

LAND TENURE PROBLEMS, GILBERT AND ELLICE ISLANDS

Richard Turpin

(Due to ~~commu~~nications difficulties only an abstract can be presented.)

Location, area, small scattered atolls over large area, diversity of rainfall and population density.

Before European contact land in Gilberts generally individually owned but restrictive customary rules governed disposal. On islands governed by High Chiefs land was vested in High Chief who distributed rights in lands.

In the Ellice Islands lands also vested in High Chiefs who disposed of rights to followers.

Land itself of little economic value until middle nineteenth century when coconut-oil first exported - nevertheless had social values - pits for babai and taro of greater food value.

After contact land had greater value as coconut-oil or copra exportable - islands fortunate that little land alienated.

Nevertheless increased value plus increasing population caused increased number disputes.

In early years Government, inadequate machinery for settlement disputes and registration but remedied after 1946.

Continuation of modified customary tenure causes fragmentation and subdivision of lands - no unused lands available.

Land hunger and surfeit exist on same islands - maldistribution.

Resistance to change stems from natural inertia plus fear of landlessness which could result in loss of security in old age or sickness and lack of alternative means of livelihood.

Security of tenure and machinery for settlement of disputes and for registration now exist.

Problems are maldistribution, fragmentation, sub-division.

Legislation now enacted enables neglected lands to be purchased for land hungry.

Customary tenure codes are not unchangeable and future more educated generations may wish to adopt less restricted form ownership.

Emigration has been tried on small scale and is possibility for future.

Variations of problems on some islands.