

THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

25, D. C.

PLT-6, NARS Date 1-29-74

DEC 29 1945

My dear Mr. Secretary:

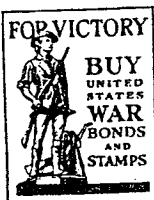
When I wrote you on November 27 asking for a meeting of the sub-committee on administration of the Pacific islands, I had several points in mind which, in view of your reply of December 6, I believe that I should make more explicit.

As I understand the problems of administration in the Pacific islands, they are not, for the most part, hypothetical ones that might arise only in the event of certain international agreements, but immediate and interim problems of an administrative and economic character arising from our de facto control. I assume also that the measures taken during the critical interim period in the islands will profoundly affect such problems as administration, trade and our relations with the indigenous peoples under any future regime. To await formal international decisions before providing orderly administrative arrangements would be to leave these arrangements to haphazard, day-to-day planning. I am sure that this Nation's interests would not be served by such delay.

I am unable to understand why either disputes over ownership or determinations as to trusteeship or exclusive right have any bearing upon this problem. With respect to all of the Central Pacific islands taken from Japan, about which I am mainly concerned, the actual governing responsibility has been assumed wholly by the United States for the time being. Even if we knew that these islands would later be assigned to another power, I assume that in the meantime the United States Government would be obliged to look after the welfare of their inhabitants.

The islands of the Central Pacific will no doubt be under continuous international scrutiny; and, for this reason, the methods which we establish may acquire an importance and an influence far out of proportion to their small size and population. It seems to me that it is greatly to our advantage to assist the natives of the islands toward a better way of life within the limits of their capabilities and the potentialities of their environment. In terms of ultimate economy and goodwill, such a policy would benefit our relations with peoples far beyond the limits of the island area.

I am sure that, to accomplish these results, the American people will be overwhelmingly in favor of civil government. Not only is our own tradition decisively opposed to military rule, but even the old colonial powers have apparently outgrown it. The Japanese themselves maintained civil government in the mandated islands.



I know that you must be concerned about the prevalence of the belief, both at home and abroad, that our military interest in the Pacific islands tends to ignore the civil rights and economic welfare of the inhabitants. The strategic position of the islands is as significant from a political as from a military standpoint. We can gain a great advantage if we can go to the peace table with a record of interim civilian administration that clearly demonstrates the democratic, non-imperialistic attitude of this Government toward the island peoples.

I cannot understand why attention should be centered only on acquiring "bases" when local human problems and our relations with the island peoples constitute an immediate and pressing responsibility of the United States Government. The President's memorandum of October 20 referred not to "bases" but to "islands." That memorandum still stands, and, for the reasons that I have stated, I hold to the opinion that the subcommittee should go to work at once to prepare the required recommendations as directed by the President.

I request that you have the subcommittee summoned to draft an interim report for submission to the President by the Committee of four Secretaries on or before February 1.

Since a copy of your letter of December 6 was sent to the President, I am sending him a copy of this communication.

Sincerely yours,

((Sgd.)) HAROLD L. ICKES
Secretary of the Interior.

Hon. James F. Byrnes, x20

Secretary of State.

Copy to the President.