty of many of the Southern Gilbertese and requesting the Government to permit them to settle on some uninhabited island. The intention behind the petition, which if I remember rightly was signed by some 750 Beru natives, was to strengthen the hands of the Government in negotiations over Washington, an island which would have supported not less than 2,300 permanent colonists. The matter was discussed with the Resident Commissioner during his visit to Beru Island, which took place shortly after the meeting, His Honour promising to consider the whole question of colonization at the earliest opportunity.

3. In May, 1935, I proceeded on sick leave to the United Kingdom, returning to New Zealand in April, 1936, via the Panama Canal, together with the new Colonial Secretary for Fiji - Mr C.J.J.T. Barton, O.B.E. During the course of the voyage the general question of Gilbertese colonization schemes was discussed with Mr Barton, who showed much interest in the idea. Unfortunately, the opportunity to
to obtain Washington

(21a) of 3796/33

(4a) of 323/39

to obtain Washington had by then been lost, the island having been purchased by Burns Philp and Co., Ltd., in December, 1935, - it was necessary therefore to concentrate on the Phoenix Group which, although in certain respects not so suitable a field, had been abandoned by the same company since June, 1932.

② of 3469/35

② of 839/31

4. On passing through Suva in June, 1936, en route to a conference in Honolulu, it was ascertained that no colonization proposals had as yet reached the High Commission office. Mr Barton, who was acting at the time as High Commissioner, thereupon sent a demi-official letter to the Resident Commissioner, from which the following is abstracted:-

① of 1896/36

"I have also been talking to Maude who has told me that you had in mind thinking out a scheme to relieve the congestion (in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands) by migrating the natives to the Phoenix Group. Could you let me know whether you have been able to consider the emigration question further."

③ of 50(s)/36

Correspondence received in the High Commission office on the 3rd July, 1936, regarding the United States occupation of Howland, Baker and Jarvis Islands, ^{which} indicated that unless the Central Pacific islands were colonized in the near future they might well be no longer available for settlement purposes. On the 23rd July, therefore, a follow-up telegram was sent to His Honour requesting him to telegraph a brief outline of any action proposed by him in connexion with the colonization proposals.

② of 1896/36

7. In his reply the Resident Commissioner stated that he regretted that he had not had the opportunity since his arrival in the Colony "of thoroughly investigating question of over-population of Southern Gilbert Islands and Northern Ellice Islands which represents intricate problem demanding close examination and

③ of 1896/36

close examination and deliberation". His Honour recommended the "detailing of officer with specialized knowledge to negotiate with natives and carry scheme into execution" and stated that I was the only officer he could suggest for the work. Meanwhile the opportunity to take over the abandoned Phoenix Group was also lost, Messrs. Burns Philp being permitted to re-occupy the islands in June, 1937, - a year later it cost the Government £7,500 to get rid of them.

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6. In 1936 I was transferred to East Africa and did not return to the Colony until July, 1937, my arrival at Ocean Island coinciding with the tour of Sir Arthur Richards.

(15) of 1896/36 During this tour the question of over-population was discussed and in September, 1937, I was ordered by the High Commissioner to proceed to the Phoenix Group to report on its possibilities as a colonization field. The reports submitted as a result of this expedition led eventually to the settlement of the islands.

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