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Letter by R. Creasy

Note.

The prospective air services across the Pacific have led, during the last year or two, to greater interest being taken in the scattered islands in that area. During 1936, and again this year, a considerable amount of information regarding the air possibilities of the Islands has been ~~covered~~^{collected} by the ships on the New Zealand Station, and in the light of this information the position as regards sovereignty over some of the Islands was reviewed at the beginning of this year.

As a result of that consideration the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific has posted an administrative officer to Christmas Island, which has been for some time ~~one~~^{part} of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, and which the Air Ministry^{thought} would be an important point on the Trans-Pacific route. In addition, the eight islands comprising the Phoenix Group, have been included, by Order in Council, in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, and the High Commissioner, who has just left Fiji in H.M.S. "Leith" on a tour of the High Commission territories, has it in mind, we understand, to recommend a scheme of settling some of the surplus population from elsewhere on these islands which are at present uninhabited.

Further, the Secretary of State for the Colonies has appointed an inter-departmental Committee to consider the position as regards unattached islands in this area, and on the recommendation of this Committee a full despatch has been sent to the High Commissioner asking for his views. The Islands in question are -

(a) the Line Group, which lies considerably East of the Phoenix Group; and (b) the group of four islands with Pitcairn as its centre. As regards the latter

group, the British Agent in Tonga is at present on a visit to Pitcairn, as a result of which he is to report to the High Commissioner on the steps which might be taken to provide for its more adequate administration.

The High Commission territories are poor, and it is not possible for them to provide any sums themselves for the development of any of the islands as Air Bases. The High Commissioner is very fully alive to the need for strengthening ^{the} British title to the islands, which may be the subject of dispute, particularly with the United States, and he will certainly be more than willing to co-operate with the Naval and Air Authorities in any direction that may be desired.

As regards Japanese activities in the Southern Pacific; as the result of an inter-departmental meeting convened recently by the Foreign Office, Sir Arthur Richards has been asked to look into the question during his present tour of the Islands, and to suggest any possible measures that can be taken, with the means at present available, to check Japanese fishing and other raids.

16/4/37

G. C. any.