

Notes on Public Record Office documents pertinent to Sir Harry Luke, attitudes toward Americans, situation around time of bones discovery and reporting

People:

Sir Harry Luke: High Commissioner WPHC and Governor of Fiji

Lord Lloyd: Secretary of Colonial Office?

Lord Moyne: Secretary of State?

Sir Cosmo Parkinson: Works for Moyne?

23rd September 1936 -26th August 1938.

Much correspondence re. Luke's desire to get governorship of Cypress; he's currently deputy in Malta. Apparently his qualities are recognized but there's a problem of succession, precedence. Much discussion of what can be offered to him. Mauritius is offered but he turns it down, preferring to wait on Cypress even though current Secretary of State can't find future one. On 12th March 1937 Mr. Ormsby Gore (SOS?) writes Luke saying he's glad Luke is "going for the bird in the bush (rather) than the one in the hand. Says it "has been kept on record here that it is my intention to offer you Cyprus when that is vacant." Much correspondence follows between Parkinson, who is apparently working for Gore, and Luke, the Gov. of Malta, and others about Luke's potential reassignment and the assignment of a Mr. Ramage - who will do what when. Parkinson stresses Gore's inability to bind the hands of the next SOS.

In October 1937 there is apparently some "leakage" to Reuters that Luke is to be Governor of Cypress. On 27th October Parkinson (to judge by the signature) says this "rumour ... should be effectively denied." Notes are associated from several new players (who subsequently vanish from the record - Thomas, Mawe, Williams, Ridgeway, others I can't read. Handwritten, apparently a flurry of excitement about the "leakage" and who can be moved where when. Note of 21st October from Williams says measures decided upon, it is hoped, "will succeed in damping down the rumour which is decidedly premature." I imagine that it would be impossible to trace its origin." On 22nd October Mawe asks Ridgeway if he knows where Reuters message came from. More fairly indecipherable (by me) handwritten minutes; one clearly says in parentheses "I hope that Sir H. Luke himself has not been indiscreet."

On 14th June 1938 SOS for Colonies advises Governor of Malta that Luke's future has been carefully considered and that he is offered the governorship of Fiji. "I am unable to put forward his name for the Cyprus governorship for which I have other arrangements in contemplation." Governor responds that Luke is "of course disappointed, but circumstances being as they are, he submits name for Fiji governorship."

There follows a lot of back-and-forth about the particulars of Sir Harry and Mrs. Luke's travel to Fiji, picking up everything after 8 years in Malta, at a time when their son is taking his Sandhurst exam, etc. Doesn't want to leave until after 11th August. Apparently does so.

11th October 1940

Luke to Lloyd. Thanks for letter of 27th June regarding Lady Bernard.

22nd October 1940

Lloyd to Luke. Been reading letters from Luke to Parkinson regarding Luke's visit to New Caledonia and New Hebrides. Comments on the difficulty of building up French resistance (major focus of Luke's diary entries about the NC/NH trip)

"Must confess that both I, and Hall, my Labour Parliament Under Secretary here, have been a good deal concerned over your recommendations for the Fiji Executive Committee." Says appointments should be made on merit and not to reconcile sectors of opinion. He reluctantly agreed to appointment of King Irving because Luke recommendation "made no reflection on his integrity, if it

was a little flat to his capabilities.”

Glad “Americans have been able to trace your mother and that she is apparently well. We are seeing what the possibilities are of getting her back to this country.” Goes on to discuss bombing raids, which have until recently spared Whitehall but are now focusing there. Thinks almost through the worst. Attention will shift to Mediterranean, hasn’t forgotten Luke’s knowledge and interest.

2nd November 1940

Davidson at Ministry of Information, Malet Street, to Lord Lloyd

Says there have been “disquieting reports” from Fiji about “Luke n’è Luksch,” who has had a “pretty sticky career.” Asks “Can’t you send an energetic patriotic married Governor...?”

8th November, 9th November, 12th November, 1940.

Typed notes in sequence from Jeffries, Parkinson, Eastwood (to whom?). All about difficulties of finding a discrete way to get Luke out of Fiji. Nothing particularly incriminating, just recognize a need (perhaps simply because they’ve been asked to consider it) and difficulty of meeting it. Parkinson, however, promotes trying to get Luke to retire

21st November, 1940

Jeffries to someone (Parkinson?). Has spoken with Secretary of State. No support at this time for moving Luke. But if Barton comes home (from Cypress?), then moving him into Barton’s slot might be supported. Wants file back (CYA?).

30th November 1940

Lloyd (unsigned, but style looks right) to Luke. Quick note with 10 minutes to catch a bag. Congenial notes about situation in Mediterranean. Ends with discussion of Palestine problem – Germans realize what difficulty they can create for GB and are sending shiploads of “Jews and others” to Palestine. GB trying to ship on to other places; one group of refugees recently blew up their ship upon learning of plans.

4th December 1940

Luke to Lloyd. Transmits copy of diary excerpts regarding trip to Samoas and Tonga. Notes that “American Naval Officers there (American Samoa) are pro-British to a man and convinced that the United States will come into the war sooner or later, although they feel (no doubt rightly) that it will be more advantageous to us if they keep out for the present.”

6th January 1941

Luke to Lloyd. Thanks for secret and personal letter of 22nd October. Grateful for help regarding his mother. No direct communication since June, will continue to be anxious until she’s back in England.

“Sorry that the question of the unofficial membership of the Executive Council here should have given you and Hall concern.” Says it’s a difficult position, because the only qualified person with no “personal axe to grind or personal antagonism to pursue” is Crompton. Goes on:

Barker, owner of only English language newspaper – Council is well rid of him.

King Irving, senior representative of Colonial Sugar Refining Co. – a “decent fellow, good record in the last war,” though he doesn’t contribute much to the Council. “what was objectionable was the arrogant and dictatorial attitude which Sir Philip Goldfinch, the General Manager of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, saw fit to adopt toward this Government in the matter of his reappointment. We do not want, of course, to quarrel with the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, but I have written personally to Goldfinch to say that King Irving will probably not be reappointed after his present year is up.”

Reminds Lloyd of his “keen desire” to get back to the Mediterranean.

6th January, 1941 (#2)

Luke to Lloyd. Provides recommendations re. Pantelleria – get Italy to cede to Great Britain, incorporate into Malta colony. Mentions possibility of settling “Maltese of the diaspora” in Fiji, which

has apparently been suggested. Could be done, but Pantelleria would be a better choice. Hopes Cypress won't be offered to Greeks.

2nd February, 1941

Parkinson to SOS. Has spoken with "Mr. Bruce," who has visited Sir Harry and says "all right, but has the problem of following the excellent Sir Arthur Richards, difficulty of measuring up. Big problem is Colonial Secretary Jaxon Barton, so we should get rid of Barton.

3rd March 1941

Parkinson to HiCom NZ, says Lord Lloyd and Lord Moyne are uncertain of Luke. Thinks Luke is in NZ getting treatment. London is concerned about his health, fitness at this critical time. Please provide opinion.

3rd March 1941

Parkinson to ? Asks permission to send telegram to HiCom NZ. Recipient (doesn't look like Lloyd) gives handwritten OK.

8th March 1941

HiCom New Zealand to Parkinson. Sees no problem with Luke, wonders how he copes with the diverse problems he faces. Thinks health is OK, has gone home from gout treatment in NZ.

16th March 1941

Parkinson to SOS says Sir H. Batterbee's (HiCom NZ) response is "not helpful." Asks for chance to discuss.

24th April 1941

Moyne to Luke, sending "A Note on the Future of Anglo-American Relations" by Harvard Prof. Alfred North Whitehead, which he regards approvingly as providing "an acute analysis," showing that there be "plenty of room for the exercise of our powers of imagination and forbearance." Thanks for copy of letter to Lloyd regarding post-war situation of Pantellaria, says will see it's brought to notice in "the proper quarters."

2nd July 1941

Luke to Moyne. Transmits 6/41 diary regarding trip to Solomons. Alludes to 24th April letter from Moyne enclosing Whitehead paper. Alludes to enjoying Moyne's "Walkabout."

16th September 1941

Moyne (apparently) to Luke. Thanks for diary. Says embarrassed by "Walkabout," which he says was "hastily put together," with "irritating misprints." Newsy, friendly letter with condolences regarding Luke's mother's death.

17th October 1941

Parkinson to SOS. Says previous SOS, Lord Harlech, promised Cypress to Sir Harry but "we advised against it when S.R. Palmer retired, and Mr. McDonald, who was then SOS, would not submit" (Sir Harry's name to the King). Says he has since learned that Lord Lloyd had privately urged against "that particular appointment." Submits draft response from self to Luke. Apparently accepted.

17th October 1941

Parkinson to Luke. Battershill is relinquishing Governorship of Cypress but it's already been assigned to Woolley. Sorry, Charlie.

14th January 1942

Luke to Lord Moyne. Transmits 12th January extract from diary on trip to Phoenix Islands. Notes that "very little if anything can be done there at the moment by way of completing the settlement until the Japanese situation has been cleared up. But in general I should like to say that the Phoenix Islands Settlement Scheme has proved an outstanding success." Says he "saw quite a lot of the

Americans at Canton Island and established very friendly relations with them but, as you probably know, Pan-American Airways had orders to evacuate a week after Pearl Harbour and, apart from any U.S. working parties that may still be left there, our stout-hearted Administrative and Wireless Officer, Fleming, and his wife, who refused to leave, alone now represent the Condominium there.”

22nd March 1942

Private for Lord Cranborne, War Cabinet Offices (now the SOS for Colonies), from Field Marshall Dill, J.S.M.(Joint Staff Mission), Washington. “Robinson, who has just arrived here with Dr. Evatt, tells me that he has written to Brndon Bracken about Luke, the Governor of Fiji. He tells me that in present situation is is complete disaster and that it is essential something should be done about him at once. I know nothing of him, but you will be able to find out. Robinson quite clear that situation demands immediate repeat immediate action.”

Back and forth discussion among Cranborn, Dill, perhaps Parkinson, about Luke; nothing really pointed to as a problem except his age (58) and need for more military person in charge.

23rd March 1942

Cranborne to Mr. (Prime Minister) Fraser, New Zealand. “Have had reports that Sir H. Luke is not the right man for Fiji in the present situation. Am not clear as to grounds for complaint. But as Fiji is of such paramount importance to New Zealand, and as you have lately paid several visits to the island, I should be most grateful for your private and personal opinion....”

26th March 1942

New Zealand H.C. to D.O. “The Prime Minister tells me that he has always found person mentioned helpful and co-operative and so far as New Zealand is concerned he would not wish to suggest any change.”

27th March 1942

BB (Brendan Bracken) at Ministry of Information, Malet St. to Cranborne (Rt. Hon. Viscount, Colonial Office, Downing St.). Addressed to “My Dear Bobbety(?)” “I have had a letter from W.S. Robinson who, as you know, is a man of sound judgment. He has recently been in Fiji and tells me that there is much dissatisfaction there and that there is need for an immediate change in the Governorship.” Annotation interpreted by KT as saying that Bracken will send Robinson letter full of criticisms.

27th March 1942

Cranborne to Dill. Fraser has no problem. “In these circumstances and as I am not clear on what grounds Robinson bases his criticism I propose to do nothing until I have seen the letter addressed to Brendan Bracken.”

28th March 1942

H.C. New Zealand to D.O. for Cranborne. “Prime Minister tells me that since discussing matter with me he has received reports form Chiefs of Staff and others which lead him to believe that a person with more drive and positive qualities of leadership would be desirable and that he is accordingly now of opinion that a change would be a good thing.”

Some back-and-forth about good candidates for replacement of Luke.

29th March 1942

Goddard at Air Ministry Kingsway to A.H.Q. Wellington. Has visited Fiji 3 times “and each time have been more impressed with the desirability of changing the Governor. In my opinion and in the opinion of Naval and Military and Air Commanders in Fiji, certain leading residents, and the American Consul, the Governor is too self-centred, self-important, and lacking in leadership and appreciation of his duty in relation to the war effort in Fiji. It appears that the Governor is universally disrespected and that his removal has recently been the subject of a public petition.

Governor’s relationship with American Consul, for whom I and all others to whom I have spoken, have the highest regard, is particularly bad. Governor has repeatedly failed to notify American Con-

sul of important American matters and the arrival at Government House of prominent Americans passing through by air. General Tinker, one of the finest American officers I have met, independently urged me to suggest that there should be an immediate change of Governor, and stated that he proposed to make a similar representation.

Governor appears unwilling to ask for or act upon advice of Legislative Council. Government Departments appear to be adhering to peace time methods and routine. Experience in Singapore and Burma indicates danger of this state of affairs. Institution of Naval Governor in Ceylon provides precedent for Fiji." Goes on to discuss possible candidates.

30 March 1942

B.C. Sendell(?) at Ministry of Information to Thornley at Colonial Office.

"I give below the relevant extract from Mr. W.S. Robinson's letter concerning the Governor of Fiji about which we spoke on Saturday.

'Fiji will be another Malaya. I told you this 2 years ago - 100,000 Fijians all dissatisfied with the Government. 95,000 Indians all disloyal. 4,500 (plus 10,000 N.Z. soldiers) dissatisfied Whites. The Governor must go - put the U.S. in charge if you like but I suggest a War Council created out of the present Executive Council, plus Sir Harry Scott, King Irving, Ratu Sabune (?) the Fiji Chief and someone to represent the Indians. Sack Luke and do it at once.'

Comment:

This was effectively the last word. There follows much correspondence about possible replacements, and finally a carefully worded letter on 26th May 1942 from Cranborne telling Luke that his valuable services are no longer needed.

23rd July 1942

Establishment Branch notice: Sir Phillip Euen Mitchell, K.C.M.G., M.C. assumed duty as Governor of Fiji and High Commissioner for the Western Pacific on the 22nd July.

WPHC Records, Hanslope Park, England (now in Auckland, New Zealand).

Kris Tague