

TRANSCRIPTION

THE FOREIGN SERVICE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL **AMERICAN CONSULATE**

Suva, Fiji Islands
October 14, 1942

SUBJECT:

INTERNAL SITUATION IN FIJI

THE HONORABLE
THE SECRETARY OF STATE.
WASHINGTON.

SIR:

I have the honor to refer to my despatch No.74 of June 17, 1942, reporting the arrival in Suva of the new Governor of Fiji and High Commissioner for the Western Pacific, Major-General Sir Philip Mitchell, K.C.M.C., and to previous telegrams and despatches relative to the internal situation here. The latter stressed the late Governor's deficiencies and the consequent dissatisfaction and lack of leadership.

The new Governor has only been in the Colony now about three months, but he has in this time shown himself, in marked contrast to his predecessor, to be a vigorous, purposeful man free from petty prejudices, bent on achieving his mission. This in his words is to "wage war" – a mission he lost no time in setting out to attempt to accomplish. In his relations with the United States Service Commanders Sir Philip has shown a desire to cooperate and for personal contact with them and their officers by his friendly unassuming ways and manner. To ensure good liaison he has replaced the late Governor's boyish Aide-de-Camp by a British Colonel of experience who acts as his Military Secretary.

Until his arrival Fiji's war measures, aside from certain economic ones governing currency and imports and exports, were negligible and futile with no organization or central direction. It is true that a small defense force of uncertain usefulness and calibre, consisting of Europeans, half-castes and Fijians existed, and that some effort toward air raid precautions had been undertaken by the Suva Town Board, such as the appointment of wardens, construction of shelters and first aid posts, and it was generally understood that the public knew what to do in case of an air raid. However, the only visible sign of this alleged understanding, as revealed by surprise practice alert, was that of puzzled Suvans catching fleeting glimpses of their late Governor complete in khaki and shrapnel helmet being driven at speed through the town's streets.

To remedy this unsatisfactory state of affairs the Governor decided that as he, sitting with his Executive Council, represented the highest executive authority in the Colony, they should also sit as a War Council. To this end each member has been made the responsible authority for and allotted a certain group of subjects either entirely ascribable to the war or so closely connected with it as to be classifiable as a war subject. Thus when sitting as the War Council the Governor and the Colonial Secretary will take charge of Military, Naval and Air questions and liaison with the General Commanding in Fiji. The Financial Secretary has been named Chairman of the Fiji Supply and Production Board and will have under his supervision imports, exports and foreign exchange control; production and marketing; transport and communications; prices and rents. The post of Director of Civil Defense and Emergency Services has been entrusted to the Director of Medical Services. The Secretary for Native Affairs has been given the post of

Director of Labor. One of the two Unofficial Members has been made Director of Man Power, while the other has undertaken the post of Director of Publicity and; Propaganda, as well as the Chairmanship of such Conciliation, Industrial Appeal and National Service Appeals as may be set up in connection with the general war effort. The Attorney-General will be responsible for giving legal advice to Members of the Council, for drafting legislation and generally supervising the legal side of the War Council's activities. The Members of the Council in charge of each group of subjects have full authority to give decisions on all matters under their jurisdiction, except those involving questions of high policy which require reference to the Governor. They are assisted by Committees made as representative as possible with members drawn from Government officials, unofficial members of the Legislative Council and merchant and commercial circles.

The Committees have now been sitting for several weeks and concrete results so far have been chiefly in connection with civil defense. Suva's soapstone hills are now honey-combed with deep tunnels, bomb-proof shelters and first aid posts. And a recent full dress air raid alert has shown that the fire-fighting, first aid and other voluntary units were learning their allotted duties and should carry them out satisfactorily.

In addition, a labor battalion to be of 1,000 men on a military basis is in process of organization, and while far from up to strength as yet those already recruited are being employed in the discharge of vessels. It is, however, too soon to form an opinion as to how things as a whole are shaping, and what will be accomplished with the many difficult and knotty problems to be solved – one of particular urgency being labor.

Since his arrival in Fiji the Governor has also found time to give attention to matters falling under his jurisdiction as High Commissioner for the Western Pacific. In this regard one of his considered policies appears to be to keep the British flag flying in British Western Pacific islands, and to raise it as soon as possible in any evacuated through necessity. This is evidenced by his enrolling certain High Commission officials in the Fiji Military Force with sufficient rank to ensure facility of their movement and to prevent unfortunate results which might occur if they were captured in civilian clothes. The Governor has also called on the Fiji Defence Force for volunteers for overseas service, undoubtedly having in mind their employment in other islands. Thus British occupancy will be ensured as far as possible.

The Governor himself has won the respect and confidence of all with whom he has come in contact as a man of character and ability. He has given the lead and set up the machinery to organize the Colony's war effort. Success will, however, depend upon the ability of his lieutenants, and here is the real obstacle to achievement, as the best at his disposal are men of mediocrity and little experience outside of Government routine. This is particularly true unfortunately of the new Colonial Secretary, who, as the Colony's second ranking official is the Governor's deputy and, the man to whom of necessity the Governor must delegate much authority.

In selecting Sir Philip Mitchell as Governor of Fiji the Colonial Office has chosen wisely for it has undoubtedly been at pains to pick not only a man of ability and push, but one possessed of a personality sympathetic to Americans, and so ensure a minimum of friction here in looking after the interests with which he has been entrusted.

Respectfully yours
/S/
Wainwright Abbott
American Consul General

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