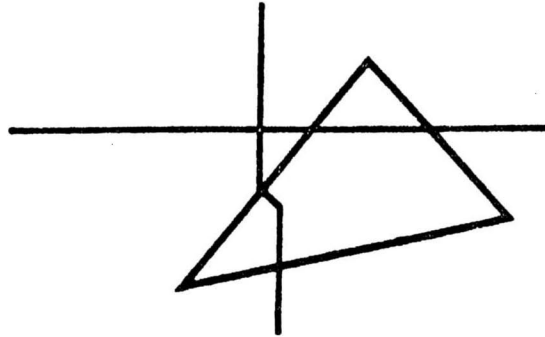


# **THE SOLOMON ISLANDS: AN EXPERIMENT IN DECENTRALIZATION**



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Drs. Ralph R. Premdas and Jeffrey S. Steeves have addressed themselves to a particularly important problem. How do newly independent states cast off the yoke of colonial rule and return self-determination to people at the grass roots level? In the Pacific, the move toward the decentralization of government has been the strongest in Papua New Guinea. The Solomon Islands have followed that lead, and as the authors of this working paper indicate, the process is fraught with many difficulties and complexities. The issues to which they address themselves will be followed by interested observers for a good number of years to come.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION: DECOLONIZATION AND DECENTRALIZATION

Decolonization of the Third World has generally been taken to refer to the formal acquisition of sovereign status by colonial territories. A new flag is hoisted as the imperial power departs. With a new constitution embodying a replica of the political institutions drawn from the polity of the ex-colonial master, the new nation embarks on a course proclaimed to be democratic. The legitimacy of the new nation is founded on the assertion and pre-eminence of people's power. The animus inspiring the policies of the new governors ostensibly addresses the needs of citizens. Political participation by the grassroots is proclaimed as a fundamental idea in the emerging order.

Operationally, however, and almost invariably, the reality of "returning power to the people" has been thwarted. Few cases of meaningful popular control exist among the entire group of one hundred or so Third World countries which were decolonized since World War II. The pattern points more to the prevalence of repressive regimes which have accumulated power through one-party systems or military coup d'etats. From the aspiration of serving the people, the state has been transformed into an instrument serving the interests of a few. The gap between "master" and "servant," a characteristic from the extinguished colonial regime has been replicated by a new system of internal domination. A well-armed, top heavy central government located in a primal city and controlled by an oligarchy of interests dominates a ruralized periphery inhabited by the many.<sup>1</sup>

Most Third World countries inherited as part of their formal institutional apparatus a centralized and relatively over-developed civil service.<sup>2</sup> The physical facilities of government are concentrated in a capital city where most public servants reside. Also, the major part of budgetary allocations is devoted to this urban sector. This pattern persists despite an official rhetoric about government's great concern for ordinary people most of whom live in rural areas. Government at the center and people at the periphery are literally worlds apart. While linkage was greatest just prior to independence when national parties mobilized urban and rural residents alike to sever the colonial connection,<sup>3</sup> the post-colonial record attests either to neglect and/or a one-way top to bottom linkage of an oppressive sort.<sup>4</sup>

To successfully undertake "decolonization" would entail at a minimum the transfer of responsibility to units of government at the periphery. "Returning power to the people" would literally mean bringing government closer to the people, especially to the majority who are rural dwellers. During colonial times in many parts of the Third World, the mode of connection between the center and the periphery was executed through a French-type prefectorial district administrative structure staffed by expatriate officers who exercised wide-ranging powers.<sup>5</sup> Regional administrative dominance was but an extension of central coercive control exercised from the capital city. There was not a two-way flow of views involving mutual exchange and reconciliation of divergent interests.

On a day-to-day basis, the will of the colonizer was enacted in the lives of the colonized through the primary device of the colonial bureaucracy. It was the civil service that symbolized the ongoing relentless colonial presence in its extractive and repressive form. To adapt to its basic penetrative and control role, the colonial bureaucracy had to be fashioned in a particular way. It was designed as a semi-military organization accountable to no local constituents and articulating a fairly steep hierarchy from which commands issued forth to the periphery. This structure represented the immediate reality of the colonial state. Even when indigenous staff were recruited to manage parts of this bureaucratic octopus, the general intent of the creature did not alter.

When, then, the first challenges against the colonial presence were asserted, its aim was directed against the administrative structure, its component parts, its agents and physical symbols. Indeed, many of the earliest rebels were once seemingly compliant employees within this bureaucracy. Attempts to adapt the colonial political and administrative system to its anticipated new status just prior to independence were introduced too late and too fast. The civil service was then expanded to become the largest employer in the country, provided with more funds and partly indigenized. However in practice it remained essentially a structure of dominance with ingrained habits of extracting compliance from citizens. As an exploitative device, it continued to symbolize a system over which constituents had no sense of control.<sup>6</sup>

It was the publicly-announced commitment of those who acceded to power following independence to "return power to the people."<sup>7</sup> This proposition, however, meant different things to different groups. For some, it could only be accomplished by the nationalization of all foreign firms coupled with full

indigenization of the public service and a radical restructuring of the economy and external trade.<sup>8</sup> But to others, it meant inter alia disaggregating the centralized state apparatus and devolution of decision-making powers to regional and local communities to conduct their own affairs.<sup>9</sup> Government was no longer to be something done to the people whether they cared for it or not, but something people did themselves guided by their own will and interests.<sup>10</sup> Active participation in community self-determination was a cardinal principle of decolonization at the grassroots.<sup>11</sup>

The implications were clear. The old inherited central public bureaucracy had to be dismantled. A new structure with new motifs would have to be forged. This would require decentralization of both political and administrative functions to units of government within the periphery. For the most part, this would dictate that formal units and their staff be re-distributed with wide territorial space.<sup>12</sup> Face to face contact with elected decision-makers and appointed bureaucrats would then be facilitated.<sup>13</sup> Decisions would be derived locally and those accountable for implementation would be within easy access. Political responsibility would thus be instituted in a new decolonized regime. Power would be returned to the people through decentralization.

The complexity of underdevelopment especially in its political dimension suggests that too much emphasis not be placed on any single variable as the most critical in altering the structure of society. Decentralization is not propounded as the key to the fulfilment of self-determination. We know that such factors as external dependency on markets, aid and foreign investment as well as political culture, land tenure, the structure of production and distribution, and resource endowment among others are powerful forces which constrain political development. In this work, we isolate "the politico-administrative" variable since within it potentially resides the leverage in modern government by which ordinary people can direct collective decisions affecting their daily lives. Lest the experiment in local democracy be confused with an exercise in tinkering with the structure of a formal organization, we define the nature of decentralization. The term refers to both the political and administrative aspect of grassroots government. This was succinctly set forth by White as follows:

The process of decentralization denoted the transference of authority, legislative, judicial or administrative, from a higher level of government to a lower. It is the converse of centralization and should not be confused with deconcentration, a term generally used to denote the mere delegation to a subordinate officer of capacity to act in the name of the superior without a transfer of authority to him.<sup>14</sup>

The political aspect points to the determination of community decision-making by those who pay for the services and who are governed by the enacted policies. Typically, this is effected through a legitimating principle such as elections. A council is established; extensive functions related to practically everything can be the responsibility of the deliberative body. It is envisaged not only that items such as health services, police, and housing regulation be within the ambit of a council, but in a set of upward linkages, these councils collectively can also provide the opinions guiding the formation of national issues including foreign policy and the strategy of economic development. It is not often that decentralized councils are empowered with such far-reaching national responsibilities, but there is no compelling reason to prohibit them from doing this if so desired.<sup>15</sup>

The administrative aspect of decentralization refers to the distributing out (deconcentration) of administrative tasks of the government bureaucracy to subordinate field agencies so that services and functions are dispensed from local centers within reasonable reach of every community cluster. The proper relationship between the political and administrative aspects of the decentralized community government is that the former makes policy while the latter implements it. To the process of devolution of decision-making and deconcentration of administration are attributed a number of benefits which we briefly recapitulate;<sup>16</sup> (1) political responsibility is transferred to the governed; democratic self-government is learned by practice; (2) fast and effective decision-making is facilitated; the indefinite delays in waiting for a remote headquarters to give permission for a policy is eliminated; (3) regional diversity is accommodated; (4) appropriate, flexible and varied responses to different kinds and rates of change in the diverse environments of the country are facilitated; (5) institutional experimentation involving only parts of the polity at a time can be conducted; (6) priorities are established according to the interests and problems of an area; (7) alternative strategies of development can be devised so as to adapt to local

peculiarities, customs, and resources; (8) innovation in techniques of production and changes in outlook are more likely; (9) more and better information for planning and project identification can be assembled; and (10) a training ground for national leadership is established.

Decentralization consequently is likely to relieve central congestion and overload.<sup>17</sup> Chances are that more might also get done than is accomplished from central direction. Self-help projects are likely to engender enthusiasm. Fears may be expressed that the latitude in decision-making suggested by this formula for decentralization tends towards facilitating internal fragmentation, ethnic nationalism, secessionist movements, and ultimate chaos.<sup>18</sup> Such a possibility does exist. Much of the fear is real but a good deal stems from fear of the people, an anti-democratic instinct. Much more seriously from a practical standpoint are problems related to shortage of skills and the weak taxing base of local communities to implement bona fide autonomous councils. The pragmatic issues of staff and tax base apart, the decentralized units of provincial and local governments make decisions through consent and consultation from constituents at the grassroots.<sup>19</sup>

There is no such thing as complete decentralization or centralization.<sup>20</sup> Every organization is a mixture of the two principles. There is not a dichotomous relationship between the two but rather a continuum. Where centralization is dominant in the mix, a qualitatively different political order is likely to exist. The same is true with a structure with a preponderance of decentralized motifs. Hence, it is crucial to note that when extensive decentralized re-organization is undertaken, the effects are likely to entail qualitative or revolutionary changes. The political system will be transformed radically; a new balance in the distribution of power may emerge.

An immediate implication of decentralization is that power tends to be shifted from one center to another. At one level of change, there is an areal or spacial dimension. But that is secondary to the upheaval that is likely to follow from the political changes.<sup>21</sup> Around the established centralized machinery are encrusted not only careers and comforts of administrators who in most emerging nations are among the most educated, organized and articulate, but also the interests of national legislators who have accommodated to the old order. Political careers built around the centralized machinery, and urban interests linked to overseas holidays and life-styles would be displaced as new localized centers of power emerge and proliferate country-wide. A new power structure is likely to be born.

For those then, who promise to decentralize so as to return power to the people, a severe struggle for power, of revolutionary proportions, awaits them. Not only political will, but political mobilization and organization linked to the mass of peasants and workers would be required to displace the old entrenched machinery. A configuration of power can only be destroyed by a corresponding power of equal or greater magnitude. The task is likely to be made doubly difficult if the new power holders who promised decentralization know little about the extent of the dislocation that their experiment entails and what it will take to implement it. Decentralization, however, may have been promised only as part of a rhetorical exercise in which popular symbols are wielded to provide temporary palliatives for a desperate situation. When this happens, a dangerous idea, teasingly thrown to the masses, may unwittingly be implanted in their minds. It may return to haunt the promise makers causing havoc to their comforts.

In this monograph, we study a case of a new state which had thrown to the people the decentralization teaser. The promise was not extended by a revolutionary party in a mobilization system. The change was entrusted practically to the same bureaucrats in the centralized system whose careers and life-styles were to be disrupted by successful implementation. The rhetoric of devolution and local responsibility was freely engaged in by those who were about to inherit power from the departing colonial master. The promise of decentralization was in fact made so as to placate certain sub-national groups which opposed independence unless regional autonomy was guaranteed to them. Other sub-national groups wanted shifts of political and administrative concentrations after independence to the provincial councils as a matter of principle.

The focus of our study is the Solomon Islands, a South-West Pacific country, which became independent in 1978. In 1977, the country's constitutional founding fathers promised "decentralization of legislative and executive power."<sup>22</sup> This commitment which was enunciated at a constitutional conference convened in London further undertook to establish a special committee "to examine the relationship between the National Government, Provincial Governments and Area Councils and to recommend on the measures to promote the effective decentralization of legislative, administrative, and financial powers."<sup>23</sup> The country's independence was delayed by several years partly because of difficult issues related to center-periphery relations. But, as the monograph will show, the demand for a greater role to be played by subnational units in the determination of their own

affairs has had a long history. After World War II, "Maasina Ruru," an indigenous semi-revolutionary movement, erected its own counter-councils juxtaposed to those of the colonizer to govern its affairs. It was an act of unprecedented defiance in the face of superior British arms. Taxes were not paid to the British authorities but to the Maasina councils. "Maasina Ruru" was symbolic of a yearning by the colonized peoples of the Solomons to govern themselves.

In chapter one of the monograph we set forth an overview portrait of the Solomon Islands. In chapter two, we begin our discussion of conquest and colonization with a special focus on the administrative structures which were imposed by the British. In this chapter we discuss "Maasina Ruru." Chapter three elaborates on the evolution of decentralization in relation to the approach of self-government and independence. The British view that local government provides a good preparatory training ground for national autonomy gave accelerated emphasis to decentralization exercises throughout the 1970s. But much of the debate over dis-aggregating the centralized colonial decision-making centers and bureaucracy would be tempered by fears of promoting national disunity. The devolution experiment was also caught up in a contest for power among the new elites who were poised to succeed the departing colonial power. A further complication points to the fears and recalcitrance of central government bureaucrats surrounding the diminution of their powers and privileges. The faithful execution of the decentralization aims threatened to alter the balance of power. In chapter four, we discuss aspects of this struggle which were largely embodied in the implementation of a Plan of Operations aimed at devolution. In chapter five we discuss in detail the culmination of the devolution debate in the form of the Kausimae Committee Report. We conclude by summarizing broad observations from the experiment to date.



## Footnotes to Chapter One

<sup>1</sup> See James S. Coleman, "The Concept of Political Penetration," in L. Cliffe, J.S. Coleman and M.R. Doornbos (eds.), Government and Rural Development in East Africa: Essays on Political Penetration (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), pp. 3-18.

<sup>2</sup> See S.N. Eisenstadt, "Bureaucracy and Development," and Fred W. Riggs, "Bureaucrats and Political Development: a Paradoxical View," in J. LaPalombara (ed.), Bureaucracy and Development (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

<sup>3</sup> See C.G. Rosberg and J.S. Coleman (eds.), Political Parties and National Integration in Africa (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964).

<sup>4</sup> See S.P. Huntington and C. Moore (eds.), The Dynamics of Established One-Party Systems (New York: Basic Books, 1970); Samuel Finer, "The One-Party Regimes in Africa: Reconsiderations," Government and Opposition, II 4 (July-October 1967); and, Lionel Cliffe, "'Penetration' and Rural Development in the East African Context," in Cliffe, Coleman and Doornbos, op. cit., pp. 19-50.

<sup>5</sup> James Fesler, "Approaches to the Understanding of Decentralization," Journal of Politics, XXVII 3 (August 1965); also his "French Field Administration: The Beginnings," Comparative Studies in Society and History, V (October 1962); pp. 76-111; and Ronald Wraith, Local Administration in West Africa (London: Allen and Unwin, 1972).

<sup>6</sup> For an excellent analysis of the continuation of such dominance see, Cherry Gertzel, "The Provincial Administration in Kenya," Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, IV 3 (November 1966), pp. 201-215.

<sup>7</sup> Sigmund Neumana (ed.), Ideologies of the Developing Nations (New York: Praeger, 1967).

<sup>8</sup> This approach is associated with the "underdevelopment" school of analysis. For a summary, see Colin Leys, Underdevelopment in Kenya: The Political Economy of Neo-Colonialism 1964-1971 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), Ch. 1; and, Lawrence Alschuler, "Satellization and Stagnation in Latin America," International Studies Quarterly, XX 1 (March 1976).

<sup>9</sup> Julius K. Nyerere, "Decentralization," in his Freedom And Development: A Selection from Writings and Speeches 1968-1973 (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 344-350.

<sup>10</sup> John Morris, "Decentralization and Development," in Ralph R. Premdas and Stephen Pokawin (eds.), Decentralization: The Papua New Guinea Experiment (Waigani: University of Papua New Guinea Press, 1980), pp. 15-20.

<sup>11</sup> Nyerere, op. cit.; see also Henry Maddick, Democracy, Decentralization, and Development (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1966), Ch. 3.

<sup>12</sup>See Arthur Mass (ed.), Area and Power (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1959).

<sup>13</sup>Maddick, op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>14</sup>Leonard D. White, "Decentralization," in Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, V (New York: Macmillan, 1931), pp. 43-44. See also the following references: Maddick, op. cit., Ch. 2; United Nations, Decentralization for National and Local Development (New York: United Nations, 1977); James Fesler, "Centralization and Decentralization," International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, II (New York: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 370-378; Ronald Wraith, "The Four Dimensional Administration: Deconcentration, Delegation, Devolution and Decentralization," Quarterly Journal of Administration, V 2 (January 1971); and, Arthur MacMahon, Delegation and Autonomy (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1961).

<sup>15</sup>The Yugoslav system is instructive. See D.S. Riddell, "Social Self-Government: The Background and Theory and Practice in Yugoslav Socialism," British Journal of Sociology, (March 1968), and, G. Hunnius, "The Yugoslav System of Decentralization and Self-Management," in C.G. Beneilo and D. Roussopoulous (eds.), The Case for Participatory Democracy (New York: Grassman Publishers, 1972).

<sup>16</sup>See Ralph R. Premdas, "Decentralization: A compendium of Problems and Opportunities," in Premdas and Pokawin, op. cit., pp. 369-374.

<sup>17</sup>See M. Kochen and K. Deutsch, "Toward a Theory of Decentralization," American Political Science Review, LXIII (September 1969), pp. 734-749.

<sup>18</sup>For a discussion, see Ralph R. Premdas and Jeffrey S. Steeves, "Decentralization and Change: The Melanesian Cases," in P. Larmour and R. Qalo (eds.), Local Government in the Pacific (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1981).

<sup>19</sup>Quite clearly this is the ideal. There is as well the possibility that the new local institutions may be captured by oligarchic elements at the grassroots. Furniss, for example, argues that decentralized units tend to be both conservative and controlled by elites. See N. Furniss, "The Practical Significance of Decentralization," Journal of Politics, XXXVI (November 1974), pp. 959-961.

<sup>20</sup>See Fesler, "Approaches to the Understanding of Decentralization," op. cit.; also, Wraith, Local Administration in West Africa, op. cit.

<sup>21</sup>Maddick, op. cit., Ch. 3; Premdas, "Decentralization: Messiah or Monster?" in Premdas and Pokawin (eds.), op. cit., pp. 5-15.

<sup>22</sup>Solomon Islands, Constitutional Conference 1977, Principles (Honiara: Government Printing Office, 1977), Preamble, 2 (3).

<sup>23</sup>ibid., p. 22.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SOLOMON ISLANDS: AN INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW

On July 7, 1978, the Solomon Islands received its independence from Britain.<sup>1</sup> In 1893 Britain annexed the Solomon Islands declaring the islands a "protectorate." Thereafter, the colony was called "The British Solomon Islands Protectorate" or "BSIP." From 1893 to 1978, the Solomon Islands remained firmly under British control; through those years English values became a measure of what was desirable and superior. It was not until the early 1970s that the first strong collective indigenous demands for independence were registered.<sup>2</sup> The "wind of change" which had witnessed the liberation from colonialism of numerous African and Asian colonies in the late 1950s and early 1960s did not buffet the shores of European colonies in the southwest Pacific until late in the 1960s and in the 1970s. Apart from being distant and isolated from much of the agitational movements for independence in the rest of the Third World, the Pacific Island colonies were very small and generally resource poor.<sup>3</sup> The attractions of independence were muted by the prospect of conducting sovereign governments with permanent deficit budgets. When the Solomon Islands became independent in the late 1970s, the British were most willing to relinquish formal control. The colony was costly since its annual budget required a subsidy from the British treasury to be balanced. The final acts of Solomon Islands' decolonization were not intense demonstrations of joy, but sober calculated conferences designed to solicit aid and technical advice so as to provide economic self-sufficiency in the long run. No one can escape this somber atmosphere in the Solomons even two years after independence. In the capital city, Honiara, and its outlying island provinces, the psychological symbols of self-determination are barely visible. The preoccupation is with expanding the economic base and enhancing economic opportunities for Solomon Islanders.<sup>4</sup> Very few strident chauvinistic sounds are heard to nationalize any of the few industries. Instead, foreign investors are eagerly sought.<sup>5</sup>

The population of the Solomon Islands was estimated in 1980 to be about 225,000. Its annual growth rate is approximately 3.4 percent. Most of the people

are Melanesians but the population is intermixed with small groups of Polynesians, Micronesians, Chinese, and Europeans as the following table based on the 1976 census shows.<sup>6</sup>

Table 1: Population by Ethnic Origin (1976)

Ethnic Type	Numbers	% of the Total
Melanesian	183,665	93.3
Polynesian	7,821	4.0
Micronesian	2,753	1.4
European	1,359	0.7
Chinese	452	0.2
Others	773	0.2
<b>Total:</b>	<b>196,823</b>	

Among the Melanesian component, inter-ethnic suspicions and rivalries are widespread. The population is distributed over a scattered archipelago of mountainous islands and lowlying coral islands covering a land area of 29,000 square kilometers and an ocean area of 803,000 square kilometers. Nearly all of the Melanesians live on the six major islands: (1) Choiseul, (2) New Georgia, (3) Santa Isabel, (4) Guadalcanal, (5) Malaita, and (6) Makira. The Polynesians tend to live on the small island atolls off the main islands. The Micronesians are recent settlers who were transplanted from the nearby Gilbert and Ellice Islands when certain segments fell victim to natural disasters.<sup>7</sup> The Europeans, Chinese and others are mainly old residents from the colonizing and commercial groups as well as recent arrivals from technical and aid missions.

The population of the Solomon Islands is distributed over seven provinces and the capital city, Honiara, as follows:<sup>8</sup>

Table 2: Population Distribution (1976 Census)

Province	Population	% of the Total
Malaita	60,043	30.5
Western	40,329	20.5
Guadalcanal	31,677	16.1
Makira/Ulawa	14,891	7.6
Santa Isabel	10,420	5.3
Central Islands	13,576	6.9
Eastern Islands	10,945	5.5
Honiara	14,942	7.6
Total:	196,823	100.0

Several points from Table 2 are noteworthy for our subsequent discussion. The population is distributed not on a single land mass, but fragmented over several islands widely separated from each other. Internal to the islands is the predominance of small localities—60 percent of the people living in villages of less than 100 people. The average size of all localities is 39 people. The census of 1976 found a total of about 5,000 localities of which only 33 or 0.2 percent had more than 300 people.<sup>8</sup> Hence, both external and internal physical distribution factors point to a very isolated and highly ruralized village-based population. Consequently, communications are a major difficulty in the Solomon Islands. The island of Malaita contains the largest population grouping. In modern times, Solomon Islanders have come to describe their identity in regional terms. Hence, a person from Malaita Province may call himself and be called a Malaitan. This is especially so when he is away from Malaita. But on Malaita itself, he is likely to be identified as a person from either a sub-regional or tribal group. Because of the divergent experiences that each island group encountered with missionaries, planters, and government administrators over the period of colonization, each island population has developed a different image and stereotypical reputation among other Solomon

Island groupings.<sup>9</sup> In the case of Malaita, it is generally felt that Malaitans were the most difficult people to colonize; they resisted foreign intrusion vigorously at various times and places.<sup>10</sup> Among Solomon Islanders, they were the last to receive the full modernizing benefits such as schools and aid posts from the colonial power. However, by sheer numbers and diligence, Malaitans have become the most aggressive and successful bureaucrats and businessmen. In contemporary Solomon Islands, there is a widespread fear of what is called "Malaitan domination." Constituting only about 30 percent of the total population, their success in commerce and government has exaggerated their role in political and economic fields. Because of the very high population density on Malaita, out migration to other islands has brought many Malaitans in hostile contact with other Solomon Islanders. The following table gives the population density in the various provinces:<sup>11</sup>

Table 3: Population Density

Province	1976 Population	Land Area (sq. kms.)	Population per sq. km.
Malaita	60,043	4,543	13.2
Western	40,329	8,573	4.7
Guadalcanal	31,677	5,625	5.6
Makira/Ulawa	14,891	3,561	4.2
Santa Isabel	10,420	4,014	2.6
Central Islands	13,576	1,722	7.9
Eastern Islands	10,945	837	13.1
Honiara	14,942	21	711.5
<b>Total:</b>	<b>196,823</b>	<b>28,896</b>	<b>6.8</b>

Later in the monograph as we delve into the issues related to provincial decentralization, we would note the inter-ethnic conflict that is being generated by internal migration generally but particularly by Malaitan migration. Suffice it to

note here that apart from the capital city, Honiara, with a population density of 711.5 and the atolls in the Eastern Island group with a density of 13.1, Malaita is the most densely populated among the major land areas in the Solomons. The freedom of movement provisions in the Solomon Islands constitution has come in head-on collision with parochial ethnonational sentiments in the provinces against "Malaitan" migration in particular. We provide in Table 3a a statistical portrait of the movement of people in the Solomon Islands.<sup>12</sup> The figures show that in 1976 that about 166,180 or 84 percent of the total population lived in the council area of their birth. Of the remaining 26,000 persons who were living outside their Council area, nearly half or 11,400 were Malaitans.

A noteworthy point that is evoked from Tables 2 and 3 is that the Western province with 20 percent of the country's population has the largest land area of 8,573 square kilometers. This land space in the Western province is even larger when note is taken that the province, unlike Malaita which is mainly one island, is distributed widely over several major island groups including the Shortlands, Choiseul, and New Georgia. Guadalcanal Province with 31,677 people or 16.1 percent of the population is also larger than Malaita. Guadalcanal Province occupies a single large island (like Malaita) of 5,625 square kilometers. The main resistance to the migration of Malaitans to other provinces comes from the two physically largest provinces, Western and Guadalcanal, which are most capable of absorbing migrants. The figures in Table 3a show that of the 11,400 Malaitans living outside their province, the highest concentrations were in Guadalcanal and the West. The issue related generally to national integration and unity. However, the salience of provincial parochialism and ethnic fear, renders unity of the Solomon Islands a problematic objective.

Apart from inter-ethnic fears, language and religion also divide Solomon Islanders. "Pidgin," a Melanesian trade language, has emerged as a common linguistic link among many Solomon Islanders from different indigenous language groupings. The "Pidgin" in the Solomons, however, is a weak variant of broken English quite unlike the complexity of Melanesian Pidgin in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. The point is that the close affinity between English and Solomon Islands Pidgin has limited the universality of the latter as a lingua franca among Solomon Islanders. In parts of the country, such as the West, Roviana is the lingua franca. Some eighty-seven different languages are spoken throughout the country.

Table 3a: Solomon Islanders Born in the Solomon Islands by Area of Enumeration--1976 Census

Council Area of Birth	Western	Isabel	Central Islands	Guadalcanal	Honiara	Malaita	Makira/Ulawa	Eastern Islands	Total
Western	35339(88)	76	238	315	1287	333	64	21	37,673
Isabel	122	9532(91)	179	114	721	62	49	35	10,814
Central Is.	136	46	10491(77)	342	747	135	71	72	12,040
Guadalcanal	320	97	250	25581(81)	939	255	72	14	27,528
Honiara	515	283	482	1643	3092(21)	908	220	132	7,275
Malaita	1686	237	1111	2991	5023	57977(97)	261	59	69,343
Makira/Ulawa	99	56	104	133	485	120	13714(92)	105	14,816
Eastern Is.	63	51	583	152	554	56	359	10456(96)	12,274
Not Defined	32	5	2	10	12	20	2	8	91
Total	38312	10383	13440	31281	12860	59866	14812	10902	191,856
Total CA Population	40329	10420	13576	31677	14942	60043	14891	10945	196,823
Difference*	2017	37	136	396	2082	177	79	43	4,967

\* mainly persons not born in Solomon Islands

Note: (Percentages in Brackets)

Solomon Islander = Melanesians + Polynesians + Gilbertese



Religion in the Solomon Islands is a salient characteristic of social life. About 90 percent of the people are Christians of one type or another. It is said that the busiest day in the Solomons is Sunday. Church attendance is a high participation pursuit. The figures below give the distribution of religious groupings in the Solomons.

Table 4: Religion (1976 Census)

Denomination	Size	% of Total
Church of Melanesia (Anglican)	67,370	34.2
Roman Catholic	36,870	18.7
South Seas Evangelical	33,306	16.9
United Church	22,209	11.3
Seventh Day Adventist	19,113	9.7
Christian Fellowship	4,822	2.5
Jehovah Witness, Bahai and Others	6,003	3.1
Pagan	7,130	3.6
	196,823	100.0

Religion is an important political force in the Solomon Islands. Because of the division of the colony during the early colonial era into spheres of religious influence by a comity agreement among the main Christian denominations, different provinces or groups of provinces tend to have the predominance of one denominational group over another.<sup>14</sup>

Turning to the economy of the Solomon Islands, the duality and dominance of the agricultural structure is notable. Agriculture provides 70 percent of the gross domestic product and 90 percent of the export income.<sup>15</sup> A subsistence sector persists beside a monetized sector. It was estimated in 1978 that of a total GNP of \$75,516,000, the non-cash or subsistence sector contributed about \$33,225,000 or a

little less than half.<sup>16</sup> However, the monetary aspect of the economy has been outstripping the non-cash part as the following figures show.<sup>17</sup>

Table 5: Sectors (1978 prices, \$'000)

Sector	1975	1976	1977	1978
Subsistence Production	\$29,806	\$31,529	\$32,410	\$33,225
Monetary Incomes	28,268	34,949	39,129	42,291
Total GNP	58,074	66,488	71,539	75,516

The monetary economy of the Solomon Islands is based mainly on four primary products: copra, fisheries, timber and palm oil. Together, these four products accounted for 85 percent of exports. The early colonizers came mainly to exploit the coconut products. This was followed by a period of "blackbirding" when large numbers of Solomon Islanders were recruited to work as a cheap source of labor on sugar and cotton plantations in Queensland, Fiji, and Samoa.<sup>18</sup>

Until very recently, copra and timber production dominated the economy. In 1970, they provided about 92 percent of the total export receipts of SI \$6.5 million.<sup>19</sup> Since 1970, the government has embarked on a program of economic diversification. Large scale projects were introduced in rice, palm oil, and fisheries. By 1978, the contribution of copra and timber to export receipts was down to 48 percent while palm oil and fish rose from zero to 37 percent.<sup>20</sup> The following table illustrates the more recent breakdown:<sup>21</sup>

Table 6: Exports (SI \$'000, 1978)

Product	Value	% Share
Fish and fish preparations	\$6,833	21.9
Copra	7,856	25.2
Timber	7,131	22.9
Palm oil	4,653	14.9
Rice and rice products	809	2.6
Cocoa	596	1.9

Note must be made of the point that in the expansion of timber, palm oil, fish and rice exports, the small holder has barely participated. Large plantations are the main holdings on which the new items are produced. In addition, these large scale agricultural enterprises are mainly foreign-owned with minority equity participation by the Solomon Islands government.<sup>22</sup>

Most imports are manufactured goods, machinery, and transport equipment. The balance of trade over the last five years has given the Solomon Islands a small surplus annually. The manufacturing sector is still at an early stage of development. In recent years, it has expanded mainly in the agro-business industries such as palm oil milling, rice milling, fish canning, and saw milling. Other small scale industries include boat building, rattan and wood furniture, fiberglass goods such as water tanks and canoes, biscuits, tobacco manufacture, soft drinks, nails and soap. Employment in the manufacturing sector grew from 650 in 1971 to 1,400 in 1977 when it accounted for about 8.5 percent of paid employment.<sup>23</sup>

Table 7: Cash Income Distribution per Capita (1975)

Income	Guadalcanal & Central	Makira & Eastern	Malaita	Western	Total Solomon Islands
From Employment	23.8	20.2	14.8	25.8	20.8
From Cash Crops	17.5	7.7	3.3	41.0	16.0
Total Cash Income	41.3	27.9	18.1	66.8	36.8

Table 7(a) shows that of all the provinces, Western is the most advanced. Similarly, it shows the Malaitan case to be the least developed. It is worth emphasizing that rural households tend to meet their basic food requirements from their gardens. Nonetheless, the figures point not only to a lack of cash income opportunities but also to the discrepancy in the distribution of these opportunities from province to province. Table 8 describes regionally the distribution of households without any cash income.<sup>26</sup>

The country's National Development Plan 1980-84 commented on the challenges and problems evoked by the foregoing statistical data as follows:

This lack of opportunities in many areas is one aspect of what appears to be the over-riding economic and political problem facing Solomon Islands at this stage in its development. The economy has been growing fast in recent years, but the benefits of that growth have improved the conditions of only a section of the population, mainly the wage and salary earners, and have reached only limited areas of the country, many areas remaining almost entirely unaffected.<sup>27</sup>

The problem of creating cash income opportunities is by itself a difficult problem. When cast in a rural context where subsistence farming has tended to be dominant, it becomes doubly difficult as urbanization drifts in the Third World have attested. Compounding the problem even further and rendering it into a volatile political issue occurs, as in the case of the Solomon Islands, when the distribution of cash income opportunities is skewed in favor of one province against another within a

Table 7a: Selected Indices of Involvement in the Cash Economy by Province, 1976

	Western	Santa Isabel	Central Islands	Guadalcanal	Honiara	Malaita	Makira/Uluwa	Eastern Islands	Solomon Islands
Cash earners as % of working age population*	33.9	27.9	45.3	33.4	75.0	8.6	18.3	15.9	28.1
% of households growing coconuts	82.8	90.0	63.7	53.2	5.8	44.7	62.3	79.0	58.2
Smallholder production of copra per household (tons)	0.89	0.50	0.30	0.31	---	0.16	0.34	0.21	0.38
% of households producing food for sale	23.9	10.5	32.6	20.0	0.8	7.2	7.6	24.9	15.2
% of households owning a radio	30.2	31.0	32.2	27.4	70.9	20.5	21.8	16.9	28.7
% of households owning a sewing machine	40.3	33.4	27.0	20.8	48.9	20.0	22.3	13.2	27.1

\* Cash earners are defined as those in paid employment and self-employed. Working age population is defined as persons in the 15-54 age group.

Sources: Population Census 1976, Preliminary Results, March 1976; and mission estimates.

Table 8: Rural Households Without Cash (1974) in Percentages (%)

	Central & Guadalcanal	Eastern & Makira	Malaita	Western	Total Solomon Islands
Households reporting No Cash Income	14.6	6.2	25.0	1.0	14.2

a national framework of inter-ethnic and inter-regional distrust and rivalry. In the Solomons, Malaita is on the one hand, regarded as dominant and aggressive, and on the other, it is the most impoverished on a per capita basis. The relatively rich Western province condemns Malaitan migration yet without development projects to employ them, Malaitans need to move to find areas of income and employment opportunity. In the land area, for example, Malaita faces extreme shortages. In the Western and Guadalcanal provinces, however, land is available albeit under traditional tenure patterns.<sup>28</sup> Regional economic discrepancies can partly be overcome by moving the factors of production to areas of opportunity. In this context, that implies facilitating the migration of Malaitans to other parts of the S.I. This is a rational plan but it cannot be operationalized in a context of ethnic fear and jealousy.

The demand for decentralization of political powers to provinces is most strongly made by provinces which claim that they can best address the issue of efficient allocation of scarce resources because they are close to the environment in which projects are identified and undertaken. But the observation is inescapable that the devolution of economic planning and powers to certain provinces may partly be intended to guard their economic resources from others thereby further exacerbating regional inequalities, apart from leading to inefficient misuse of scarce manpower and other resources. An Asian Development Bank Report commented on aspects of the problem as follows:

An aspect related to the new Development Plan is the implementation of government proposals to decentralize decision-making to provincial governments. This is seen as an important requirement if there is to be widespread involvement in development and decision-making processes in a country of widely scattered islands and poor transport and communication links. A major issue is

the extent to which decentralization should be taken. Many of the projects, especially those of a resource development nature designed to expand export production, will necessarily involve general issues of central policy if the best use is to be made of resources and thus may be unsuitable for handling at the provincial level. Further, there is the question of the availability of trained manpower at all levels to enable decentralization to be effective. Such manpower, especially of Solomon Islands origin, is already very scarce and to thin it out further by too fast a rate of decentralization may prove counter-productive and detract from the notable progress that has already been made in establishing a strong economic base.<sup>29</sup>

The manpower aspect will, by itself, stimulate migration issues. The problem of identifying projects and assigning them to different provinces to effect a regime of balanced development and employment opportunities will also trigger inter-provincial rivalries and quarrels in the Solomons.

Finally, in the economic sphere, note must be made of the role of foreign aid. The Solomon Islands aspires to a condition of economic self-reliance. However, foreign investment and aid are deemed prerequisites to exploiting and expanding the country's economic base to realize the objective of self-reliance. At independence, the country required a grant-in-aid contribution from the United Kingdom to balance its recurrent budget. In 1979 this was reduced to half a million out of a total of \$27 million in the recurrent budget. In the area of capital formation and investment, however, foreign aid is completely dominant. The following table illustrates the role of capital funds in relation to recurrent taken from the 1980 budget.<sup>30</sup>

Table 9: Recurrent and Capital Budget

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<u>Revenue</u>		
<u>Recurrent:</u>	Local	\$26,500,000
	U.K. Grant-in-Aid	<u>500,000</u>
		\$27,000,000
<u>Capital:</u>	Development Loans	
	- Bilateral	16,446,000
	- Multilateral	<u>2,277,000</u>
		18,723,000
<u>Development Loans:</u>		
	- External	8,460,000
	- Local	2,000,000
	- Miscellaneous	<u>18,000</u>
		<u>10,478,000</u>
	<b>Total:</b>	<u><u>\$56,201,000</u></u>

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To spend the large amount of aid for development purposes, would require the Solomon Islands to utilize its scarce skilled and managerial manpower efficiently as well as to rely on expatriate imported skills. The following table points to the extent of dependency on foreign skills.<sup>31</sup> It results in the transfer of a significant portion of monetary incomes to expatriate employees and foreign businesses.



Table 9a

	(\$ million)	
	<u>1974</u>	<u>1977</u>
<u>Wages and Salaries</u>	<u>11.13</u>	<u>17.70</u>
Expatriates	4.59	6.00
Others	6.54	11.70
<u>Operating Surplus</u>	<u>10.72</u>	<u>11.21</u>
Business	6.61	7.70
- Companies	(4.07)	(5.00)
- Others	(2.54)	(2.70)
Government	0.15	0.75
Households	3.96	2.97
Total:	<u>21.85</u>	<u>28.91</u>

From the table, a number of observations are important. In 1977, wages and salaries received by expatriate employees amounted to (SI) \$6 million. In addition, the (SI) \$5 million company surplus went mainly to foreign businesses. Thus, some 38 percent of all wages and profits accrued to foreign employees and companies. In visible day-to-day terms these figures translate as approximately 1,000 expatriates who received about (SI) \$6,000 per capita in contrast to 15,800 Solomon Islanders who received a per capita of (SI) \$740.<sup>32</sup>

The disparity in income between Solomon Islander and expatriate is matched by disparities between rural and urban dwellers. An estimated rural population of 170,000 (1974 figures) received cash incomes totalling (SI) \$6.64 million giving a per capital rural income of (SI) \$40. For the 12,000 Solomon Islanders who resided in

the capital city, Honiara, their per capital works out to approximately (SI) \$320 or eight times that in rural areas.<sup>33</sup>

The provinces struggle to obtain their individual shares of development capital for their own people. Inter-provincial rivalry for resources underlines the proposition that a larger Solomon Island nationalism is still to evolve; regional and ethnic loyalties remain today as powerful political forces in the system.

The final section in this part describes briefly the main features of the Solomon Islands' political system. The Solomon Islands is a constitutional monarchy with a Westminster model parliamentary system of government.<sup>34</sup> A 38-member unicameral national Parliament, elected every four years, is the decision-making center of formal power. A Prime Minister and a 12-member Cabinet is derived from the elected Parliament. A public service exists as the main instrument for policy execution and administration. An independent judiciary adjudicates civil and criminal conflicts. The entire governmental edifice is established on the principles of freedom of speech, religion, movement, etc., embodied in a Bill of Rights in the country's constitution. Theoretically, political accountability by office holders affirms the proposition that the Solomon Islands government is "a government by the people," simply, a democracy.

No system of formal political institutions can survive without the appropriate set of social values and cultural traditions to uphold it.<sup>35</sup> "Political culture" must be congruent with "political structure" to ensure a minimal level of legitimacy and stability to a polity. In the case of the Solomon Islands, serious issues arise regarding the appropriateness of its British-derived constitutional structure for a setting that is characterized by small-scale communities, fragmented by ethnic and linguistic fissures, and driven by inter-regional distrust and fears.<sup>36</sup> A body of common opinions on the formal structure of government had more or less emerged since the late 1960s when parliamentary committees were established to elicit the views of citizens on political and constitutional change.<sup>37</sup> In 1960, a country-wide nominated Legislative Council was established. This was followed in 1964 with the introduction of universal adult suffrage under which a minority segment of the Council was elected by the people. Through a systematic approach by which nominated members were replaced by elected legislators, combined simultaneously by a gradual approach of transferring executive powers to the elected members, over a period of 10 years from 1964 to 1974, a fully elective parliament with a

cabinet-style executive was put in place as the preferred Solomon Islands form of government.<sup>38</sup> The gradual approach of transferring legislative and executive powers to an indigenous leadership had been standardized by British administrators throughout their colonial empire as country after country moved towards independence. The blueprint was applied to the Solomon Islands in its quest for self-determination. On January 2, 1976, the Solomon Islands was granted internal self-government. Full independence followed over two years later on July 7, 1978. At that time, the Solomon Islands became a sovereign state joining the United Nations as its 150th member and the Commonwealth of Nations as its 37th member. The first Prime Minister was Peter Kenilorea from Malaita.

A parliamentary system on the British Westminster model requires political parties as an essential component for its functioning. In the Solomons, the introduction of universal suffrage for national elections and the establishment of an elective legislature provoked the formation of parties.<sup>39</sup> The first efforts in the late 1960s and early 1970s were sporadic and for the most part unsuccessful. Parties were dissolved as quickly as they were formed.<sup>40</sup> Serious problems arose even up to the 1980 general elections about the prospect of a stable party government emerging.<sup>41</sup> Most parliamentarians contested their seat by utilizing their own resources and making their own programmatic appeals. Very few concerted party linkages were organized to bring like-minded candidates together before the elections prior to 1980. Most parliamentarians simply preferred to be independents. In the 1976-1980 period a very uncertain situation existed in Parliament.<sup>42</sup> Three parliamentary groupings could be identified. The group that constituted the government with an appointed Prime Minister and Cabinet Ministers lacked a majority. From legislative bill to legislative bill, the government had to lobby for a majority to pass its bills into national policies. On one notable occasion, the 1978 Appropriations Bill, that is the annual National Budget, was defeated because the government failed to mobilize a majority of members to its support.<sup>43</sup> In parliamentary systems, such a loss as an Appropriations Bill is tantamount to a vote of no confidence. When the Prime Minister of the Solomons in these circumstances offered to resign, no one was willing to come forward and take his place.<sup>44</sup>

When a full party system fails to emerge, another casualty in the parliamentary system is the idea of continuity and accountability in policy.

Citizens are left to ascertain from issue to issue how their Parliamentarians voted, a most difficult civic duty even in developed countries, and rendered doubly difficult in the Solomons partly because of the existence of only one newspaper which is published weekly and only in English.<sup>45</sup> The 1980 elections witnessed the emergence of several strong parties. The new parliament is more structured than before but independents still command the largest bloc of votes.<sup>46</sup> It is too early to predict how much order and programmatic consistency will be maintained in the present setting.

Political leadership in an unintegrated multi-ethnic state such as the Solomon Islands tends to be fragmented. No single leader with towering charisma such as an Nkrumah or a Nyerere has emerged on the Solomon Islands' political landscape. Leadership is very much determined by specific ethnic and religious criteria. A "big man" in Malaita is without similar stature in Santa Isabel. Ethnic suspicions suggest that only a kinsman or wantok can be trusted. This perspective is pivotal to the legitimacy of government. The present Prime Minister comes from Malaita, a province whose people are feared for their aggressiveness and hard work. Fear of "Malaitan domination" is a theme that pervades much of Solomon Islands politics. The Prime Minister prefers to be regarded first and foremost as a Christian instead of a Malaitan. Lacking full recognition, his strategy in government is to recruit leadership associates around him from other provinces. Nevertheless, without a body of shared national consensual values, parliamentary challenges to the Prime Minister in a government format that institutionalizes the role of an Opposition Leader are likely to be popularly interpreted in regional or ethnic terms. The Solomon Islands will continue to face a leadership crisis until a comprehensive party system emerges to accommodate various particularistic interests under broad neutral programmatic manifestos.

In the political field, some mention must also be made of the public service. Like most Third World countries, in the Solomon Islands the public service is the largest employer in the country. It is also the most likely source of leadership; the educated elites seek employment generally with the government. The background of most Cabinet members in particular, and parliamentarians generally, includes a period of service with a branch in the government. The Solomon Islands' public service consumes two-thirds of the recurrent budget. An attempt is made to contain the growth of civil servants to about 5 percent annually. The problem with

the public service is not size so much as the need for skilled personnel to execute the increasing number of development projects undertaken by the government every year. Because most foreign aid is granted to the government for public projects, the public service is under growing pressure to recruit skilled overseas staff to supplement limited local talent. Overseas officers constitute about 10 percent of the service and there is a vacancy rate of 16.3 percent.<sup>47</sup> Private businesses compete vigorously with the government for skilled local staff. Emerging as a general issue related to public servants is the extent of their involvement in formulating policies. Elected political leaders are formally assigned the responsibility of formulating and promulgating policy. However, where public servants command the skills and experience in both policy formation and execution, politicians and cabinet ministers who are generally less educated and experienced tend to give way to the initiatives of senior public servants. In a number of cases, charges have been made that public servants and not politicians run the state. The issue continues to provoke public debate from time to time.

The final area in the Solomon Islands political system that needs comment is local government. This is the subject of the next chapter.

## Footnotes to Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup>For a recent political history of the Solomon Islands, see Francis J. Saemala, Our Independent Solomon Islands (Honiara: Government Printer, 1979). For a lighter narrative overview, see Charles E. Fox, The Story of the Solomons (Sydney: Pacific Publications, 1975). A short informative introduction can be found in Solomon Islands Handbook (Honiara: Solomon Islands Information Service, 1978).

<sup>2</sup>Warren Paia, "Aspects of Constitutional Development in the Solomon Islands," Journal of Pacific History, Volume X (1975), pp. 81-89.

<sup>3</sup>Harold Brookfield, Colonialism, Development and Independence: The Case of the Melanesian Islands in the South Pacific (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

<sup>4</sup>See Solomon Islands National Development Plan 1980-84, Volumes I-III (Honiara: Government Printer, April 1980). Cited hereafter as DP 1980-84.

<sup>5</sup>Guidelines for Foreign Investors in the Solomon Islands (mimeo), Honiara: Visitors' Information Center, 1980.

<sup>6</sup>DP 1980-84, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>7</sup>See Tabano Bobai, "Gilbertese Settlement" in Land in the Solomons, edited by Peter Larmour (Suva: Institute for Pacific Studies, 1978), pp. 131-141.

<sup>8</sup>DP 1980-84, op. cit., p. 6, and The Solomon Islands: An Introductory Economic Report (World Bank Report 2553-501, December 18, 1979), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup>See Peter Corris, Passage, Port, and Plantation: A History of Solomon Islands Migration (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1973).

<sup>10</sup>See Roger Keesing and Peter Corris, Lightning Meets the West Wind: The Malaita Massacre (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1980).

<sup>11</sup>DP 1980-84, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>12</sup>Submission from the Finance Ministry to the Kausimae Committee on Decentralization, mimeo., p. 7.

<sup>13</sup>DP 1980-84, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>14</sup>See Hugh M. Laracy, Marists and Melanesians: A History of the Catholic Missions in the Solomon Islands (Canberra: Australian National University, 1976); David L. Hilliard, Protestant Missions in the Solomon Islands 1849-1942 (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Australian National University, 1966).

- <sup>15</sup>World Bank Report, op. cit., p. 18.
- <sup>16</sup>DP 1980-84, op. cit., p. 19.
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 23.
- <sup>18</sup>See Corris, op. cit.
- <sup>19</sup>DP 1980-84, op. cit., p. 20.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup>World Bank Report, op. cit., p. 31.
- <sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 33.
- <sup>24</sup>DP 1980-84, op. cit., p. 23.
- <sup>25</sup>Submission Finance Ministry—Kausimae Committee, op. cit.
- <sup>26</sup>DP 1980-84, op. cit., p. 23.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup>See, Ian Heath, ed., Land Research in Solomon Islands, Land Research Project Lands Division (Honiara: Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, March 1979).
- <sup>29</sup>South Pacific Agricultural Survey: Pacific Agriculture, Choices and Constraints (Manila: Asian Development Bank, 1979), p. 381.
- <sup>30</sup>Solomon Islands Annual Budget 1980 (Honiara: Government Printery, 1980).
- <sup>31</sup>World Bank Report, op. cit., pp. 11-12.
- <sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 12.
- <sup>33</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup>For a description of the Solomon Islands political institutions, see The Solomon Islands Independence Order 1978 (Honiara: Government Printer, 1978).

<sup>35</sup>Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba, Civic Culture (Boston: Little and Brown, 1966).

<sup>36</sup>For a theoretical discussion, see Cynthia Enloe, Ethnicity and Political Development (Boston: Little and Brown, 1972).

<sup>37</sup>The reports of the major parliamentary committees established to consider constitutional change were in order: Interim Proposals on Constitutional Development, Legislative Council Paper No. 119 of 1968; Report of a Special Select Committee on Constitutional Development, Governing Council Paper No. 89 of 1972; Report of the Constitutional Committee 1975 (March 1976); and Principles for the Solomon Islands Independence Constitution, Legislative Assembly Paper (February 1977).

<sup>38</sup>Saemala, op. cit.

<sup>39</sup>See Ralph R. Premdas and Jeffrey S. Steeves, "The Solomon Islands: First Elections Since Independence," The Journal of Pacific History, XVI, 4 (October 1981), pp. 190-202.

<sup>40</sup>Warren Paia, op. cit.

<sup>41</sup>Premdas and Steeves, op. cit.

<sup>42</sup>Saemala, op. cit.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>The Solomon Islands News Drum is a government weekly newspaper. From time to time various news sheets such as the Solomon Islands Tok Tok has emerged to supplement the supply of weekly news to Solomon Islanders. The News Drum is the only paper that has maintained continuity and reliability in publication.

<sup>46</sup>Premdas and Steeves, op. cit.

<sup>47</sup>World Bank Report, op. cit., p. 44.



## CHAPTER THREE

### THE EARLY EVOLUTION OF LOCAL INITIATIVE

#### Part I: Colonization and Local Initiative

British acquisition of the Solomon Islands in 1893 was not intended to protect or promote the interests of the indigenous people. From the outset, systematic attempts were undertaken to harness their resources to serve colonial interests. The administrative system that was established sought to subjugate Solomon Island communities to imperial direction. The 1927 massacre of an official party that went among tribesmen on Malaita to collect head taxes underscored local resentment against the colonial administration. The head tax was designed to extract resources from the indigenous population to defray the cost of the administrative system utilized to establish official foreign control. In a sense, this early role of imposed administration would cast a dark shadow of suspicion on subsequent reforms of local government however innovative or well intended they were.

When the British government took formal measures to colonize the Solomon Islands in 1893, about forty years of "blackbirding" had already been experienced by the indigenous population.<sup>1</sup> "Blackbirding" was the recruitment of villagers for rugged plantation work in Queensland, Fiji and Samoa. While most laborers were voluntarily recruited, among both the voluntary and involuntary recruits, injustice and exploitation on the plantations were common experiences. Numerous villages, then, had developed negative images of persons who were collectively called "Europeans."

Another major factor that would make European penetration problematic would stem from the linguistic and social structure of the Melanesian communities in the Solomon Islands.<sup>2</sup> By 1900, no "pidgin" had yet evolved to link linguistically the indigenous population. Neither was there a dominant local language. Languages were many numbering about seventy-four. Solomon Island communities were spread over a vast area on the many islands, without a common unifying language, rendering the establishment of an integrated administration a formidable and frustrating task. Moreover, the language diversity problem would be compounded by the nature of Melanesian social organization. A typical indigenous

community was a small scale unit containing about 50 to 300 persons. There were probably as many as 4,000 to 5,000 such communities. Each was relatively self-sufficient economically and lacked a hierarchy of leadership that structured community decision-making in a readily visible form. "Big men" were persons who acquired their stature by merit and performance.<sup>3</sup> They rarely possessed coercive powers. Community decision making was a collective affair that led to decisions by consensus after prolonged village meetings. Separated by parcels of island territory, truncated by language diversity, and living in thousands of small-scale self-contained communities, Solomon Islanders would present an extremely difficult task of colonization to the British administrators.

By themselves, the characteristic features of Solomon Island society would be hard to overcome. But the British colonizers would complicate their goal of establishing administrative control by bringing to bear irrelevant forms of government they had acquired from other parts of their worldwide empire. In Africa, they employed variants of "indirect rule" in social systems that were for the most part well structured and led by distinguishable leaders. In the Solomon Islands, however, "big men" were not the same as African chiefs. One observer commented on these difficulties:

Imbued with the theory of indirect rule, the British colonizers tend to give areas of authority greater importance than in fact they warranted. Local leadership, or what appeared to be local leadership, was supported in the belief that it was hallowed and confirmed by tradition and could be built up into native administrations forming the rationale for the introduction of a Native Authority system on the African model.<sup>4</sup>

The establishment of indirect rule through a system of "native administration" in the Solomon Islands was implemented by an attempt to identify and recruit what was arbitrarily and often erroneously deemed to be local leadership by British district officers.<sup>5</sup> The recruited local "big man" was assigned the pivotal role of linking the will of the external ruler with the responses of the indigenous people. Apart from the problem of readily identifying the "big man," the British assumed that if the "big man" could be coopted or coerced to their purpose, he would be sufficiently powerful to compel compliance among villagers. In fact, this was not the case; villagers, although small, may have several "big men," each of whom would command some "influence" and rarely exercised very extensive powers beyond their own village or clan.

When the search for a leader was undertaken, it tended to yield a person who could speak some English or Pidgin. In most cases, as it turned out, these persons would be ex-laborers who had served on plantations in Queensland, Australia. They may or may not have been legitimate community leaders; they were chosen because they were able to communicate with the district officers.<sup>6</sup> As a consequence, many of the persons who were recruited to serve as intermediaries between the village and the new external administration lacked standing in their communities:

In the early days the use of local agents was pivotal to the promotion of government and exploration of the islands. Faced with a plethora of local dialects, the British, unable to communicate directly with the people, appointed as headmen those with whom they could communicate regardless of their standing in the local community.<sup>7</sup>

Another important problem that the British administrators would encounter related to community size. Solomon Islanders traditionally lived in very small scale communities in which they practiced a form of face-to-face democracy. Their social structure was essentially egalitarian. Beyond their village, the Solomon Islander rarely trusted anyone else unless a kinsman. The British however, short of skilled manpower, sought to establish larger scale administrative district and sub-district units encompassing several distinct linguistic groups.

Until World War II, the system of appointed "headmen" and "indirect rule" underwent little modification.<sup>8</sup> A centralized administrative machinery was gradually established around clusters of villages. The main accomplishment was the termination of inter-tribal warfare. In turn, pacification paved the way for the spread of European plantations and missionary activities.

At no time did the new imposed administration penetrate to the point of displacing local customs. In a real sense, two levels of government operated simultaneously in the Solomons. First, the informal village-based traditional decision-making practices continued to operate but not without interruption or modification. Indeed, over time, traditional democracy would be significantly eroded by the new economic and social forces that were implanted in Solomon Islands society. New criteria for status were emerging as cash cropping spread throughout the country. Migration to plantations also would weaken traditional obligations among young laborers to their villages. The impact would modify the modes of decision making and conflict resolution at the village level, not eradicate

or completely supplant them. At another level, and developing greater authority, was the colonial administration. The British were learning from their earlier mistakes; they were searching in the 1930s for greater congruence between their imposed administrative structure and the traditional values and motivations of Solomon Island society. If village practices and colonial administrative values could be made to coincide to serve imperial interests, it would be ideal.

An important watershed in thinking occurred after the murder of a British district commissioner in Malaita in 1927.<sup>9</sup> In company of a large party of officials and police, the commissioner sought to enforce the collection of taxes. A Native Tax Regulation promulgated in the early 1920s levied a head tax on all males between the age of 16 and 60. The district commissioner and his party were ambushed with many casualties suffered including the loss of the life of the District Commissioner himself. A subsequent commission of inquiry declared that one major cause of the incident was that "headmen had been appointed precipitately and in most cases, they were unacceptable to the people."<sup>10</sup> The Moorhouse Report on the incident recommended that traditional values be incorporated in the operations of the district administration.<sup>11</sup> In turn, this report influenced the formulation of a new policy that actively sought to identify and recruit local big men and chiefs who commanded influence among villagers. Since the task of district administrators involved not only tax collection, but dispute settlement, capitalizing on the judicial role of big men would more than likely impart greater respect for the district administration imposed by the British.

Clearly, the form of government adopted by the British administrators faced severe challenges. By the 1930s, the district machinery had failed to incorporate traditional styles of government in its practices. It took the death of a district commissioner to alert the alien rulers that local attitudes to their government were for the most part negative. In 1939, a distinguished anthropologist, Ian Hogbin, in commenting on the need for effectiveness in district administration in the Solomon Islands further underscored the need "to return to the solid foundations of the past."<sup>12</sup> The overall impact was the first initiative at the sub-district level to establish informal assemblies of local leaders to participate in both tax collection and revenue allocation. This experiment in local initiative was extended in the early 1940s to the area of community conflict settlement. Under a New Natives Court Regulation promulgated in 1942, a system of native courts throughout the Solomons was constituted from local headmen and elders.<sup>13</sup> The native court system survived until 1960 progressively extending its jurisdiction from village

disputes to criminal matters. However, like the district administration, the court system was still substantially an externally imposed institution. Beneath the veneer of the formal administrative structures, the Solomon Islander would surreptitiously continue practicing collective village decision making and adjudicating disputes by his ancient traditional values and practices.

Forty years of colonial administration starting at the beginning of the century and culminating with the inception of World War II, witnessed the establishment of a centralized system of district government in the Solomon Islands protectorate. No pretense was made that its initial purpose was to institute a regime responsive to alien directives. The administrative machinery was the device to implement alien dominance over indigenous society. Towards the end of the 1930s, new policies were tentatively undertaken to permit a meaningful role for local initiative in determining revenue and expenditure in local government operations. If genuine local leaders could be tapped to fulfill this purpose, then a new era of local government effectiveness would be inaugurated. But until the 1930s, the record remained one of "indirect rule" that continued the condition of foreign domination and indigenous alienation.

## Part II: World War II: Its Impact on Local Initiative

Perhaps the most revolutionary event in the development of local initiative in the conduct of grassroots Solomon Islander affairs followed from the impact of World War II. The Solomon Islands became a massive battle ground in which allied troops, preponderantly American soldiers, fought against large numbers of Japanese forces. During the military operations at Guadalcanal and Tulagi, Solomon Islanders were recruited to serve in a separate labor corps. Contact between Solomon Islanders and Americans shattered the old structure of colonial relationships that were maintained between the black indigenous populations and the European colonizers. Roger Keesing summed up the effects as follows:

In all this, Malaitans encountered not only staggering quantities of American hardware, but the irreverent egalitarianism of the Americans, their wealth, and their generosity with government-issue rations and equipment. The ex-colonial officers who commanded the Labor Corps faced difficulties in trying to maintain status and prestige on behalf of a British establishment that had crumbled in the face of Japanese invasion

and been humbled by massive American power and successful liberation. They did their best to preserve a heavy-handed control in the racist pre-war colonial style and to prevent the "natives" from getting "uppity" in the face of American largesse and egalitarianism. Their confiscation of goods the Labour Corps men had accumulated and attempts to preserve pre-war style segregation and subordination only heightened resentment among the Malaitans and anti-colonialist sentiment among American military personnel.<sup>14</sup>

The seeds of defiance against the European colonial administration were sown among Solomon Islanders in the war. Not only was the plentitude of American goods admired, but values of equality were imparted. Although black American soldiers were segregated in the U.S. Army, they were treated "vastly better than the treatment Solomon Islanders had received from planters and government."<sup>15</sup> The general idea imparted to the Solomon Islanders was that through organized and collective effort, they might be able to wrest from the British in the post-war period better conditions of survival at all levels.

The post-war period would witness the emergence of a collective movement among Solomon Islanders called "Maasina Rule."<sup>16</sup> The movement which was mainly developed on the large populous island of Malaita would embody a fundamental challenge to the entire system of imposed government that preceded the war. It would forge unprecedented links between the diverse indigenous communities on Malaita establishing an island-wide government with a hierarchical system of chiefs at district, sub-district, and village levels was constructed within a year. Malaitans temporarily submerged their parochial interests and inter-community differences to develop an entirely new social organization completely staffed, led and directed by indigenous people.<sup>18</sup> Mass mobilization of effort was directed at undertaking collective economic projects. This was engrafted on traditional communalistic values so as to exploit the familiar form of traditional village organization as well as to impart legitimacy simultaneously to it.<sup>19</sup>

Together, "Maasina Rule" meaning "Rule of Brotherhood" established an indigenous political and social organization paralleling that of the District Administration constructed by the European administrators after the war. "Maasina Rule" was a novel and unprecedented indigenous government that established its own hierarchy of councils from the district to village level. At the

pinnacle of the structure was a "Federal Council." To succeed the movement needed its own resources to carry out its self-assigned functions of economic development. It, therefore, refused to permit its followers to pay the local government head tax. It collected its own taxes from its adherents to sponsor its activities.<sup>20</sup>

"Maasina Rule" effectively capitalized on the new ideas generated by the war and transformed a compliant people into a rebellious movement seeking the power to control their own affairs. "Maasina Rule" was both a collective act of protest against alien rule in the pre-war period as well as a set of anticipatory revolutionary values reflecting the needs of indigenous Solomon Islanders. It was initiated immediately after the war and persisted until 1950. Although suppressed eventually, it would leave in its wake a variety of lessons that would transform the structure of local administration radically.

The British government did not dismantle their own local administration when confronted with the alternative structure established by Maasina Rule. Posing a threat to continued British control of the Solomons, "Maasina Rule" was suppressed by the colonial power. Large-scale arrests of its leaders as well as internal divisions in the movement led to its dismantling as a viable unified organization in the early 1950s. From the movement's achievements especially in relation to the scale of its organization and indigenous leadership and motifs, a new attempt would be made by the British to establish local councils to win support of the ordinary villager as well as to perform effectively.

In 1953 a new Native Administration Regulation was passed. Under a system of direct administration, each district was allocated its own council. This happened first on Malaita, where a new all-island Malaita Council was created to supplant the Maasina Rule's "Federal Council." "Maasina Rule" had demonstrated the effectiveness of larger viable units of administration built on traditional communalistic values. These ideas were incorporated in the 1953 legislation. Campbell noted that "the new councils in fact provided a successful and useful forum for breaking down clan barriers and readily accept wider responsibilities."<sup>21</sup> In turn, "this jump forward made possible by the unifying forces on Maasina Rule laid the foundation for an effective form of political decentralization."<sup>22</sup> The important point was to design a form of local government that would, at once, be larger in scale than the typical small communities in which the people lived to permit

viability and yet to be intimate enough to impart trust to groups that had habitually distrusted and fought each other. In effect, centralization of administration could occur for certain purposes while decentralization of other aspects may be required for others. Previous colonial administrative units were not able to fulfill both objectives simultaneously. "Maasina Rule" successfully incorporated both principles of centralized and decentralized administration. Bringing government closer to the people in a setting marked by social and cultural fragmentation would bedevil the ongoing experiment to find appropriate local government structures for the Solomon Islands.

The period 1953-1963 constitutes a watershed in the evolution of local initiative in the Solomon Islands. "Maasina Rule" was effectively suppressed but an implicit set of expectations were imparted that indigenous interests would find accommodation in the new administrative structures that were to be established under the 1953 native administration regulation. A period of intense activity followed, witnessed by the spread and consolidation of district administration, local councils, and native courts in the country. New executive functions were allocated to the councils as well as revenue creating powers. However, when all of these developments were accounted for, one salient fact remained as a major aberration in the evolution of local initiative in this period. It is that a system of Native Administration prevailed under which the elective principle was denied. Members of the various local councils were appointed by the High Commissioner from among "natives of good standing."

Changes in the operations of the councils were nevertheless imperative between 1953 and 1963. Twenty-four local councils were established throughout the Protectorate. They varied in size from the largest, Malaita Council, responsible for 50,000 people with a revenue of £17,000 to Duffs Council covering 150 people with an annual revenue of £13,000. In 1962, it grew to £60,000, that is over four-and-a-half times the 1955 figure. Similarly, expenditure in 1955 was £34,400; this grew to £59,400 in 1962. Practically, all the revenues were derived from native tax. In 1962, of the total of £60,000 total revenues, £52,700 or 87 percent came from taxes paid by Solomon Islanders. Yet, in this picture, the people who paid the taxes were not permitted to elect their own representatives to the councils which controlled the disposal of the funds collected. It was estimated in 1955 that 65 percent of the revenues was spent on servicing the administration of the councils in such areas as payment of salaries and wages of staff and village



chiefs.<sup>24</sup> Only 27 percent was left for social services, medical care, and education. In 1962, the heavy allocation of revenues for salaries and other administrative costs had dropped to 34 percent. With more funds then available for other services, many councils were engaged in identifying projects such as road construction, transport services, wharves, and water supplies.

The increase in the council budgets and activities underscored the proposition that a change in local initiative in the direction of democratic government was required. Not only were councillors appointed and paid without the benefit of a direct mass base of village opinion, but the central government retained the power to approve all council budgets, by-laws, and other council items. These crucial problems apart, the growth in council activities threw up other difficulties. The line of difference in responsibilities and functions between the central government and local councils was blurred which caused confusion. Similarly, the alternating role of headmen as councillors and native court appointees lent itself to confusion in roles and abuse.<sup>25</sup> Finally, councils which wanted to enter into other fields of economic development discovered severe limitations in their permitted bases of tax levy as well as in recruitment of skilled staff.

These developments taken together suggested that drastic changes in local administration were called for. To add to the accumulating pressures from below, new developments in institutions of the central government were emerging from above. In 1960, an appointed Legislative Council for the entire protectorate was established incorporating both official and non-official members to advise the High Commissioner on colony-wide issues. The first meaningful element in a system of gradual constitutional change pointing to self-government was not installed. The upshot at the local level was a government White Paper in 1962 titled "The Respective Functions of Local Councils and Central Government."<sup>26</sup> This paper was the prelude to the introduction during the following year of the landmark legislation under which a local government ordinance was inaugurated. If self-determination was the long-term objective, local government would serve as a preparatory school to this end.

The 1963 local government ordinance established councils that were wholly elected. It also contained adequate provisions to accommodate various sizes of councils. The legislation itself was borrowed and adapted from the Ghana Local Government Ordinance. It provided for wide-ranging functions to be undertaken by

councils if they wished. The Act contained enough plasticity to permit councils to adapt to a range of functions that it wanted to undertake. In 1964, a re-organization of councils occurred under the 1963 ordinance. Seventeen new councils were formed to supercede the previous arrangements. Much publicity attended the new initiatives in local governments.

### Part III: Performance Under the 1963 Local Government Act: 1963-1973

The 1963 Act inaugurated a period of great optimism for the role of local indigenous opinion in the activities and policies of the councils. Mainly this was because the elective principle determined the composition of the councils. When the implementation exercise was over, there were 18 local councils which were all rural bodies except for the Honiara Town Council. Every part of the Solomon Islands fell under the jurisdiction of a rural council, apart from the two remote islands of Tikopia and Anuta. The council areas in turn were sub-divided into wards so that elections could be conducted on an area basis. Initially, between 1964 and 1968, election turnout for ward elements was at an impressive 79 percent of voters. Later, when the novelty of the ward system wore off and some disappointment in council performance became publicly evident, the electoral turnout was reduced to about 55 percent which was comparable to turnout for national electoral posts.<sup>27</sup>

Below the council unit which for the most part covered wide areas was another tier of local government called area committees. Where they were established, they were the unit of government closest to the people, built essentially on the principle of a separate committee for a separate village, ethnic or clan group. What affinity to local sentiment the councils failed to achieve because of their incorporation of a multiplicity of discrete language and clan groups in their jurisdiction, the area committees in theory were to compensate for by their direct accommodation of village or clan interests. Further, area committees were composed of local leaders and chiefs who would conduct their meetings and decision making on familiar traditional patterns. Because of these characteristics of area committees, if they became even moderately operational, they could provide a vibrant link between council activities and grassroots village opinion. While area committees were a tier of relatively informal government below the level of councils, district administration under central government control was the tier immediately above the council. The function of the district administration was to assist and supervise the councils.

Over the ten-year period, the new councils showed some important achievements. About 75 clinics and 34 registered schools were constructed to meet village needs for health services and education. A total of 120 nurses, half employed by the councils and the other half by the central government, staffed the clinics and hospitals. In the area of education, the councils assumed responsibility for about 10 percent of the instructional process at the primary level. In the area of infrastructure, about 150 water supply units were established and some roads were built. About 700 to 800 people found employment with the councils receiving salaries and wages that were infused in the local economy.<sup>28</sup> Finally, the head tax levy on adults stimulated villages to enter cash cropping. While revenues were received from the levy directly from the people, the central government matched the taxes collected by a similar grant contribution. Together, these activities played a role in stimulating the local economy. It was estimated that the levies and disbursements accounted for the production of \$120,000 of copra annually and about \$300,000 of salaries and wages.<sup>29</sup>

After the accomplishments are tallied, the question that arises is: Why did the central colonial government in the early 1970s come under very severe pressure to reform the entire local government structure? The 1963 Local Government Act appeared to have met the rising demands that were generated from the 1940s and 1950s for fundamental changes in rural representation. The 1953 Native Administration Regulation attempted to expand the scope of the unit governments as well as incorporate the bona fide village big men in council decision making. The 1962 reforms scrapped the nominated system and replaced it by elective bodies reinforced by a system of village-based area committees that tapped into traditional leadership structures. It would appear that all basic demands had been met by appropriate responses. A comprehensive network of councils had been introduced throughout the Solomons.

At least two sets of interlocking factors would emerge to qualify the success of the 1963 derived local government system. Together, they would highlight the evolutionary nature of colonial administration as well as attest to the awakening of the Solomon Islands people for "more development." First, constitutional changes initiated at the protectorate-level in 1960 accelerated dramatically by 1970 when a full ministerial system in a Governing Council was instituted. The nominated members of the legislative council were being phased out as general elections under universal adult suffrage provided the principal means for the establishment of

representative democracy. The explosive growth of elective office at the national level in anticipation of impending self-government stimulated re-examination of the local government structures in relation to the tasks of development. It was abundantly clear, as the 1972 constitutional development committee indicated in its recommendations, that in any scheme for further devolution of economic and political responsibility to the peoples of the Solomon Islands, a substantial measure of burden would inevitably fall on local council structures. The solution was to expand the role of the councils to enable them to become a crucial partner in the ongoing experiment in democracy and development. The second factor that would be identified as a cause for further local government reform may be termed "internal" and "pragmatic." This refers to the nuts and bolts of local administration, to the daily problems of making a very unfamiliar and alien organization develop vitality in the countryside. These factors would severely temper any frenzied rush in sentiment that would suggest that development would be easy. They would point to severe constraints on implementation. We shall look briefly at the 1963-1973 period in the local government experiment to isolate and examine the pragmatic difficulties that were thrown up.

First, let us look at council organization. The councils were bodies that operated on Western procedures using a system of committees and subcommittees, standing and ad hoc. The procedures that were intended to facilitate participation in decision making would become too complex for local leadership to understand and fully manipulate. To add to this problem, councils tended to meet only two or three times a year. The single council item that evoked much interest and deliberation among councillors related to personal allowances for travel and attendance. Inevitably, these practices led to regular intervention by district administration functionaries from the central government. Abuses in the use of funds were frequent. The tier of government below the council, that is, area committees, which were supposed to link a large remote council to the specific needs of individual villages and communities displayed sporadic activity. Both the councils and area committees suffered from problems of leadership recruitment since their tasks in relation to rewards did not attract the most able people. Where a council assignment promised reward in the form of sitting and travelling allowances, it had its attractiveness. But this was a cynical form of political participation. The aim of local councils would suffer from the narrow instrumental view espoused by villagers and leaders alike that the council was as good as it was

useful in providing benefits without corresponding service. The point was that the council remained still an alien institution introduced by the colonial administration. As such, it was viewed not only cynically, but with a widespread attitude, reinforced by the presence of a district commissioner system, that its value was only appreciated to the extent that it provided services. The idea of responsibility was difficult to implant in village communities which still viewed their loyalty and interest in very parochial and intimate terms.

This leads us to the second factor related to council finances. Local sources of revenue primarily from head tax or "basic rate" contributed a very small part of total expenditures of council activities. Grants and subsidies by the central government constitute over 50 percent of total local council revenues by 1973. From 1965 to 1973, these in fact increased from \$26,000 to \$463,000.<sup>30</sup> Most central government allocations were assigned to capital projects which in practice were in the area of social services thereby providing few revenues in return except on an indirect and long-term basis. The critical point from these observations about the source of council revenues is that they render the local democratic institutions highly dependent on the central government for both their recurrent and capital budget. While a weak rural economic base pointing to few available cash income opportunities goes a long way in explaining this dependency, it is inevitable that the deepening of this dependent condition over the years would destroy local pride, initiative, and responsibility. It is posited here that the local councils as alien institutions with intricate and esoteric internal procedural processes lose their legitimacy as indigenous bodies because of their overwhelming dependency on the central government for survival. Close supervision and assistance by the district administration as an overlord invariably accompanies, as it did in the Solomon Islands, the dependency on the colonial administration. A mentality of dependency, in this opinion, had evolved through the colonial period and it found most extensive and expansive expression in the operations of the council system that was engrafted in the rural areas.

The utilization of the externally derived funds by the councils presented its own hurdles. Implementation of projects required trained staff; responsible use of funds entailed the availability of accountants. Both were in short supply. While pride may be lost by deriving revenues from central government sources, daily confidence by ordinary villagers is eroded when projects and services falter because

of lack of skilled manpower. Yet, this was substantially the record that was bequeathed by the experiment between 1963-73. A report on the staff situation commented: "The most widely heard and valid observation about local councils is that their administrative and financial management is weak."<sup>31</sup> On internal management of the councils, the report elaborated:

In most councils, concepts of simple management and supervision techniques are absent. Works [division] is unprogrammed, staff discipline vague, financial controls hit-or-miss and office organization and records are chaotic.<sup>32</sup>

Records have been described as "dusty and rat-catch" while council offices "frequently look as if funds ran out before the building was quite finished and have never been sufficient for maintenance."<sup>33</sup>

Overall, the 1963-73 period in local initiative made a bold start in badly needed reforms to accommodate rapid social, economic, and constitutional changes. The legitimacy of councils was still unanchored in local tradition. Performance had the potential of winning acceptance and spreading overall legitimacy. The record in this regard is clearly mixed. Some accomplishments could be seen and even enumerated. But it appeared that full realization of the promise of the 1963 local government act encountered constraints of an historical, environmental and cultural nature. The implementation process will be discussed at length later. Suffice it to underscore the conclusion of a report on this period that said: "Local government in 1973 has itself the appearance of a half-baked project. Some parts are well advanced, some have never gotten started and some were started but the foreman seems to have lost interest or lost the plans."<sup>34</sup> With new challenges awaiting it in the 1970s, the local government system instituted in 1963 would undergo yet another phase of drastic re-examination and revision.

### Footnotes to Chapter Three

<sup>1</sup>See Peter Corris, Passage, Port, and Plantation: A History of Solomon Islands Labor Migration (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1973); also, J. M. Ward, British Policy in the South Pacific 1786-1893 (Sydney, 1948).

<sup>2</sup>R. H. Codrington, The Melanesians (Oxford, 1891).

<sup>3</sup>G. Cochrane, Big Men and Cargo Cults (Oxford, 1970); A. Strathern, The Rope of Moka (Cambridge, 1974).

<sup>4</sup>M. J. Campbell, The Development of a New Local Government Image in the British Solomons, Seminar Paper, University of Papua New Guinea, Nov. 1974, mimeo, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>See A. M. Healy, "Administration in the British Solomon Islands," Journal of Administration Overseas, July, 1966, pp. 195-197; also, W. G. Ivens, The Island Builders of the Pacific (London, 1930), p. 86.

<sup>6</sup>Campbell, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>8</sup>Ian Wotherspoon, An Outline History of Local Government in the Solomon Islands, mimeo, background submission paper number 8 to the Kausimae Committee, pp. 1-3.

<sup>9</sup>See Roger Keesing and Peter Corris, Lightning Meets the West Wind (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1980).

<sup>10</sup>Campbell, op. cit., p. 3. See Moorehouse Report, Cmd. 3248, Jan. 1929.

<sup>11</sup>Moorehouse Report, op. cit.

<sup>12</sup>H. I. Hogbin, Experiments in Civilization (London, 1939), pp. 142-6.

<sup>13</sup>Healy, op. cit., p. 199.

<sup>14</sup>Roger Keesing, "Politico-Religious Movements and Anti-Colonialism on Malaita: Maasina Rule in Historical Perspective," Oceania, September, 1978, Part II, p. 48.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>16</sup>See C. S. Belshaw, "Native Politics in the Solomon Islands," Pacific Affairs, XX, 1947; C. H. Allen, The Marching Rule Movement in the B.S.I.P., unpublished thesis, Cambridge University, 1950.

<sup>17</sup>Keesing, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Campbell, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>B.S.I.P. Hansard, Second Session, Second meeting, 1962, p. 32.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Wotherspoon, op. cit., pp. 1-2.

<sup>26</sup>White Paper: The Respective Functions of Local Councils and Central Government (Honiara: Government Printery, 1962).

<sup>27</sup>See Plan of Operations (Honiara: Government Printery, October, 1973), p. 10.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 18.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### EVOLUTION OF DECENTRALIZATION IN THE 1970s

The 1970s witnessed an escalation in the evolution of the decentralization process accompanied by the transformation of the Solomon Islands from colonial dependency to independent South Pacific nation. The period opened with a continuation of the colonial pattern; reform proceeded incrementally mainly by administrative adjustments. But grumblings of discontent were beginning to gather ominous proportions.

From 1971 onwards, pressures for local government reform would be instigated at both the parliamentary and grassroots levels. Government response would be marked by the establishment of several successive committees and the issuing of reports recommending changes.

Several major documentary events marked out this process:

- (1) Report of a Special Select Committee on Constitutional Development (November 1972).
- (2) Suggested Reforms to the Existing Local Government Structure in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, Preliminary Report, M. J. Campbell (March 1973).
- (3) The Development of Local Government, Plan of Operations 1974-77 (October 1973).
- (4) The Development of Local Government Policy Statement (November 1973).
- (5) Report of the Constitutional Committee 1975 (March 1976).
- (6) Constitutional Conference 1977 Principles (March 1977).
- (7) Report of the Solomon Islands Constitutional Conference (September 1977).
- (8) Creation of the Special Committee on Provincial Government in December 1977 chaired by David Kausimae.
- (9) Report of the Kausimae Committee 1979.
- (10) Government white paper on the Kausimae Committee Report on Decentralization, 1980.

By any standard, this must be regarded as an impressive list of reports. At least at two junctures, in 1974 when the Local Government Plan of Operations was adopted and in 1977 when the Kausimae parliamentary committee on decentralization toured the country convening village meetings to elicit views on decentralization, the role of local initiative in development became a dominant national concern. Steady political steps towards self-government and independence partly triggered this preoccupation. The issues of decolonization and local grassroots democracy had become enmeshed. The stakes were high with a silent political struggle between various interests seeking to influence the role decentralization would play in the emerging new order. The independence constitution would embody the distribution of power among the political and administrative actors in the government. The final constitutional formula would substantially influence the relative access to resources and institutional legitimacy of the competing political groups. Hence, underlying the multiple impulses towards local democracy were political calculations by power competitors about whose interests should be served by the rearrangements in the formal relationship between the center and the periphery.

The British administrators, seemingly standing above the local jockeying for power, had a key interest in the way matters were resolved. Their major concerns were to maintain national unity and to ensure that their successors were loyalists. A number of local political groups aligned themselves to and were supported by the British position. To some extent, the devolution of extensive powers from the central government to subordinate local units posed a potential threat to the coherent formulation of national policy and to the effective implementation of programs. Besides, strong semi-autonomous subordinate government units, especially where they were co-terminous with discrete ethnic or regional groups, could capitalize on decentralization to promote secession. What fed British fears about the potential of devolution to invite separatism or open defiance of the central government's authority was the source of the most intense demands for decentralization. Politicians who were associated with populist and semi-socialist ideals and who also tended to be most critical of the impact of colonialism in the Solomon Islands were the most vocal advocates of devolving extensive political and administrative powers to the grassroots.

The movement towards local government reform, then, was not strictly a technical administrative issue. The contest had crystallized for the most part

between two polar groups during the period of the Kausimae parliamentary inquiry (1977-80). The Kenilorea-led government (1976-81) was associated more with the "centralist" position while most of the opposition favored extensive devolution. If the Kenilorea government was Christian and pro-capitalist, the opposition elements were quasi-socialists who menaced the government with a "proletarian" program advocating "power to the people." In reality, no such strong programmatic difference separated the parties in and out of power. However, the parties were clearly separated over their respective positions on decentralization. To the opposition groups represented by Bart Ulu'faalu and Solomon Mamaloni, power denied them at the center could conceivably be obtained at the periphery. To the group in government represented by Prime Minister Peter Kenilorea (1975-81), maintaining power was equated with preserving central control over the affairs of state. The momentum towards decentralization received half-hearted support from the outgoing colonial administration and its local sympathizers who had succeeded to power. Despite the ethnically diverse and geographically disparate nature of the Solomon Islands, the critical and dominant determinant of the manner in which decentralization was perceived and introduced by those who governed rested with the colonial reality of hegemony from Honiara.

The issue of inter-governmental relations was postured as a revision in local government, not fundamental alterations in the balance of power between center and periphery. The underlying assumption was that the Solomon Islands was and would continue to be a unitary system of government.<sup>1</sup> Under Kenilorea the regime's policy makers—political and administrative—seemed to agree on the need for a tame and toothless form of devolution to meet the ethno-geographic reality of the country; they felt threatened and were very cautious about the possible adverse political and social implications of decentralization. Devolution should not undermine the role and place of central authority.

Given the absence of a strong assertive nationalist leadership challenging colonial rule, combined with weakly disciplined political parties and the reality of bureaucratic dominance, the discussion and elaboration of decentralization seemed non-ideological in character.<sup>2</sup> The central government attempted to cast debate between dissenters and advocates as a consensual process at a highly general level. To those who governed, it was overtly conceded that decentralization was good and necessary, but the details should safely be left to specialists and the central administration to work out in practice. The mood and tone were paternalistic: the

pace and direction, essentially bureaucratic. The strategy of the British trained administrators was to coopt the rhetoric of decentralization but in practice to implement if not as a political revolution but as an administrative exercise that retained the essential features of the centralist state.

The one feature of a dissonant quality was cast by the shadow and demands of the people of the West for greater powers and a co-equal status with the central government.<sup>3</sup> The potential of secession was held out as an alternative if their demands were not met. In this instance, the central administration was not in complete control over the process of decentralization. Rather, a degree of initiative had passed to another arena, distant from Honiara and potentially threatening to central perceptions and plans. For the first time, the central adjustment which took place was reactive in nature. This required a new strategic response, one which had to gauge the level of discord, anticipate possible points of difference which in retrospect seemed to alternate the severity and stridency of the Western challenge. But the Western case takes us too far ahead of our analysis. Our attention in this chapter will focus on the political and administrative changes that transpired in the first half of the 1970s, culminating in the appointment of the history-making Special Committee on Provincial Government in 1977. A separate chapter is devoted to this report. But setting the stage were earlier events which we must examine. These include: The Report of the Select Committee on Constitutional Development; The Campbell report; the 1974-77 Plan of Operations, the 1975 draft of the Independence Constitution and the Independence negotiations. These marked a subtle but important change in the perception and seriousness of a devolution commitment. A Plan of Operations was adopted to re-design local government. Drawing upon the Campbell report, the Plan of Operations recast the number of local government units, identified in specific terms the functions which could usefully and realistically be transferred to the revised units of local government and scheduled a timetable for the introduction of the reforms.<sup>4</sup> The 1975 draft constitution and the Independence negotiations affirmed the commitment of the Solomon Islands government to the principle of decentralization. References began to appear to "decentralization" in place of local government reform and to "provincial" as against "local" levels of government. However, and this is the crucial point, the momentum for change and the nature of the decentralization concept remained under the control of the central bureaucracy and senior public servants.

a) Report of the Select Committee on Constitutional Development, 1972

At the beginning of the 1970s, the British Solomon Islands Protectorate underwent a major change at the national government level. The legislative body of the 1960s—the Legislative Council—was transformed into a Governing Council in 1970 which merged executive and legislative power into one institutional setting. This Council was structured into standing committees which were chaired by elected members and had responsibility for overseeing departmental portfolios by subject areas. The merger of the Executive Council and Legislative Council into a Governing Council whose members were predominantly elected Solomon Islanders and the creation of standing committees to oversee departmental affairs marked an important movement towards a ministerial system of government and parliamentary supremacy.<sup>5</sup>

In 1971, the Governing Council decided to establish a Special Select Committee on Constitutional Development with a broad mandate,

To consider the next steps in the Constitutional development of the British Solomon Islands and, having regard to the economic, social and political situation, to submit such proposals for the amendment or replacement of the British Solomon Islands Order 1970 as it may consider desirable and appropriate.<sup>6</sup>

The Special Select Committee was a misnomer for in fact all the members of the Governing Council were members of the Committee which was chaired by the Chief Secretary.

In general political terms, the Special Select Committee recommended a further advance in constitutional development to proceed to internal self-government.<sup>7</sup> With respect to local government reform, however, the Special Select Committee was far more cautious. Neither the term "decentralization" nor any expressed commitment to the principle of decentralization appeared in the Report. Rather, the Committee adopted a clearly traditional colonial approach to the conceptualization of the issue: the key question was how to improve, ". . . the organization and quality of local government administration in the Protectorate,"<sup>8</sup> not to alter and strengthen the relationship between central and local government. Increasingly, the Committee did not feel competent to venture any substantive changes in the existing structuring of power. That time would have to await the recruitment and report of an expert whose services the Government agreed to seek in April 1972.

The traditional colonial approach can be seen at several major points in the Report. In an overview of the social background of the Solomon Islands, local government was cast as a "foreign institution" which, in association with other elements, had ". . . substantially weakened traditional social systems and traditional patterns of leadership."<sup>9</sup> The most salient and disturbing trend in recent Solomon Islands history was the decline of traditional authority and the rise of a new non-traditional leadership which wanted to move too quickly to assume leadership positions in a country which lacked a national identity.<sup>10</sup> This perspective paralleled that of other colonial experiences where colonial administrators lamented the erosion of traditional leadership and sought means to retard the decline. In part, the revival of traditional leaders was felt by the Committee to be instrumental to other goals, to overcome, for example, land problems and to foster economic development in rural society. More obvious, however, was the expressed desire to find some means of associating such leadership within a more general political framework. The Committee considered the creation of a Council of Elders at the national level to act as a consultative body which could be utilized by Ministers and the Legislative Assembly, "particularly on matters affecting custom and the quality of Melanesian life."<sup>11</sup> However, a number of major disadvantages of such an arrangement mitigated against its implementation. Fundamentally, the proposal ran counter to the more modern and democratic Solomon Islands that the elected members desired to create.

**The focus for a consideration of the place and role of traditional authority** moved quickly to the local government level. It was here that chiefs could participate legitimately and make a real contribution, although the latter remained vague and unspecified. Although the underlying rationale for the argument that traditional authority be given a place in governmental affairs would change over time as well as the fact that the degree of concern was at its highest under this Committee, the place of traditional leadership would be a recurring theme in future discussions about decentralization and local government.

With respect to center-periphery relations, the Special Select Committee advanced a number of suggestions for reform. These set the context within which the external adviser would view local government. They were inchoate in that no clear rationale was given for the advance of these new ideas. The suggestions did touch upon a number of important themes which deserve our attention. First, the idea was advanced that a separate ministry for local government be created at the

center. Presumably, this would provide a focus for local government coordination and control and at the same time be a powerful voice for local government interests in the central government. Second, participation by Legislative Assembly members, on an ex-officio basis, was suggested at the local council level. No elaboration was given but as the Special Select Committee was dominated by elected national representatives it is not surprising to see their concern for participation in structures of government that affect their constituencies. Third, the Committee suggested that District Development Committees be merged into the local government organization. Although unexplained, this suggestion is one response to a common difficulty with the District Development Committee faced in other former British colonial territories.<sup>12</sup> Chaired by the District Commissioner, the predominant central force at the district level and composed of special departmental field staff and other coopted members, these structures tended to become administrative mechanisms for central coordination and control of district activity. Their transformation to real arenas for participation on development issues has never been successfully achieved.<sup>13</sup> Fourth, in light of the suggestion that District Commissioners be bypassed by the Minister in charge of the new department of local government who would now issue instructions direct to local council presidents, the disappearance of District Development Committees becomes even more logical. This circumvention is a fascinating suggestion given the District Commissioner's central place in colonial administration for the Committee does not consider what role the District Commissioner should now assume nor what alternative position could give effect to central control. Fifth, the Committee suggested that the central government grant subsidies to local councils rather than permitting councils, ". . . to enter fields of taxation now the responsibility of central government."<sup>14</sup> This touches on a crucial point in center-periphery relations, the distribution of revenue sources and implicitly the power to decide how revenues are to be spent. By implication, no change was foreseen in the balance of fiscal power between central and local governments. Finally, the Committee suggested that the presidents of local councils meet annually in Honiara, a suggestion which was implemented in 1973.

It cannot be said that the Special Select Committee marked a sharp departure from past evaluations and revisions of the local government machinery. Despite the dominance of elected politicians, the Committee continued the incremental and evolutionary approach characteristic of past efforts. The two features of the

Committee's Report that stand out are the extremely tentative nature of its proposals, which appear as suggestions rather than recommendations unsupported by cogent arguments or an overarching framework and the continued expression of deep concern for the place of traditional leadership. Clearly, the momentum for change in local government remained in the careful control and hands of the colonial administration.

b) The Campbell Report and Decentralization

Following upon the Special Select Committee of 1972, the next stage in the decentralization process occurred with the appointment of Mr. M. J. Campbell as an adviser to the Government in January 1973. Campbell prepared a preliminary report, "Suggested Reforms to the Existing Local Government Structure in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate," which was submitted to government in March 1973. He stayed on to act as a consultant during the drafting of the Local Government Committee's "The Development of Local Government—Plan of Operations 1974-77" which appeared in October 1973. The Campbell report was a rather hasty and cursory overview of local government in the Solomon Islands, a fact acknowledged by Campbell who saw the draft as an outline for the future development of local government.<sup>15</sup>

It is precisely from this perspective that Campbell's Preliminary Report should be viewed—it provided a framework for a decentralization of power from the central to local units of government based on certain assumptions about the need for and benefits of decentralization in the Solomons case. Significantly, it was cast from an administrator's perspective outlining the restructuring of functions and relationships necessary to achieve a measure of local autonomy within the existing unitary system of government.

In terms of reference, Campbell was asked,

To evaluate the existing system of local government in the British Solomon Islands and, bearing in mind the limitations on the financial and manpower resources of the Protectorate, to make recommendations for its future development.<sup>16</sup>

Instead of approaching the task from a purely technical point of view, Campbell outlined a theoretical perspective on decentralization and development which rested on the viability of "development from below" as the most appropriate



strategy to promote change.<sup>17</sup> Given the nature of the Solomon Islands, decentralization is a more appropriate response than a centralized and powerful administration modelled on the colonial pattern. The geographic factor and problems of communication between the center and the local level are important constraints to the promotion of effective development from the center. Campbell also agreed that the parochial and static nature of the population fostered an island identity and a preference to avoid migration. The third argument for decentralization was based on the multi-ethnic nature of the Solomons where there are a number of separate cultural and linguistic groups. Campbell assumed that decentralization will be integrative in nature,

Experience in other democratically oriented countries indicates that where the population is multi-ethnic in nature and there are a number of linguistic and cultural groups within the one state, successful government depends upon a decentralized system which permits local aspirations full rein in order to preserve national unity or major issues. Under such conditions rivalries become aggravated at the centre over specific needs and the division of available resources.<sup>18</sup>

The dangers of over-centralization, as counterpoint and support for his assumption, can be found in the Papua New Guinean case with respect to Bougainville and the Gazelle Peninsula. His final point suggested that a decentralized form of government would provide employment opportunities locally for school leavers and thus prevent migration to urban centers.

On the basis of his claims for decentralization then, local government would serve three objectives—(a) it would provide the lower level of government and be a viable unit in terms of population and finance, (b) it would be the main agency for development and the provision of governmental services in its area, and (c) it would be the coordinator of the public service in its area. However, to fulfill this set of roles, local government requires that two essential preconditions be met—one is the recognition at the center both administratively and politically that local government is the principal agency for development in its area and that it has the responsibilities and second, that local government is seen as an integral part of government and that it became an "effective and necessary" partner in tandem with central government to promote national development. Without the preconditions, local government would be isolated from central activities at the local level and sterile for lack of staff and resources.<sup>19</sup>

Thus Campbell, in his overview, provides the arguments for moving further along the road of local government reform and presents a challenge to the central government to accept local government as a viable and essential form of government. For the first time in the evolutionary process, the term "decentralization" appears and to Campbell, development must be redefined in terms of decentralization:

It appears valuable to define the term development within the context of local government if the above criteria are accepted. Firstly, it should mean the provision of an infra structure designed to promote and strengthen economic activity and local prosperity. Secondly, it should be designed to provide these social services calculated to promote and maintain higher standards of living within the local communities.<sup>20</sup>

The remainder of the Campbell report introduced the administrative restructuring required to achieve decentralization. This included specifying the number of local government units which would be viable, financially and administratively. He proposed that the present 17 rural authorities be reduced to six major local government councils:

- |                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Western Council               | - to remain as at present                         |
| 2. North Central Council         | - Ysabel, Russell Islands, Bela and Savo Councils |
| 3. South Central Council         | - Guadalcanal and Mungabba-Mungikki Councils      |
| 4. North Eastern Council         | - Malaita, Sikaiana, Pelau and Luaniua            |
| 5. Eastern Inner Islands Council | Makira and Ulawa Councils                         |
| 6. Eastern Outer Islands Council | - Santa Cruz, Reef Islands, Utupua and Vanikoro   |

This represented a crucial new theme in decentralization—to replace weak, local and isolated units through amalgamation with local government units of sufficient population and resources. Viability required amalgamation. Honiara would be treated as a separate concern and take the form of a Town Council.

The form of local government would feature elected councils based on ward constituencies following a major principle of representation, that is, ". . . in so far

as is possible, all ethnic and linguistic groups obtain adequate representation."<sup>21</sup> Executive direction of Council affairs would be the task of an Executive Committee chosen from among the council members. The key committee of the Council would be the Development and Finance Committee. Campbell considered this committee to be at the heart of local government decision making and, therefore, should include a wide representational character, "It is suggested that all local Governing Council members should be ex-officio members of this committee. Coopted membership might also include representatives of missions, central government departments, large private enterprises or citizens with specialized knowledge."<sup>22</sup>

To complete the representational side of local government, sub-area committees, selected and organized on an informal basis, would be encouraged to represent and advance local village level interests as well as acting as a "mouthpiece" for local councils. They would occupy an intermediate position between the councils and people in the villages. Some degree of developmental and financial power would be devolved to these committees by the Councils but they would remain under Council authority and supervision. The area level would provide opportunities for participation by traditional leadership.

From an administrative and staff perspective, three categories of staff would be designated: (1) senior local government staff, (2) seconded staff, and (3) other staff and labor. The senior staff at council level would feature three significant positions—the council executive officer, the council treasurer and the council works supervisor. Clearly, the Executive Officer is a critical individual. Campbell outlines his duties as follows:

The role of the executive officer would be to supervise the administration, implement council decisions, act as secretary and adviser to the council and coordinate the work of the council staff. He would be responsible for the discipline and management of all staff. It is suggested that the holder of the post should be a District Officer in the first instance seconded full time to the Council.<sup>23</sup>

Initially, these three posts would be filled by seconded central officers but at a later date, Campbell hoped a unified local government service would result. Specialist departmental officers from central departments would be seconded to

Council and would thereby come under the control and supervision of the Council. Technical matters would be handled in the relationship between such officers and their parent departments. Such individuals would remain as members of the central public service to maintain career advance prospects. Junior staff and laborers would be employed directly by the Council.

A central concern when considering decentralization is the definition of functional responsibility to be accorded to local government units. Campbell provided for local government to assume responsibility for five major functional areas. In detail, these were the following:<sup>24</sup>

1. Improvement of Communications
  - i) All local roads
  - ii) Maintenance of airstrips
  - iii) Wharves
  - iv) Ferries
2. The Development of Natural Resources
  - i) Agricultural extension work and prevention of crop pests and diseases
  - ii) Reforestation and timber control
3. Social Services
  - i) Rural health, clinics, disease prevention, sanitation, child welfare clinics, etc.
  - ii) Urban and rural water supplies
  - iii) Education, maintenance of schools (where applicable), vocational training schemes
  - iv) Maintenance and administration of local courts
  - v) Community development
4. Economic Services
  - i) Markets
  - ii) Transportation of passengers, goods and livestock
  - iii) Commercial enterprises (where these cannot be undertaken by the private sector)
  - iv) Employment of school leavers

## 5. Administrative Services

- i) Rate collection
- ii) Registration of births and deaths
- iii) Elections

Campbell cautioned against the central government delegating tasks to Council without transferring policy control as well. The functional responsibilities suggest that the status and power of local government would be upgraded appreciably. Indeed, this is the first major reconceptualization of the jurisdictional powers of local government and it reflects Campbell's commitment to associate decentralization with development.

However, a key issue remained—finance. This cut to the core of the problems faced by councils in the past which were largely weak and ineffectual structures. Internally, revenue had been generated largely through the levy of a basic rate, the successor to the classic colonial instrument, the head tax. Although unmentioned, the collection of such a tax has been perceived elsewhere as a major contributory factor in the lack of popular support for local government.<sup>25</sup> However, to expect the basic rate to be sufficient as a revenue source was to Campbell's mind misplaced:

At present there is a low taxability potential in terms of direct taxation. Rate returns from all the councils visited showed a short fall which varied from 10-20% of the estimate. Some of this short fall was due to movement out of the area but the normal excuse for the inability to pay the rate was the need to use available money on school fees. It would seem more likely that there is a reluctance to pay rates to a council which provides little in terms of tangible development. Confidence in the Council, combined with an efficient tax collection service might yield better results. For some time to come there seems little potential for anything but a slow increase in rating and this would only keep pace with the annual rise in maintenance costs.<sup>26</sup>

This meant a search for new local revenue sources would have to be initiated and in this light he suggested a number of alternatives. In the end, however, councils would require strong financial support through the mechanism of direct transfers from the central government. In the past, such transfers took the form of tied grants calculated according to a complicated formula. He recommended that the formula should be simplified and as well that consideration be given to the

introduction of block grants, based on a formula, which would presumably include not only recurrent expenditures but capital expenditures as well. It is instructive to note that the determination of the proportion of conditional as against unconditional grants was left extremely vague in addition to the issue of recurrent/capital expenditure finance. A useful recommendation advanced the need for councils to engage in the preparation of development plans which would be devised within the framework of a national development plan. Not only would this lead to a coordination of central and local objectives but as well such plans would serve to indicate a real commitment to the various areas under council jurisdiction of the development activities and projects planned for them.

Two major recommendations of his study have been left to the end to present. Campbell suggested that, as evidence of the commitment to local government, a separate ministry should be created at the center, ". . . with the responsibility for encouraging and festering (*sic*) the new councils and for coordinating local needs at the centre."<sup>27</sup> The second recommendation which has implications for central control over the process of decentralization focuses on his recommendation to retain the post of District Commissioner as an agent of central authority who would act as an advisor to local councils and continue to assume the preponderance of his original functions.<sup>28</sup> The District Commissioner had been the major instrumental position for the advance of the colonial administrative presence at the local level.<sup>29</sup> The fact that Campbell was prepared not only to retain the post but the status of the D.C. as well suggests that in the final balance local government would remain an administrative device in the hands of the central bureaucracy to penetrate local society to serve centrally defined interests.<sup>30</sup> In this fundamental respect, the Campbell report is consistent with past approaches to local government. However, Campbell did mark an important point of departure in several ways—he advanced amalgamation of local government units; he linked decentralization to development; he pressed for clear functional responsibilities for councils wider than heretofore with sufficient finance and staff; he defined the key post of executive officer and through these reforms and the creation of a separate ministry, he sought a stronger commitment to decentralization on the part of the central government.

Campbell did put one final corollary to his recommendations expressed as an urgent priority—"I would suggest that the important consideration at this stage is to ascertain popular reaction to the proposals and obtain acceptance of the idea of

the new council areas and the sub-area committees before any further steps are taken."<sup>31</sup> This review of popular response would have to await the Kausimae Committee in 1977. In the interim, the momentum for decentralization continued under the auspices of the central government. We now turn to an overview of the next major document in the policy evolution, the Plan of Operations 1974-77, which was formed in an environment dominated by administrative power.<sup>32</sup>

### c) The Plan of Operations

The Plan of Operations 1974-77 is the first major and systematic overview of decentralization in the Solomon Islands to appear in the 1970s. In the Preface to the original draft it is clear that the Plan represents a further step stimulated by the 1972 Special Select Committee on Constitutional Development and the Campbell report.<sup>33</sup> It was drafted in 1973 between March and October in a period yet a considerable distance from the constitutional negotiations and the final attainment of independence. The same Governing Council system was in effect as at 1972.

The Plan is divided into five major sections: (1) a synopsis of the Plan on a chapter-by-chapter basis, (2) Chapter One which set forth the context and principles underlying decentralization, (3) Chapter Two which outlined the local government situation in 1973, (4) Chapters Three through Nine which detailed the creation, functions and responsibilities, finance and staff and the internal organization of central and local governments, and (5) the timetable for decentralization recommended in the Plan. The Plan was based on a consultative process which sought advice from all government departments, local councils and the members of the Governing Council. To cite the Plan, "It represents a remarkable level of agreement by all concerned as to the overall objectives and the broad methods by which local government should be developed . . . and . . . is intended to provide a firm basis for the development of local government in the period 1974-77 and for further natural growth thereafter."<sup>34</sup> "Natural growth" suggests a measured and orderly evolution of future decentralization.

Although the Plan of Operations appeared over the title of the Local Government Committee of the Governing Council, it has been conceded that the Plan was predominantly the creation of senior public servants and, in particular, reflects the influence of Mr. Tony Hughes, an influential and dynamic public servant, who was Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance. It is not our

intention to outline and assess the Plan of Operations in all its detail. Rather, we intend to focus on the context and principles of local government reform and to comment on a number of broad themes which are touched upon, in some cases only superficially by the Plan of Operations.

Chapter One—Context and Principles—is a crucial section of the Report and, indeed, the entire decentralization process. We are offered a glimpse of the major assumptions and propositions of the centralist perspective. Local government is framed in terms which suggest a real transfer of powers coupled with the creation of autonomous units of government. However, there is also a series of major checks which fall to the central government, suggesting a view of local government as administrative decentralization which can be retrieved if necessary by the central government acting within the justification of the national interest. To appreciate the centralist view, we must assess the context for local government reform. Two major points are conceded. First, there has been a degree of decentralization and autonomy in the Solomon Islands but a powerful central administration has tended to undermine its effects. The authors of the Plan of Operations admit this:

The form of local government now existing in the Solomons implies a considerable degree of autonomy for the elected councils and a clear division of functions between those retained centrally by the government and those devolved to local councils. The system cannot, therefore, evolve directly from the British colonial administration, in which government was deconcentrated to district level but never decentralized to autonomous bodies. In the Solomons, as in many other British dependencies, an attempt at establishing decentralized local government roughly in the form in which it exists in Britain, has been made in the shadow of a powerful colonial administration in many ways resembling the regional systems of metropolitan France.<sup>35</sup>

Second, the major reforms of the past several years have been the constitutional developments combined with growth in the economy and modernization whose primary effects are felt most keenly at the national level. The dynamic of change contrasts with the case of local government:

Compared with the dramatic changes which have occurred at the centre and in the pattern and nature of economic activity, local government has



not moved forward as was hoped. New developments have largely bypassed local councils and the village economy. Widespread feelings of frustration and withdrawal have resulted and the aims set out in 1962 have been overshadowed by more glamorous and better publicised objectives.<sup>36</sup>

Local government has lagged behind, yet feelings of alienation and isolation at the local level have developed further, one assumes, than can be safely tolerated.

Immediately the Plan of Operations turns to a centralist perspective of how to overcome the difficulties. The major statement which encapsulates this centralist perspective is put forward as a statement of principle:

This plan of operations contains proposals for the development of local government to meet the likely needs of the people of the Solomons over the next ten years. These proposals are intended to provide internal systems of local government at once more effective, more responsive to the wishes of the people they govern and more capable of handling complex issues arising from social and economic modernization. The powers of local councils in the Solomons are devolved upon them on the British principle that they can only do what they have specifically been given the power to do and anything else is ultra vires. The discharge of these powers must be subject to legal scrutiny and ultimate control. While this plan of operations will reduce the amount of petty interference in council affairs by central government, the powers of government inspection and control on broader and more fundamental matters will be strengthened and the machinery for regulating central-local relationships will be completely rebuilt as part of the 1974 constitutional changes.<sup>37</sup>

The intention of the central government is to create more viable and effective local government units. Significantly, the definition of powers will be specific. What remains unspecified will be deemed ultra vires, or beyond the power of local government. However, hand in hand with the revitalization of local government, there will be an increase in the central government's powers with respect to inspection and control. We elaborate on this issue in the next chapter.

The central perspective on decentralization is elaborated further in a detailed statement of the major points of principle underlying local government. First, the success of rapid and stable development depends on the political responsibility for local development and the control over resources to implement local policies being

brought as close to the people as resources will permit. The redefinition of powers is seen as a redefinition of political responsibility.<sup>38</sup> Second, the criterion for allocating responsibility and power is that ". . . local government should undertake all activities except those which, because of the wider effects of the issues or nature of the resources involved, cannot in practice be devolved to the local level . . ." <sup>39</sup> The new allocation, it is claimed, goes beyond the 1962 reforms and beyond the existing level of responsibilities assumed by local councils. Third, the success of local government will depend on a sound allocation of functions and upon the creation of an effective machinery, in particular, to assure sufficient staff and finances. This point of principle raises the issue of the size of the new units of local government. Fourth, although the central government must try to assure the strengthening and effectiveness of local government, the predominant responsibility remains to assure ". . . the overriding national interest of mutual security and interdependence of the island communities."<sup>40</sup> In a situation of conflict or breakdown, the central government must prevail even to the point of dismantling local government:

The central government must always be able to act to safeguard these interests and to ensure that basic services are maintained, if necessary by suspending the local government and assuming direct responsibility.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, the distribution of resources to the local units will be based on the extent to which various areas help themselves and contribute to the national income. This principle sees revenue transfers as more appropriately based on productivity rather than need. Equality of opportunities and services is not the effective principle, rather the replication of the colonial pattern of development and underdevelopment of the Solomon Islands will continue.<sup>42</sup>

Significantly, the revitalization of local government is based on a particular perception by the central leadership of the political and economic reality of the Solomon Islands. Politics in the Solomon Islands is viewed as expressing local interests and needs,

The political nature of the Solomons favours the development of local government. The pattern of the 1973 general election again emphasized the importance of local issues and local personalities and the comparative absence of national issues, political organizations or leadership conceived on a national basis; though a number of successful candidates campaigned

on agreed issues, there was no open party campaign. The political dynamic of the Solomons appears to lie in the close ties felt by fairly small communities and their tendency (so far at least) to judge individuals on personal merit or performance rather than ideology.<sup>43</sup>

This political dynamic expresses a "localized concept of politics and power."<sup>44</sup> For the near future, government must recognize this fact and instead of resisting this reality, it should attempt to harness local energies for development purposes. In adopting this perspective, the central government accepts the failure as yet to establish the legitimacy of national institutions. In part, this reflects the nature of colonial rule which operated at an island or district level and, in part, this view reflects an assessment of popular political protests in the framework of island level politics. National government depends upon a "continuing consensus of advantage between a large number of local groups."<sup>45</sup> The political context which supports and legitimizes local government has the following characteristics: (1) lack of national concepts, (2) strong local identification, (3) willingness to support local movements and the need to use local leaderships, and (4) resentment of or lack of support for central government activity.

The economic context of the Solomon Islands also favors a local government approach. Here, the argument rests with the likely requirements of future development planning. The emphasis will be ". . . to spread both the benefits of and responsibility for economic development as widely as possible."<sup>46</sup> To mobilize participation in modernization, it will be critical to have the energy and support of rural society. That cannot be achieved by central government. It is important as well ". . . to avoid the creation of favoured social groups at the expense of others."<sup>47</sup> A decision-making process which is brought closer to the grassroots will be more successful in promoting development and in attenuating social stratification than will a centralized decision-making process. The central characteristics of the economic context which favors decentralization are the following: (a) natural resources are largely known but difficult to exploit by direct central government policy, (b) local manpower is reluctant to mobilize for development unless plans and decisions are made at local level, (c) locally planned and executed development has potentially lower fixed costs and greater technical flexibility, than centrally controlled operations, and (d) the danger of creating favored social groups is lessened by devolving investment decisions to local communities wherever possible.

brought as close to the people as resources will permit. The redefinition of powers is seen as a redefinition of political responsibility.<sup>38</sup> Second, the criterion for allocating responsibility and power is that ". . . local government should undertake all activities except those which, because of the wider effects of the issues or nature of the resources involved, cannot in practice be devolved to the local level . . ." <sup>39</sup> The new allocation, it is claimed, goes beyond the 1962 reforms and beyond the existing level of responsibilities assumed by local councils. Third, the success of local government will depend on a sound allocation of functions and upon the creation of an effective machinery, in particular, to assure sufficient staff and finances. This point of principle raises the issue of the size of the new units of local government. Fourth, although the central government must try to assure the strengthening and effectiveness of local government, the predominant responsibility remains to assure ". . . the overriding national interest of mutual security and interdependence of the island communities."<sup>40</sup> In a situation of conflict or breakdown, the central government must prevail even to the point of dismantling local government:

The central government must always be able to act to safeguard these interests and to ensure that basic services are maintained, if necessary by suspending the local government and assuming direct responsibility.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, the distribution of resources to the local units will be based on the extent to which various areas help themselves and contribute to the national income. This principle sees revenue transfers as more appropriately based on productivity rather than need. Equality of opportunities and services is not the effective principle, rather the replication of the colonial pattern of development and underdevelopment of the Solomon Islands will continue.<sup>42</sup>

Significantly, the revitalization of local government is based on a particular perception by the central leadership of the political and economic reality of the Solomon Islands. Politics in the Solomon Islands is viewed as expressing local interests and needs,

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on agreed issues, there was no open party campaign. The political dynamic of the Solomons appears to lie in the close ties felt by fairly small communities and their tendency (so far at least) to judge individuals on personal merit or performance rather than ideology.<sup>43</sup>

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From a broad analytical overview of the substantial part of the Plan of Operations, a number of central themes emerge which are, at times, only addressed partially.

Until the Plan of Operations, the process of decentralization was based on a pattern of devolution of administrative power within centralized departments of government coupled with a gradual evolution of local government bodies which was incremental in nature and scattered in results. Local government was perceived in a colonial framework which saw local councils as inherently weak, disorganized and ineffectual and, moreover, devoid of popular support. To carry local government reform further required a reconceptualization of the Solomon Islands which appeared early in the Plan of Operations in a description of the political and economic context of the country. The implications of this reconceptualization of local government required, firstly, fundamental changes in the district administration,

It is most important that the staffing, name and status of the district administration should be deliberately changed in step with the strengthening of local government. The central government must decide whether it wishes to retain a general political officer in district or island headquarters. A post at the necessary level is expensive in money and manpower, and the resources may be better used elsewhere. If the government were to decide to retain such a post, it must be clearly distinguished from, and prevented from conflicting with, the management of local government . . . . If it were decided not to retain such a post, the functions would be carried out by the chief executive of the local council, touring ministry staff and politicians and the local headquarters of the central government policy. Either alternative represents a drastic change from the 1973 situation, but it is essential that the importance of this progressive restructuring is grasped by all concerned, since without it the proposals to create effective local government will run into difficulties which could prove fatal.<sup>48</sup>

The list of functions associated with the continuation of the position of a "general political officer" at district level is terribly revealing of the reality of the power relationship between centre and periphery. The functions included the following:

. . . observing and reporting (to Minister of Local Government or Chief Minister); acting as nodal point for communications and intelligence; local interpretation of central government policy on request; fostering of constructive central/local government realtions; safeguarding national interests in local deliberations.<sup>49</sup>

Here is the essence of the dilemma facing the central government. To progressively restructure local government would jeopardize the crucial penetration of central control to the grassroots. However, the open and direct intrusion of central administrative control would not be supportive of the claims being made for decentralization by the centre. Senior public servants were forced to adopt the indirect approach. The continuation of central administrative officers paralleling the local council structure would be "inconsistent" with the essence of the reforms. The creation of a local government ministry, with powers of advice and the ultimate approval of the Minister, to provide direction and support for local government units would resolve this dilemma. This would allow the functions and field staff associated with direct administration under the colonial pattern to pass to local councils with the Clerk as chief executive officer displacing the role of the District Commissioner,

. . . the clerk, as chief executive, will co-ordinate and command the council team so as to execute council policies. All information and directions will pass through him, upwards and downwards, except where he specifically delegates or directs otherwise; he cannot delegate his accountability or overall responsibility for the proper running of the organization. Communications with the central government will be addressed to the clerk, and will issue from his office unless he authorizes otherwise, as he may do, for example, on technical matters of a non-policy nature.<sup>50</sup>

This contrasts sharply with the characterization of the Provincial Secretary in the Special Committee on Provincial Government (the Kausimae Report) which views him as the executive director of autonomous and secure units of government rather than an instrument to assure the dependence and control of the periphery by the centre.<sup>51</sup>

Although Campbell, in his Preliminary Report, called for an early test of popular support for his suggested reforms, the Plan of Operations proceeds from

the very comfortable assumption of unquestioned popular support for its recommendations. The political dynamic in the Solomon Islands is cast in local terms, the national political level is composed of politicians who act as spokesmen for local interests. The interpretation of Solomon Islands' history is one which sees political action defined in terms of local movements. The dual perception of government as being composed of, on the one hand, a dominant center unresponsive to local feelings and interests and, on the other hand, as an essential and benevolent dispenser of goods and services will be altered fundamentally. Functions which are critical to local aspirations, for example, agricultural extension services, and are distributive in nature, for example, medical facilities, will be transferred to local councils. Critically, however, the political responsibility for local development will no longer rest with the central government.

The Plan of Operations reveals quite clearly that the central government was captured in yet another fundamental dilemma. Local government reform was seen as a precondition for effective development at the grassroots level of society in order to mobilize people behind development efforts and to actively encourage them to participate in the decision-making process. Yet to make local government effective, the existing rural councils must be amalgamated to create sufficiently large units to be administratively and financially viable. This leads to repeated statements that the new structures must be supported by sub-district bodies to bring government closer to the people.

The need is widely recognized for an informal and flexible type of local government at the level of groups of villages, electoral wards or language area. Local councils of the size needed to implement this plan of operations tend to appear remote from daily problems at village level and they will not be able to afford the formal structures which full direct coverage would require. Local leadership commonly operates at clan or group-of-clans level, covering several villages or wards, often less than a whole language area. Traditional communication, co-operation and decision making tend to wither away or withdraw in face of legal formality. . . . Area Committees have been established in some islands with some success; but they have not been as widely used as might have been expected, perhaps because their potential has not been fully



understood. The Western Council is experiencing now some of the problems of amalgamation, which opens a gap between the enlarged but more distant council and the villagers who previously had a council . . . much nearer home. Similar problems will arise with other proposed amalgamations. The need for an executive body which can be seen and felt in village daily life is genuine and widespread.<sup>52</sup>

As with Campbell, the Plan of Operations recognizes that considerable effort will be required to increase the levels of funding and staffing of local councils. The Plan recognized that the sources of revenue of the local councils had been inadequate and proposed to restructure the entire revenue division:

At present local government revenues comprise basic rate, property rate, court fees and fines, licenses, earnings of services, loans, investment revenues, and grants from the central government . . . the last category is now by far the largest single source of money, but the bulk of this is for specific capital projects. This plan of operations will greatly increase the extent to which local government is centrally financed, by completely revising the grant system and providing for large transfers of recurrent resources, but local council autonomy will actually be increased by limiting central government's detailed intervention and defining the scope and functions of the two levels of government in a way not previously attempted.<sup>53</sup>

With respect to direct revenue sources available to local councils, the basic rate forms the most important component. On this, and other revenue sources, the Plan of Operations assumed that the changing status of councils might lead to a greater capacity to tax:

What is not known, of course, is how far the strengthened local councils will be able to increase both the effectiveness of collection and the level of basic rates in areas where cash incomes have increased; one aim of this plan of operations is to make councils more credible and more popular so that they will be able to adopt a more aggressive approach to revenue raising.<sup>54</sup>

The major source of Council revenue, however, would take the form of transfers from the central government. On the recurrent expenditure side, three

forms of payments would be provided: (1) rate counterpart grants which are calculated according to the amount of basic rate collected and are unconditional in nature, (2) staff salary payments which will meet the salaries of public servants working in the functional areas transferred to local government, and (3) services grants which would allow councils to meet the costs of services maintained at the level when they were transferred to local government control. Councils would have the autonomy to decide whether or not to maintain the services, the particular distribution of expenditures between the various services and how to fund their costs.

Capital grants would take two forms—the general developmental allocation (GDA) and specific projects grants. The GDA would form the basis of each council's capital budget and it would be an annual block allocation of development funds. The project grants would be tied to major projects largely financed by and falling under the preferences of external aid donors. Consequently, a claim was made that the GDA was to be unconditional in nature and the project grants by contrast, conditional, in that a large measure of control and direction would be exercised by the central government. However, the potential for central control over GDA, and thereby the perpetration of a form of influence from the centre, was apparent in the text.<sup>55</sup> Central control was also expressed in the requirement that local councils become more planning oriented and that each council be required to design their development strategies in such a way so as to coordinate with the national development plan. Such control would arise as well from the introduction of more extensive performance checks on local councils through the strengthening of auditing procedures.

The Plan of Operations recognized that a major constraint to the reorganization and revitalization of local government would depend upon the number and quality of central staff available for transfer to Council control. It was envisaged that the direct administration staff would form the core of the new administrative cadre serving local councils. The clerk to the Council would become the chief executive officer at the local government level. The transfer of specialist staff was tied to the allocation of functions between central and local governments which itself was based on a basic definition of functional responsibilities:

The principal function of local government is direct and immediate government of the people in town or rural areas. Local government is concerned with the quality of life, economic prosperity and welfare of the people as expressed in and affected by day-to-day local activity, projects and common community services. Central government's function is to provide a secure and prosperous national context within which local government can function effectively; and to undertake legislation, planning and use of resources on a country-wide basis so as to achieve national unity, security and prosperity.<sup>56</sup>

Given this distinction, the Plan of Operations urged the transfer of departmental functions which corresponded with those specialized departments which utilized a field staff structure—that is, departments of agriculture and lands, medical services, education and works. The transitional arrangements would place under council control serving public officers at all levels of a transferred function. A single unified public service would be created above an established grade level. Whether a public servant worked for local or central government, each individual would have the same career prospects and opportunities for promotions available to him. At the local government level, public servants would be under the supervision of the Clerk for their functional operations and activities to ensure that staff operated within the decisions made by local councils. The Plan of Operations did not address the key problem of a dual loyalty arising for specialist staff seconded to councils.

This raises a broader theme which is the definition of the "responsibility" of local government. Through a number of qualifiers, the Plan of Operations suggested that planning and decision making on matters fundamental to the development process will remain at the center while "operational" responsibility will be transferred to local councils. The key issue was whether councils would be restricted to the implementation phase of development or actively participate in the decision-making phase. Would councils be conceived as overseers of development projects identified, planned and funded at the center or would councils be viewed as more autonomous units of government? The question is resolved in favor of the ultimate assertion of central power. What emerges is a rather unique public service view which places local government in a transitional phase with sufficient central checks to allow a re-assertion of central control if necessary. There are two components to the perspective advanced by the public service.

First, the activities of local government would be subject to administrative oversight and evaluation from the center. This power of oversight could potentially circumscribe and undermine local decision making for the release of funds depended upon central approval. To cite the Plan,

The flow of finance and assignment of staff to local government will be regulated by the Minister for Local Government. Approved aid allocations, capital and recurrent, will be placed under the vote control of the local government department; where the release of funds is related to operation of a certain level of services by local government, a fiat by the appropriate technical department of central government will be required before funds start to issue. Further checks will be made in the field, by inspection visits from central government staff and by the making of rules by the Minister prescribing conditions for the use of central government funds.<sup>57</sup>

Second, the oversight role required the reorganization of and redefinition of the functions of central departments.

During the period covered by this plan of operations, the headquarters departments of central government will be reorganized. Departments will be grouped according to sectors of political and economic affinity . . . . The functions of the new departments will be as follows:

- participation in national planning and policy making; sector planning and monitoring, reporting to the Minister; preparation of legislation at national level and monitoring and enforcing it;
- operational and financial control of:
  - headquarters
  - research institutions
  - national training institutions
  - projects planned and financed at national level
  - Joint projects with local councils under agreed plans of operations;
- staff planning, training and technical supervision of staff working in local government service;
- coordination and exchange of information with other departments, especially that responsible for local government, to insure early warning of malfunctioning and avoid delays in funds, personnel or information.<sup>58</sup>

The reforms at the center were just as important to the public service view as those at the periphery. They form the complimentary package of decentralization. When local decisions or performance are deemed inappropriate by the specialized central departments, then autonomy would be sacrificed.

A fundamental reform advanced by Campbell and reiterated by the Plan of Operations, was the proposal to create a separate ministry of local government. This new ministry would be "the single overlord in central government"<sup>59</sup> for local government. To reinforce this role, the clear jurisdiction of the Minister of Local Government in all matters affecting local government was forcefully put:

The Minister for Local Government will be kept informed of any matters affecting policy, overall performance, finances or seconded personnel and no formal action against local government will be taken without the approval or initiative of the Minister for Local Government.<sup>60</sup>

On the key political question of conflict resolution in cases of local councils clashing with central departments, the Minister for Local Government would act as the representative of local interests. Dispute settlement ultimately would take place at Cabinet level.

A correspondingly important theme is the relationship between elected councils and public servants. This relationship becomes especially significant as it is envisaged that the suggested reforms would strengthen local councils as instruments of political control and bring public servants under council direction. On this issue, the Plan of Operations assumed that public servants would have to be protected against improper pressures or interference. According to the Plan,

The form of democratic local government being developed in the Solomons requires a clear and consistent view to be taken of the relationships between council members and council staff. This is in some ways analogous to that between central government's political members and civil servants with the main difference that local government has no executive members or ministers. It must be recognized that the proper function of the councillors is to decide policies and allocate priorities, while that of the staff is to manage, control and execute the decided policies and programmes. It is most important that council staff should not be subject to interference from individual councillors, or put in fear of

punishment for offending a council member while carrying out their proper duties. Many people are aware of the dangers of corruption, waste and confusion arising from councillors' interference with staff, but there are instances of it in most councils. With greatly increased staff and activities, it will be even more important to guard against this tendency by appropriate Staff Instructions, Standing Orders, inspections and the manner in which the chief executive or clerk discharges his duties of general management.<sup>61</sup>

The phraseology adopted later in the Plan came down clearly on the side of the protection of public servants through the creation of clear lines of command and responsibility.

As with the Special Committee on Constitutional Development and the Campbell Report, the Plan of Operations attempted to reconcile the place of traditional leadership with the structures of local government. In this the Plan of Operations is more specific than was the case with the earlier attempts. The Plan recommended the creation of an advisory committee of chiefs at council level to consider and advise the council ". . . upon any matters referred to it by the council and in particular upon the social effects of any proposed projects or undertakings, and any steps the committee considered necessary to safeguard the traditional values of people in the council area."<sup>62</sup> The influence of traditional leadership would also be felt in the Area Committees at sub-district level.

From a wider perspective, the Plan of Operations assumed that revitalized local councils would become a new arena for leadership participation. In the past, local councils were too weak and too subordinate to the district administration to develop as an attractive alternative for leadership aspirants. Their strengthening, however, would introduce a new and significant political field. In a sense, decentralization becomes a tool for the central bureaucracy to restructure political competition to a local rather than the national level. The creation of a new political elite tied to the local, island arena, with enhanced powers over matters of crucial importance to rural society would have serious implications for the emerging national political elite who seek support and influence over the same constituency. The potential for conflict between these two leadership groups was very real. Yet the Plan of Operations did not deal with this critical political issue.

The Plan of Operations assumed that the Governing Council would accept the proposed changes in local government. The authors therefore proceeded to outline the implementation process:

By the end of 1974, the following should be achieved:

- i) amalgamations agreed and implemented;
- ii) management staff trained and at post;
- iii) systems and controls strengthened;
- iv) some major functions transferred to certain councils;
- v) preparations made for introduction of new financial structure on 1st January 1975 and the transfer of further functions during 1975.<sup>63</sup>

It was foreseen that by 1977 the new system would be established in full and would be operating effectively. Further alterations would be made as part of a continuing evaluation of local government performance.

The expectation that the Plan of Operations would provide the framework for local government reform was fulfilled with the unanimous approval by the Governing Council of a policy statement, "The Development of Local Government," in November 1973. The twelve-point statement represented an encapsulation of the Plan of Operations. From this point forward the central bureaucracy provided the dynamics for administrative reform. The stages foreseen in implementation by year were as follows:

1974	September 1 end of October	- the creation of the Ministry of Home Affairs - Second Annual Local Government Conference
	end of year	- Amalgamation—the number of councils reduced from 18 to 9
	end of year	- Elections held for majority of councils
1975	January	- functions of District Administration passed to councils - District Commissioners become field officers for Ministry of Home Affairs

Transfer of functions regarding Works and Agriculture to Malaita, Western, Makira and Eastern Islands councils.

Completion of integration of Government sub-treasuries at Auki, Gizo and Kira Kira and creation of Council treasuries.

- Transfer of government accounts staff to Councils.
- Preparation of Councils' 1975 Estimates on basis of the new grant structure.
- 1976 Transfer of functions of Works and Agriculture to the remaining councils.
- Transfer of function of Education to all councils.
- Transfer of functions of Health to one major council.
- 1977 Transfer of functions of Health to the remaining councils.

#### d) National Politics and Decentralization

Over the period that these administrative rearrangements were being made the Solomon Islands was caught up in the movement towards independence. The approach of independence crystallized a debate between Western Province political leaders and the central leadership—national politicians, senior public servants and the colonial administrators—over the future form of center-periphery relations.<sup>64</sup> The essential features of the Western position were expressed in a paper prepared by the Western Council which appeared in August 1975. From the Western perspective, only a quasi-federal system of government was appropriate for the Solomon Islands.

The Solomon Islands structure and principles of government should, where possible, reflect the different cultures, respect the ethnic diversities, take into account the geo-political factors, and above all, answer the wishes of the people. The present structure of government does not really do this, because it has been designed in such a way that ultimate power is concentrated in a single central government having a legal omnipotence over all districts within the country. Yet it is acknowledged that the present structure has established a local Government Council system where an extensive delegation to local units of some functions has been admirably carried out. But in no way, it seems, would the present structure allow genuine provincial autonomy to take place because the unitary system of government is not designed to do that yet the realities of the Solomon Islands society requires genuine provincial autonomy to be set up. That is why the setting up of a Western state will from now on be a primary concern of the Western Council and its people . . . . It is . . . envisaged that when the state government system is established, it is



highly desirable that the national constitution should define the areas of responsibilities, functions and powers which would regulate and justify the existence and activities of the central and state governments, and in so doing the central government and the state should be self-ruling co-ordinate bodies rather than subordinate to each other as is the case under the present system of government.<sup>65</sup>

Clearly, the Western demands cut at the heart of the decentralization program as conceived and directed by the central government. The central response appeared in the Report of the Constitutional Committee of 1975 which rejected a quasi-federal solution and reasserted instead the commitment to a unitary system of government.<sup>66</sup>

Having reaffirmed the framework for local government reform, the Constitutional Committee addressed three basic issues. The first issue was whether or not to entrench local government autonomy in the new constitution. The Committee decided against such a recommendation based on an argument which suggested that although the degree of autonomy conceded to this point in time was open to question that continued flexibility should be the primary consideration. To entrench local government powers in the constitution would lead to complexity and rigidity. Instead, the Committee recommended that the definition of local government powers be a matter for parliamentary authority through an act of parliament.<sup>67</sup> The second issue concerned the degree of decentralization. The Committee conceded that local government reform had been disappointing to date asserting that decentralization had been primarily a delegation of functions without a corresponding decentralization of decision-making powers. The Committee was unwilling to recommend any further measures calling instead for the creation of a special committee to consider how to proceed.<sup>68</sup> Of far greater concern to the Committee was the need to assure that adequate checks be introduced against the national government being able to dissolve local government arbitrarily. This would require a 3/4 majority of Parliament.<sup>69</sup>

The final preparations for the Independence negotiations culminated in a Constitutional Conference in Honiara in 1977. The Conference issued an agreed statement of principles which would form the basis of the Independence constitution. The preamble contained "a commitment to decentralization of legislative and executive power."<sup>70</sup> Chapter Nine, Provincial Government,

contained eleven basic principles designed to give force to the commitment to decentralize and to assure the continuation of the process. The eleven principles, briefly summarized were as follows: (1) the Solomon Islands shall be divided into provinces; (2) a provincial government will be formed in each province; (3) a provincial assembly will be provided for each province; (4) an Act of Parliament will Prescribe the finances and taxing powers of the provinces; (6) provincial assemblies will prepare annual estimates; (7) provincial governments will be subject to audit by the Auditor General; (8) dissolution procedures were carefully specified; (9) an Act of Parliament will provide for the composition, powers, functions and procedures of provincial assemblies and governments; (10) until this occurs, provincial government shall be regulated by the Local Government Ordinance; and finally, (11) a special committee shall be established, "to examine the relationship between the National Government, Provincial Governments and Area Councils and to recommend on the measures to promote the effective decentralization of legislative, administrative and financial powers."<sup>71</sup>

#### Footnotes to Chapter Four

<sup>1</sup>Solomon Islands, Report of the Constitutional Committee 1975 (Honiara: Government Printing Office, 1976), para. 12, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Francis J. Saemala, Our Independent Solomon Islands (Honiara: Government Printer, 1979), pp. 3-5.

<sup>3</sup>For an analysis of the evolution of the Western challenge, see: Ralph R. Premdas and Peter Larmour, "The Western 'Breakaway' Movement in the Solomon Islands" in Peter Larmour (ed.), Politics and Government in the Solomon Islands (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 1981).

<sup>4</sup>In Kenya immediately following Independence, the Kenyatta government re-asserted central power through the use of the provincial administration structure. See, Cherry Gertzel, "The Provincial Administration in Kenya," Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, IV 3 (November 1966), pp. 201-215.

<sup>5</sup>Saemala, op. cit., pp. 21-22.

<sup>6</sup>British Solomon Islands Protectorate, Governing Council Paper Number 89, Report of a Special Select Committee on Constitutional Development (Honiara: Government Printing Office, 1972), para. 1.1.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., para. 5.3.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., para. 4.3.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., para. 4.4.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., para. 5.38.

<sup>12</sup>See, David K. Leonard (ed.), Rural Administration in Kenya: A Critical Appraisal (Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau, 1973).

<sup>13</sup>L. Cliffe, J. S. Coleman and M. R. Doornbos (eds.), Government and Rural Development in East Africa: Essays on political penetration (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977).

<sup>14</sup>Report of a Special Select Committee on Constitutional Development, op. cit., para. 5.34(e).

<sup>15</sup>As Campbell stated, "It will be seen from these details that the investigation has been extremely limited both in time and in scope. It would be presumptuous therefore to offer more than tentative suggestions at this stage and it must be recognized that these are based on preliminary impressions which might not stand up to detailed examination. They are intended to provide an outline for a possible pattern . . . ."

J. Campbell, Adviser, "Suggested Reforms to the Existing Local Government Structure in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate," Preliminary Report (Honoraria: mimeo, March 23, 1973), p. 1.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>For an overview of this perspective, see: Ursula K. Hicks, Development from Below: Local Government and Finance in Developing Countries of the Commonwealth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).

<sup>18</sup>Campbell, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. p. 4.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>25</sup>Refer to: Ronald Wraith, "The Revenue of Local Authorities," in Wraith, Local Administration in West Africa (London: Allen and Unwin, 1972), pp. 119-135.

<sup>26</sup>Campbell, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid. p. 3.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid. p. 12.

<sup>29</sup>For a superb analysis of the role of the District Commissioner in the colonial period, see: Robert Heussler, British Tanganyika: An Essay and Documents on District Administration (Durham: Duke University Press, 1971). An excellent short overview can be found in: Stanley Dryden's, "The Colonial Legacy" in Dryden, Local Administration in Tanzania (Nairobi: East Africa Publishing House, 1968), pp. 1-21.

<sup>30</sup>An example of the dilemma of reconciling the imperatives of central authority with local participation in development planning can be seen in: Republic of Kenya, "Field Administration for Development," Report of the Commission of Inquiry (Public Service Structure and Remuneration Commission) 1970-71. Chairman: D. N. Ndegwa (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1971), pp. 109-121.

<sup>31</sup>Campbell, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>32</sup>Solomon Islands, The Development of Local Government: Plan of Operations 1974-77 (Honiara: Ministry of Home Affairs, 1974), p. 94.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid. p. i.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 2-3.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid. p. 3.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 3-4.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>For an analysis of the Solomon Islands from the perspective of dependency theory, see Ralph Pettman, "The Solomon Islands: A Developing Neo-Colony?" Australian Outlook, XXXI 2 (August 1977), pp. 268-278. A general overview of the Solomon Islands' economy can be found in: Solomon Islands, Central Planning Office, Solomon Islands National Development Plan 1980-1984, Volume I (Honiara: Government Printer, 1980). The problem of regional balance in the distribution of development benefits has been highlighted in: The World Bank, The Solomon Islands: An Introductory Economic Report (2553-SOL, December 18, 1979), esp. p. ii and pp. 15-17. For an overview of the approach undertaken by the central government, see: Ministry of Finance, Submission by the Ministry of Finance (Honiara: June 1978), Background Paper No. 27, Special Committee on Provincial Government, December 1977-May 1979 (Honiara: Ministry of Home Affairs, 1979). In 1980, regional imbalance was seen as a major weakness in the Solomon Islands economy: Solomon Islands National Development Plan 1980-1984, Volume II, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup>Plan of Operations, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>51</sup>An analysis of the Kausimae Report is presented in the following chapter.

<sup>52</sup>Plan of Operations, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., pp. 38-39.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., pp. 49-50.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>64</sup>Refer to Premdas and Larmour, op. cit.

<sup>65</sup>Western Council Paper, Gizo (August 1975), pp. 3-4.

<sup>66</sup>"The Committee noted a growing interest among the people in a form of quasi-federal constitution. This interest sprang from historical and other roots. As has already been mentioned, however, the Committee was enjoined to take account of the need for the proposed constitutional arrangements to be such as an Independent Solomon Islands could afford to pay for from its own resources. In the light of this requirement as well as in the interest of recommending a form of government which was practicable, the Committee considered that an unitary constitution which allowed for the effective devolution of power and responsibility to local government level would be the most suitable." Solomon Islands, Report of the Constitutional Committee 1975 (Honiara: Government Printing Office, 1976), para. 12, p. 2.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid. pp. 13-15.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Solomon Islands, Constitutional Conference 1977, Principles (Honiara: Government Printing Office, 1977), preamble, 2(e).

<sup>71</sup>Ibid. p. 15.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DECENTRALIZATION: THE PROBLEMS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The devolution of substantial functions to local government units between 1973 and 1978 required a major undertaking by national administrators. On successful implementation, the new local authorities would fulfill a complex set of tasks ranging from symbolic aspects of democratic participation to practical matters related to economic development. If it were possible under the Plan of Operations to realize even half of the enunciated objectives, the exercise in decentralization could be declared a success. However the aims of a project and their fulfillment can be worlds apart. "Policy" and "implementation" are supposed to be relatively congruent concepts at least in an optimist's world. In the case of the Solomon Islands, we posit that the experiment in decentralization under the Plan of Operations underwent such transformation at the implementation level that the expectations of policy were substantially denied.

However, we do not share the view that policies are "only a collection of words" as suggested by one authority.<sup>1</sup> When the scarce resources of a poor nation are committed to solve fundamental issues related to national unity and elementary economic needs, such an outlook is an intolerable admission of failure from the outset. If the implementation of policy encounters constraints, then the task we believe is to isolate the causes and search for solutions. In the end, the policy aims of a project may have to be modified to take account of the limitations inherent in the implementation process. However, this would not be the same as to suggest that the objectives are whatever has been implemented. As noted by one observer, "in these cases, policy is effectively 'made' by the people who implement it."<sup>2</sup> In our study of the decentralization exercise in the Solomon Islands, we found innumerable cases where during the implementation process "policies have been turned on their heads."<sup>3</sup> Our task is to examine the entire experiment to ascertain the causes of the divergence between policy and implementation.

We begin this by examining the explicit policies and aims of the Plan of Operations in relation to the implementation exercise. In particular, we shall analyze the policy aims for their explicitness and internal contradictions with an eye towards the latitude of discretion that was permitted the implementors. The

perceptions and interests of the implementors are also taken into account. We shall sum up and evaluate the achievements of the experiment after seven years of its progressive implementation.

#### A. The Policies

The policy aims of the reforms undertaken in the local government system were set forth by the Governing Council in November 1973. They were as follows:<sup>4</sup>

- (1) Local Government should be developed and strengthened to become an important agent for development and services, and the coordinator of all forms of government activity in its area.
- (2) Central government's commitment to the development of local government should be clear and consistent and its advisory and control systems should allow considerable local autonomy while ensuring that national interests are safeguarded and developed.
- (3) There should be a well-understood division of functions between central and local government based on the principle that all those functions which in the opinion of the Government Council could best be performed by a well-established local authority, should be progressively allocated to local government.
- (4) There should be a ministry responsible for local government, charged with:
  - central government policy, planning and coordination in relation to local government;
  - watching over advising and operating controls over local government;
  - control of central government staffing and financial assistant to local government as provided by the Governing Council;
  - inspections systems and training of staff;
  - the introduction of legislation and regulations, and voting of council legislation.



- (5) The functions of general field administration, agriculture and associated extension services and certain functions of public works, health and education services should be progressively transferred to local government.
- (6) Staff to assist in carrying out these functions should be provided from the public service and placed under the operational control of local government; suitable arrangements should be made to protect their terms of service and those persons employed directly by local government, and to stimulate productive and well-ordered work by all employees.
- (7) The financial arrangements between central and local government will be revised to take account of the transfer of functions and to make provision for block grants. There should not be a net expenditure increase as a result of the transfer of functions and associated payments. The size of grants to local councils will be considered each year in the context of the supply estimates.
- (8) The small local councils should be encouraged to amalgamate to produce seven rural councils plus the Honiara Town Council.
- (9) In all areas, and especially where amalgamations of small councils are proposed, care should be taken to see that local government is functioning through informal areas, subdistrict ward committees, that the work of such committees is understood and supported, and that they have some resources for minor local projects and services.
- (10) Customary leaders and chiefs should be recognized as an important source of wisdom and leadership; they should have a consultative role in informal committees at area or subdistrict level.
- (11) The first priority in achieving all these aims should be to strengthen and improve the management and financial systems of local government.
- (12) By the end of 1974, the following should be achieved:
  - i) amalgamations agreed and achieved;
  - ii) management staff trained and at post;
  - iii) systems and controls strengthened;

- iv) some major functions transferred to certain Councils;
- v) preparations made for introduction of new financial structure on 1st January 1975 and the transfer of further functions during 1975.

Accompanying this set of objectives was "The Plan of Operations" in which a program of implementation was described. In a real sense, the Plan of Operations was the blueprint for day-to-day action outlining what the policy objectives meant to the implementor. In analyzing the objectives then, it would be useful to look at them also in terms of what they communicated to those who executed the entire project.<sup>5</sup>

Among the policies enunciated, three in particular were internal to council operations.<sup>6</sup> These were items 5, 6, 11. They dealt with staff, financial, and management issues. With regard to staff in item 6, special note must be taken of the words: "placed under the operational control of local government." In practice, numerous violations of this guideline would emerge to mar much of the experiment especially at its early stage. In item 6, the new financial responsibilities of the councils would be met through block grants. The revenue issue would generate intense controversy taking many forms, but in essence, it would be related to the meaningfulness of the local responsibility concept. Item 11 underscores the administrator's concern for efficiency and order as vital sign posts of success or failure in the experiment with local initiative and democracy.<sup>7</sup>

Two items, numbers 4 and 8, in the aims were concerned with the creation of new entities. Item 4 directed that a separate Ministry of Local Government be created to oversee and coordinate the reform experiment. This act, by itself, suggested the grave importance that the Governing Council had attached to the reforms. In practice, the local government responsibilities would be subsumed under the functions of a Ministry of Home Affairs which had other tasks apart from local government. Item 8 related to the amalgamation of smaller councils so that the larger and more viable units would be created. Here, the economies of scale and overhead costs would take precedence over the social identify issue.

Overall, items 4, 5, 6, 8, and 11 of the objectives appeared to be concerned with innocent pragmatic issues of council efficiency. Hardly any internal contradictions or ambiguity were immediately discernible in them. The problem that would arise, however, would be concerned more with politics than administrative issues which, in turn, would severely taint the way the simple pragmatic items

were executed. We must look at other items in the policy aims list for the political aspects in the experiment. These are included in items 1, 2, and 3.

The emphasis in items 1, 2, and 3 is on extending powers and functions to the councils. The experiment would be bold as well as innovative for the Solomon Islands: the sphere of local democracy could be substantially enlarged at both the administrative and political levels. To be sure, in extending the new functions, the central government safeguarded its own powers indicating that devolved powers would not be allowed to encroach on "national interests." This limitation was a very broad formulation lacking precise boundaries separating local autonomy from national interests.

Nothing in the policy aims clearly indicated how much political autonomy would accompany the new administrative functions assigned to local councils. Did the Governing Council contemplate reforms mainly in the administrative area? Or did they also mean that political devolution would occur simultaneously with administrative delegation of tasks? The issue was absolutely crucial to the direction of implementation. In several post-colonial states where rural development occupies the strategic place in social and economic change, decentralization in the sense of devolving both decision-making and administrative powers is the preferred form. In the case of the Solomon Islands, the policy aims for local government reform lacked adequate precision to justify a label as either "decentralization" or "deconcentration." The direction of political change in the country suggested the former.

At various places in the Plan of Operations a rhetoric that characterizes the decentralist approach to reform is betrayed:

"It is fundamental to these proposals that any assumption of an existing local government function by local councils is matched by a withdrawal by the central government and in most cases by the transfer of government staff and assets to local council control."<sup>8</sup>

But much more frequently we find statements which suggest that political autonomy would be tightly bridled. For example,

". . . in return for greatly increased functional powers and massive transfer of resources, local councils will be subject to increased standardization, scrutiny and general tightening up of key aspects of management."<sup>9</sup>

"while this Plan of Operations will reduce the amount of petty interference in council affairs by the central government, the powers of government inspection and control on broader and more fundamental matters, will be strengthened."<sup>10</sup>

The impression is imparted that a condition of indecisiveness of not outright schizophrenia divided the functions allocated to local units and the central government respectively.<sup>11</sup> An inescapable part of the Plan of Operations was its insistence on inspection and efficiency in council affairs to be enforced by the national government. This theme was much more evident than the periodic lapses into decentralist phraseology. An inevitable consequence of the limited duality of split image in policy purpose, was that those who advocated centralist oversight could find passages to substantiate their claims, while those who espoused decentralist devolution of both political and administrative powers could also find justifying passages in the Plan of Operations. In the end, the Plan of Operations would be implemented in a form reflecting the philosophies and interests of the implementors. Much of the direction of the reform which would be guided not by precisely prescribed laws but by ministerial directives and bureaucratic imperatives. The end shape of the experiment, whatever the politicians in the Governing Council might have envisaged in drawing up their policy aims, would be determined by the political interests of administrators at the central level.

### C. Implementation: Evaluating the Record

Seven years after the experiment in local government reform, specifically in the direction of devolving powers and functions to subordinate council units, the record of achievement remained very mixed.<sup>12</sup> The experiment itself was supposed to have concluded at the end of 1977. And the success anticipated from implementing the policy objectives was projected to last at least ten years before further reforms would be required. But the implementors were overly optimistic of their plan's durability. Even before the Plan of Operations had been fully implemented, widespread demand for further devolution had become urgent and vocal. The Western Province was, in particular, unhappy with the degree of decentralization that had occurred under the Plan of Operations. The West wanted a federal system as the price for its continued participation in the Solomon Islands sovereign state. Other provinces were less extreme in their demands but

nevertheless wanted further decentralization of both political and administrative powers. The Kausimae Committee was appointed to elicit views from the public, the councils, and the central government about the decentralization issue. The results of the Committee's hearing pointed unequivocally to the widespread sentiment for a political system in which extensive powers and functions would be decentralized to the local councils which were renamed "provinces."

When the research for this work was undertaken in mid-1980, the accomplishments of the Plan of Operations were to be the base from which further reforms issuing from the Kausimae Report were to be undertaken. The lessons learned, however, from the implementation problems associated with the Plan of Operations are essential for evaluating the prospects of further devolution of powers. In this section, we briefly describe and analyze the record of implementation under the Plan of Operations. Apart from the practical value they may have for further devolution of powers and functions, this part of the work will raise theoretical issues related to implementation in Third World countries.

#### A. External Amalgamation; Internal Organization; and a New Ministry

We shall begin by looking at three items which are related to large scale organizational matters. It was proposed that the large number of councils in the country be reduced so as to make them more economically viable administrative units. Prior to the Plan of Operations, there were 17 councils ranging from Malaita Council with 50,000 people to Sikaiana Council with 200 people. Only four councils had more than 10,000 people. The budgets of the councils ranged from \$234,000 for the Western Council to \$800 for Sikaiana Council. The implications of these figures for a central government that was about to embark on a massive experiment that would inevitably involve the transfer of scarce skilled staff from headquarters to the councils were immediate concern for administrative efficiency. Too many councils but too few skilled staff meant only one solution: that is, a reduction in the number of councils. This expedient would also convert a number of very small councils, especially those established around the small and sparsely-populated Polynesian outer islands, into viable units capable of undertaking large and expensive projects. The main problem with this exercise was that the large council units were likely to be more remote from their constituents.

The amalgamation task was, however, completed by 1975, as follows:

<u>Old Councils</u>	<u>New Council Unit</u>
1. Western	Western (no change)
2. Ysabel	Ysabel (no change)
3. Guadalcanal	Guadalcanal (no change)
4. Malaita; Sikaiana; Luanina; Pelau	Malaita (change)
5. Ngella; Savo; Russells; Munggabe- Mungiki	Central (change)
6. Makira; Ulawa	Makira (change)
7. Santa Cruz; Reefs; Vanikoro; Utupa	Eastern (change)

The pattern of amalgamation adopted by the implementors followed a strategy that deviated least from established forms of administration and communication thereby causing a minimum of disruption in the political lives of citizens. The seven rural councils and one town council covering Honiara, the capital city, together covered all parts of the Solomons apart from Tikopia and Anuta which were two very remote Polynesian islands. These were administered directly by the central government.

Accompanying the council amalgamation exercise was a sub-council ward redelineation task that sought to reduce the number of wards which in some council areas gave a very low ration of one councillor for every 50 people. Ward redefinition was undertaken so as to achieve an average of 1,000 people per ward. Clearly, this aspect of the amalgamation exercise overlapped with the separate assignment of council internal organization. Before proceeding to this area, note must be taken that the amalgamation exercise was almost completely an administrator-initiated plan. What would be gained from this aspect of the reform experiment would be efficiency. The problem that would be created would be associated with the creation of too large units that subsumed widely different people in a multi-ethnic setting. The Makira and Ulawa amalgamation was problematic in this regard. The residents of Ulawa are mainly Polynesians with a different form of social organization than the Melanesians on Makira. The issue of mixing unrelated peoples and different social systems together would re-emerge again in 1978 during the tours taken by the Kausimae Committee on Decentralization. For some communities, it was preferable to be run efficiently by others. The

problem of multi-ethnic distrust underlies this proposition. The upshot would be the loss of a sense of identification with councils by the small units that were absorbed by the larger.

The problem of identification with council activities stemming partly from large size would re-emerge at the area committee level. The internal reorganization aspect of reforming local government was again efficiency oriented. While new committees and organizational relationships were prescribed leading to continuity and accountability in council affairs, the larger councils were inadequately linked to communities at the village level. One of the policy objectives of the local government reform was stated as follows:

In all areas and especially where amalgamations of small councils are proposed care should be taken to see that local government is functioning through informal area, sub-district, ward committees, that the work of such committees is understood, and supported, and that they have some resources for minor local projects and services.

If any item had equal if not prior salience to the efficiency aspects of the reform exercise, it would be the idea of enhancing local participation and cultivating a sense of belonging to a council. The structure of Solomon Island society would bedevil this task. As noted earlier, village communities were small scale units. Thousands of such societal fragments inhabit the plains, valleys, mountain sides, and atolls in a culturally diverse and linguistically fragmented country. The solution to one problem is often the curse or complication to another in this sort of social system. Hence, emphasis on council amalgamation so as to produce more efficiently run units simultaneously creates alienation among many village communities. The problem is to choose which goal is more significant: efficiency or identity?

When asked to comment on how strong the sub-council area committees were after nearly six years of the reform, the Ministry of Home Affairs replied:

Area or subdistrict committees have not been as successful as was hoped due mainly to the aims and functions being so informal that no clear direction has been given. A number of these committees seem to be interested in only their sitting allowances and few have initiated minor projects or services.<sup>14</sup>

It is noteworthy that the reason given for the failure was mainly administrative. In the same vein, the Ministry continued:

It will be essential for area councils to have definite stated functions to be backed by a small staff for administrative and financial control and to be accountable for their handling of public funds. There should also be adequate lines of communication between provincial assemblies and area committees to ensure an exchange of views, decisions, and policies.<sup>15</sup>

Insofar as the problem of inadequate performance by the area committees was organizational, the evaluation of the Ministry of Home Affairs was correct. In particular, our research confirmed the proposition that the lines of communication between area committees and the councils were woefully inadequate. In places where rugged mountains and widely distributed islands characterize a council's jurisdiction, these topographical features were often compounded by the lack of roads and vehicles. But these administrative and physical factors were only part of the problem with area committees.

It must be recognized that in the entire scheme of local government organization that the area committee was the main link with villagers. The area committees were small and coterminous with the cultural and physical limits of village communities. In a real sense, the area communities were the only face-to-face organization that was capable of committing the loyalty of villagers to local government. If properly constituted and adequately empowered to carry substantial functions, they could revitalize local initiative. One of the policy aims in fact attempted to provide for this aspect of the experiment:

Customary leaders or chiefs should be recognized as an important source of wisdom and leadership: they should have a consultative role in informal committees at area or subdistrict level.

When asked whether this part of the policy directives was implemented, the Ministry of Home Affairs candidly admitted:

It is debatable whether customary leaders or chiefs have had any influence over the work of local councils through the informal committees.<sup>16</sup>

Hence, a critical source of legitimacy in area committee affairs had not been successfully harnessed. It could be argued that local chiefs were no longer relevant



to the new and modern challenges of council affairs. This might be true insofar as technical know-how in project design and execution was concerned. But the usefulness of the chiefs was more pertinent at the level of approving a project and mobilizing local initiative to its support. Without these fundamental points, it is doubtful whether any project could adequately engage community support, identification, and pride.

It was discovered from this project that political rivalries and jealousies also hampered the operations of area committees. In direct competition were "modern" leaders and "traditional" leaders. The so-called modern leaders apart from being younger were persons with formal education and occupational skills. In some cases, a traditional leader who had obtained his position by descent, would also possess "modern" education and skills. For the most part, however, the position of an elected councillor was occupied by a "modern" type. Council seats were acquired by electoral competition; it had a measure of prestige and a variety of sitting and travel allowances. At the area committee level, leadership was non-elective and some funds were available for sitting allowances. Most councillors would conduct their duties over a diverse ward population and, while in theory they should consult the area committees for advice and information, often the consultative process was done directly or through separate village contacts. The area committee's limited funds but major task of collecting head tax probably further enfeebled its vitality. However, the main point here is that the "modern" leader found at the council level often did not attend area committee meetings. Instead he developed his own network of wantoks for information and requests from individual villages. The general effect was as follows: (1) The area committees lacked substantial powers and attracted some traditional leaders. It was responsible for collecting the head tax. Together, the incentives to attract able and recognized leaders were weak at this level. The funds that were available to area committees were allocated to the area councillors primarily in the form of sitting allowances. This practice further demeaned the prestige of the area committee not only as impotent but self-serving. (2) The provincial councillor was elected from several ethnic groups. Without a vibrant system of area committees to link him to the diverse communities, a councillor who was normally a full-time farmer or wage worker, had to rely on his own network to obtain feedback and demands from villagers. Often the network was weak and only sporadically tapped. Together these items point to feeble political linkages between council and village sentiment. Without area committees

being strengthened, citizen identification with and support for councils were found to be weak, sporadic, and indifferent.

The fact that administrators were allocated the task of implementing the council reforms to devolve powers and responsibilities inevitably led to greater emphasis being put on administrative and efficiency criteria in measuring success or failure. The political dimension, in particular, the mobilization of local support was not given more perfunctory attention. The elected councillors were left with a burden of operating with area committees which were weak and not given much encouragement to perform their limited roles actively. As it stood, the potentially pivotal position of area committees in tapping local leadership and catering to the issue of identity loss was starkly neglected in the reform exercise. To the councils, this task would be assigned. But they themselves plagued by their own administrative difficulties would not carry out this function of upgrading area committees adequately. The relatively easy business of drawing new organization maps with all efforts directed to building council headquarters facilities would take precedence over the most demanding undertaking of cultivating grassroots village sentiments.

In the other organizational aspects of the reform experiment, a major shift was required at the national level by the policy directives. A new ministry solely responsible for local government was to be created. From this focal point, a variety of tasks would be undertaken including planning, coordination, advising, monitoring, training, etc. In effect, radical reorganization at the bottom required radical reorganization at the top also. But more than that idea was the commitment to local initiative that such a new department would symbolize if the central government would ensure that it was adequately staffed and financed. In 1974, a Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) was established. The preponderant part of its function was Local Government; however, it was assigned other responsibilities as well. From the outset, two events would severely limit the capability of the ministry from carrying out the devolution of powers and functions effectively. First, the MHA was understaffed. Said a MHA submission:

. . . at one crucial time, the central ministry was run by one level 7, one level 5, one level 3, a typist, and a registry clerk. It has never had sufficient staff to cope adequately with all the functions outlined in the policy statement. Also, with the exception of a few months, no legal

officer has ever been appointed to the Home Affairs staff making it necessary to go through the often laborious process of seeking advice and consultation from the Attorney General's Chambers.<sup>17</sup>

The inadequate staff situation was partly created by the devolution process itself. The new councils required trained managerial staff to undertake their expanded functions. Many of these were transferred from MHA to them. But staff shortage was a minor problem as compared with the political viewpoints espoused by the staff. The Plan of Operations itself noted that the MHA should "help shape the attitudes and operations of all central government ministries and organizations."<sup>18</sup> It was acknowledged that some hostility was bound to be generated by the loss of functions that would be incurred by ministries and public servants in the devolution of responsibilities to the councils. For many years, public servants had operated from an administration that was highly centralist in structure. Public servants became very powerful people in the colonial setting because of this fact. At the local government level, district commissioners and their assistants had enormous powers and discretionary authority. Under the experiment in local reforms, both senior public servants and the district commissioners were slated for loss of powers. What would have a severe adverse effect on the new local councils would be the decision, on withdrawing all the district commissioners from the field, to place them in the Ministry of Home Affairs to implement the devolution of powers. In other words, a strong centralist viewpoint with vested interests was placed in a strategic position to frustrate the devolution of powers to local councils. Said the Plan of Operations in allocating this new assignment: "District Commissioners will remain for some time, as field officers of the Ministry of Home Affairs with responsibility for locally planning and coordinating local government reforms."<sup>19</sup>

The MHA became subsequently a symbol of resistance to the devolution of functions. Relations between the councils and MHA have grown progressively worse throughout the entire implementation period and beyond. When the researchers for this project arrived in the Solomon Islands, the malaise continued with no solution in sight. It soon became apparent, as we shall discuss later, that the MHA not only contained colonial staff that was suspicious of strong local governments but it was inspired and egged on by the centralist attitudes of those politicians in the government who regarded the devolution exercise as a threat to their own political careers. Suffice it to note here that when the reform began, the MHA's staff inadequacy might very well have been a blessing since the fewer

centralists available the greater the changes for devolution without interference. The attitude of MHA to hamstringing the local councils would be imitated by other ministries but for their own ends. In an attempt to pass on the blame for the deficiencies in implementing the policy aims of the reform, the MHA said to the Kausimae Committee:

Whilst the Government has stated the priority of development of local government the message has taken many years to reach certain ministries and initially there was obstruction and an attitude that the councils would fail and then ask the ministries to take back the services. When it was seen that this was not to happen attitudes gradually changed but often cooperation between ministry and council still remains poor.<sup>20</sup>

Our evidence from field analyses clearly pointed to the proposition that the transfer process threatened too many centers of concentrated power built up during the colonial period. The fact that those who were to lose from the experiment were asked to literally provide the skills for their own diminished prestige and power indicated a major deficiency in the implementation exercise. In the next section, we look at other political aspects of the experiment that would enter to further frustrate the devolution of powers.

#### B. Management and Financial Systems; Field Administration Functions; Staffing

The second set of policy objectives dealt mainly with seemingly technical and administrative tasks and with the transfer of staff and field functions. A graduated system of transfers of functions was adopted. The field administration functions to be transferred were:

- (1) administration
- (2) agriculture
- (3) health
- (4) works
- (5) education

The transfer of these field functions was orchestrated with the development of a council's financial and management capability to undertake and execute its new tasks efficiently. Hence, one of the policy objectives stated that:

. . . the first priority in achieving all these aims should be to strengthen and improve the management and financial systems of local government.

A training school was established to provide skilled personnel such as accountants for the councils. Staff was supplied from the public service seconded from various ministries in the central government to the councils. When the seconded staff was transferred, it was explicitly stated that they would be "placed under the operational control of local government." To complete this process, finance was to be provided via bloc grants to enable the councils to meet the costs of the new functions that were devolved to them. In this financial arrangement, it was stipulated that the cost of executing the new responsibilities "should not be a net expenditure increase . . . ." That is, at the very outset the new inexperienced councils had to perform at a level of efficiency similar to that of the central government. No concessions would be granted to novelty or inexperience.

By 1980, practically all the field items were transferred to the local councils. But along the way, three events were noteworthy: (1) the Honiara Town Council was suspended; (2) the health functions were re-centralized; and (3) a breakaway movement had emerged around the Western Council complaining about inadequate decentralization of functions and protection of provincial powers. We shall examine these cases in relation to the devolution exercise. But to understand the reasons why the transfer of powers, although completed in a mechanical sense, stirred so much public comment, and political dispute between the councils and the central government, we must analyze individually each of the first three policy principles under which the local government reform was to be implemented. These policy principles dealt with "relationships" between units and not merely with the transferred elements such as vehicles, public servants, etc.

- (1) "Local government should be developed and strengthened to become an important agent for development and services, and the coordinator of all forms of government activity in its area."

In this statement, the words "developed" and "strengthened" were related to the performance of two sets of roles: (i) services, and (ii) development. Great expectations were stirred widely in the public mind that the new councils would become vibrant vehicles for change in their respective provinces. What was to transpire, however, would be a long and on-going battle between the councils and the central government over the extent to which the former was equipped by the latter to carry out its tasks. The councils claimed that they were perennially understaffed and whatever staff they had were caught in a game of serving two

masters at the same time. All the council clerks, assistant clerks, presidents, secretaries, and ordinary members interviewed by us complained bitterly that they were understaffed causing significant problems in implementing their programs. This, in particular, occurred in the works division where engineering skills are required to execute the various council projects. When transfers and resignations occurred, another area of frustration was immediately created by the failure of the central government to recruit replacements swiftly. At least three councils felt that the problem of adequate staffing was so continual and frustrating that they disagreed with the concept of a single unified public service for the Solomon Islands. They wanted to take things literally into their own hands. They felt that should they be permitted to have their own public service, they would expeditiously attend to the issue of staffing. Investigations into the pervasive staffing problem showed that the blame was misplaced on the MHA. The bad feeling between the councils and the MHA had so intensified that any deficiency in local government operations was laid on the latter's doorstep. It was the Public Service Commission which was responsible for staff recruitment and training. Many of the vacancies at the council level required technical and tertiary backgrounds. Because of the shortage of such personnel among the indigenous population, this meant that expensive expatriate staff had to be recruited. The process could be protracted but when a public service commission fails to anticipate this problem in its recruitment procedures over several years of accumulated experience, then the complaints of the local councils about deliberate sabotage and non-cooperation by central government bureaucrats deserve a second look. Regardless of the accuracy of the charges of deliberate footdragging by the Public Service Commission, the significant point is that without adequate staff, basic council functions as well as development projects were not likely to be implemented. In turn, this reflected badly on council performance confirming the predictions of critics and pessimists that the councils could not be entrusted with extensive functions. The vicious circle between inadequate staff needs and implementation deficiencies had led to mutual recriminating charges between councils and the MHA about each other's efficiency rating. In the end, the councils began a concerted campaign for further reforms to give them more power over their affairs.

There was reason to believe that the central government had acted deliberately to slow down the pace of staff recruitment so as to maximize the use of scarce resources at the national level. The government had undertaken several

massive job-producing and revenue-generating projects requiring the use of all its skilled manpower at the national level. Council projects were not spectacular and were less capable of utilizing scarce skills efficiently. In any event, there is competition between the national bureaucracy and the local councils for skilled staff. This tension was anticipated and a prestigious regional organization had recommended the slowing down of decentralization as the solution:

An aspect related to the new Development Plan is the implementation of government proposals to decentralize decision making to provincial governments. This is seen as an important requirement if there is to be widespread involvement in development and decision-making processes in a country of widely scattered islands and poor transport and communication links. A major issue is the extent to which decentralization should be taken. Many of the projects, especially those of a resource development nature designed to expand export production, will necessarily involve general issues of central policy if the best use is to be made of resources and thus may be unsuitable for handling at the provincial level. Further, there is a question of the availability of trained manpower at all levels to enable decentralization to be effective. Such manpower, especially of Solomon Islands origin, is already very scarce and to thin it out further by too fast a rate of decentralization may prove counter-productive and detract from the notable progress that has already been made in establishing a strong economic base.<sup>21</sup>

It would appear that such advice would percolate to policy areas in the Solomon Islands government thereby affecting the availability of staff to local councils.

At another level, the staffing issue that emerged dealt with the loyalty of seconded staff to the councils. This was underlaid by the charge that the central government ministries continued to give direct orders to seconded staff in the field. The written arrangement in the Plan of Operations stated that seconded staff had to be operationally responsible to the clerk of a council. Our evidence on this charge shows that when the Plan of Operations was first being implemented, frequent interference by central government ministries did occur. By 1980, this problem was substantially resolved. Seconded staff received their instructions from the clerk of a council and this was recognized by the ministries. The problem became very acute partly because practically all senior level staff members

attached to the councils were seconded from central government ministries. All positions above level 4 were public service positions; others were direct council employees. In effect, nearly all the senior staff carrying out local council orders in the division of agriculture, works, education, administration, and health was derived from the central government. Their "seconded" status created an image of temporariness and consequently thwarted the development of loyalty to local issues. One top level official in MHA even disputed that the terms "seconded" was appropriate. He said the staff was "posted" suggesting that their final loyalty was not with the councils. It was felt that this ambiguousness of "seconded" status had created a problem of discipline at the local level.

Finally, on the idea that the "developed" and "strengthened" councils would coordinate "all forms of government activity in its area," this has not eventuated. In fact, because of staff shortages, the councils have voluntarily returned their responsibility for local courts to the national judiciary and constables to the national police commission. Overall, the performance in implementing "strengthened" councils with enlarged responsibilities has been mixed, but generally staffing has been the most difficult problem area.

The central government's commitment to the development of local government should be clear and consistent and its advisory and control systems should allow considerable local autonomy while ensuring that national interests are safe-guarded and developed.

The devolution of functions to local councils was not a simple mechanical exercise in administration. An intense struggle between the central government and local councils was initiated at the very inception of the exercise. The impression imparted was that the authorities at the center were forced into an experiment that they did not believe in. Evidence of sabotage and non-cooperation by functionaries in the ministries is not difficult to find. Indeed, a submission by MHA to the Kausimae Committee on Provincial Government admitted those early difficulties:

While the central government has stated the priority of development of local government, the message has taken many years to reach certain ministries and initially there was obstruction and an attitude that the councils would fail and then ask the ministries to take back the services.



When it was seen that this was not to happen, attitudes gradually changed but often cooperation between ministry and council still remains poor.<sup>22</sup>

The list of important charges against the central government included: (1) lack of respect for council decisions; (2) interference in the activities of staff seconded to local councils resulting in the undermining of council authority and leading to confusion and double loyalty; (3) lack of consultation with councils in formulating national legislation that were likely to affect council affairs; (4) failure to fill staff vacancies promptly resulting in frustrations in implementing council projects; and (5) continued growth of the central government staff establishments and activities at the same time that much of these items were supposed to be decentralized to local councils. The total effect of these practices, apart from stirring controversy and conflict between the central government and local authorities, was to limit the autonomy of the latter. The MHA in its submission to the Kausimae Committee noted that:

It is debatable whether local councils have considerable autonomy as yet and councils are bound to say not enough.<sup>23</sup>

This was an understatement but coming from one of the two primary parties in the controversy, it was a candid admission of the grave difficulties into which the experiment had fallen. What the statement failed to capture and communicate was the frustration and bitterness expressed by councils universally that the MHA had become an impenetrable barrier to council demands and aspirations. The MHA, on the other hand, had replied that councils were asking for more powers than were contemplated under the Plan of Operations. A stalemate marked by mutual suspicion and intolerance was the essential nature of the relationship between the MHA and the councils at the time research for this project was undertaken. The MHA felt it should not proceed further with devolving powers until the Kausimae Report on Provincial Government was acted upon by the central government. The councils attached less hope for a solution in the Kenilorea government, placing its demands for more autonomy on a possible change of government in the next elections.<sup>24</sup>

We have posited earlier that part of the explanation for the malaise between the central government and the local councils stemmed from the centralist orientation of certain staff who were charged with the responsibility of implementing the Plan of Operations. Further, we noted that the devolution

experiment entailed the loss of powers and functions from one locus (the ministries in the central government) to another (the new local councils). In turn, this provoked acts of non-cooperation by the ministries. Consequently, when the experiment was implemented, bitter struggles ensued. We suggested that other factors related to scarce resources, overload, and cultural values served as variables that limited the effectiveness of the implementation process. However, in the analysis up to this point we have only peripherally discussed the political factor as it was connected to the difficulties that the devolution experiment encountered.

The decision to devolve extensive functions and powers to subordinate units of government through the Plan of Operations occurred at a time when the national political arena was being enlarged. Constitutional changes were rapidly advancing towards the transfer of powers to Solomon Island institutions and leaders. For the first time, Solomon Islanders were to be made masters of their own political destiny. Operationally, this meant that powers were transferred from the imperial power overseas to institutions in a central government in the Solomon Islands. Those who were elected or selected to staff and direct the operations of the new central institutions such as the ministries and the public service would wield unprecedented political power. However, simultaneous with the transfer of extensive powers from the metropolitan base to the colonial country was the Plan of Operations which sought to transfer power from Honiara, the capital city, to local councils located predominantly in a rural periphery. In effect, two processes of decolonization were being undertaken at the same time. However, the two operations were not similar. At the national level, sovereign institutions in a unitary state were being created. Political power to make binding decisions for a new Solomon Island state was being transferred in this exercise. At the local level, however, through the Plan of Operations, mainly administrative functions were being devolved. A grey area related to the proportion of political to administrative powers to be transferred to local councils was very evident. There was no question that the local councils were units subordinate to the will of the central government. What was not clearly and adequately spelled out was the amount of political autonomy local councils would have in undertaking to execute the new functions transferred to them. This became a cause of bitter dispute as was pointed out earlier. The main reason stemmed from political motivations and interests.

To the local occupants of the new central institutions were entrusted the responsibility of maintaining national unity and protecting national interests. In relation to the local government reform contemplated under the Plan of Operations, it was stated that "the central government's commitment to the development of local government . . . should allow for considerable local autonomy while ensuring that national interests are safeguarded and developed." The idea of a "national interest" was a new one. There was no clear definition of its main features. It was left to those who controlled the institutions of the central government to determine its content and meaning. Inevitably, this would tempt the new national leaders to confuse "national interest" with "personal political interest." To the inheritors of sovereign political power will the task of separating national interest from personal political interest fall. We believe that the experiment in local government devolution would become an early victim to the tensions inherent in this issue.

By 1976, it had become clear that indigenous competition for control of the new central government was between two main personalities: (1) Peter Kenilorea; and (2) Solomon Mamaloni. Kenilorea was the contestant for the position of Chief Minister and at independence the coveted post of Prime Minister. Mamaloni who was the first Chief Minister resigned from Parliament after a scandal had tarnished the image of his government. While Kenilorea slowly consolidated his control over the central government, Mamaloni and many of his sympathizers agitated for a system of decentralized provincial government. Hence, the experiment in local government devolution became a central issue over which political competition at the highest level in the Solomons was conducted. Mamaloni wanted to return to power as much as Kenilorea wanted to stay in office. Mamaloni's agitation for greater provincial autonomy was seen as a strategy to weaken the central government as well as to transfer powers to sympathetic politicians at the provincial level. David Kausimae, a close associate of Mamaloni, was subsequently to become chairman of the Committee on Provincial Government. This Committee toured the Solomon Islands extensively, received frequent and widespread publicity, and finally recommended extensive decentralization of functions and powers to the local councils. The Kenilorea government saw the Kausimae Report as a political device intended to enfeeble it and eventually remove it from office. The Kausimae Committee was very critical of the manner in which the central government undertook its responsibility to devolve powers to local councils. The Committee

sympathized with the multitude of complaints that the councils advanced against the MHA. More powers were recommended for the councils.

As a political vehicle, the Kausimae Committee was suspect. Appointed by Parliament, the Committee was a concession by the central government to accelerate the wheels towards independence.<sup>25</sup> The Chairman of the Committee, David Kausimae, was leader of one of the small opposition parties in Parliament. He was subsequently to become the Chairman of the People's Alliance Party, the main opposition party after the July 1980 general elections. The People's Alliance Party nominated Solomon Mamaloni as its chief spokesman and political leader. Mamaloni became Opposition Leader in Parliament. In August 1981, Mamaloni succeeded Kenilorea as Prime Minister. In these respects, the Kausimae Report posed as a threat to the Kenilorea government. If the central government should accede to an extensively decentralized system of local government, not only would it lose more political and administrative powers to local councils, but the Kausimae-Mamaloni coalition would receive the praise for this achievement. The beneficiaries of a decentralized provincial government system would be local councils renamed provincial councils which would owe a major political debt to the Kausimae-Mamaloni group. Give that elections were scheduled within a year of the Kausimae Report in 1979, the Kenilorea Government decided to accept the Report for further action. Such action would be deferred until after the general elections. In the interim, a government White Paper on provincial government was prepared. The White Paper which was accepted by Parliament approved the general ideas of the Kausimae Report but left ample room for changes when the Paper is translated into law.

The manner in which the central government approached issues on devolution underscored the political interests that had come to dominate the entire experiment in local initiative particularly after 1976. The Kenilorea-led government would be under heavy pressure to decentralize further powers but would react to these proposals by utilizing delaying tactics and by invoking "national interest" considerations. In effect, it became difficult to disentangle the political interest to maintain power from the national interest. We shall examine briefly three cases in which these themes were intertwined: (1) the suspension of the Honiara Town Council, the Medical Health Act of 1978, and (3) the Western breakaway movements.

## 1. The Suspension of the Honiara Town Council

The Honiara Town Council was established in 1969 under the Local Government Act of 1963. The council was responsible for local government in the country's capital. It was endowed with powers and functions similar to that of other local councils in the Solomon Islands. However, as a subordinate unit of government in a unitary system, the Town Council was creature to the wishes of the central government. According to the Local Government Act, the council could be suspended and dissolved by the Minister for Home Affairs without consultation or approval of Parliament.

As party politics gradually became a salient aspect of national political life, various centers of power became arenas of partisan contest and control. After the 1976 general elections, a Peter Kenilorea-led government came into existence.<sup>26</sup> Simultaneously, a labor-based party called NADEPA (National Democratic Party) became the main Opposition (1976-80) in Parliament. Led by Bart Ulufaalu, NADEPA decided to contest the elections also for seats in the Honiara Town Council. NADEPA candidates and sympathizers won most of the seats thereby gaining control of the council in the 1979 elections.

From the town council chambers where the national Opposition leader simultaneously held a seat and chaired the council's finance committee, NADEPA was able to become a vocal critic of the national government. In the same capital city, then, the headquarters of two governments were located. The Kenilorea government faced NADEPA not only in the national parliament, but in addition, faced opposition criticisms from the town council chambers less than half a mile away. NADEPA was, therefore, able to command considerable national attention to challenge the day-to-day performance of the Kenilorea regime. General elections which were due in July 1980 could possibly witness serious setbacks to Kenilorea and his United Party because of the strategic hold that NADEPA had over the Honiara Town Council.

In April 1980, the Minister for Home Affairs on behalf of the central government suspended and dissolved the Honiara Town Council giving as the main reason "financial mismanagement." Said the Minister in giving his reasons:

As Minister with Portfolio responsible for the affairs of the Honiara Town Council, I have for some time been worried about its financial situation. Two aspects give rise to particular concern: the mounting burden of

undischarged debt and the lack of financial control which appears to have contributed to this.<sup>27</sup>

The Minister then requested the Auditor-General to investigate the charge of financial mismanagement. What was significant in this regard was that the suspension preceded the Auditor-General's report. Attending the suspension was intense media coverage of the event. The accusation of wrongdoing spilled over to tarnish the image of the Opposition Leader and NADEPA. With general elections only a few months away, most observers agreed that the suspension was a carefully calculated act intended to fulfill the narrow political interests of the Kenilorea government in the forthcoming elections. Interviews carried out by the research team in this project confirmed that NADEPA's overwhelming defeat in the general elections was partly attributable to the negative image that the charge of financial mismanagement by a NADEPA-controlled council had on the public's perception of the political parties in the elections.

The auditor-general's report exonerated the Town Council from the charge of financial mismanagement, but it came too late to erase the damage inflicted on NADEPA. Said the Auditor-General's report:

At the time of audit, the revenue collected according to the ledger and after allowing for items b, c, d, and e above was practically in line with the Estimates. On the expenditure side the ledger showed underspending of approximately \$194,000, but against this, of course, must be set net outstanding debt, detailed in paragraph 12 of \$201,000. It can be seen, therefore, that the overall position was very little different to that approved in the Estimates.<sup>28</sup>

The blatant nature of the suspension order was underscored by the fact that the charges made against the Town Council were about events committed in 1979 by a previous council that had since been superseded by a new group of councillors after the September 1979 elections. It was never explained why the new council controlled by NADEPA had to bear the blame of the previous council's alleged transgressions. Finally, the political motivations that underlied the suspension of the council were adequately borne out when note was made of the fact that the local councils across the country habitually overspent by large amounts without suffering dissolution.

## 2. The Recentralization of Health Services

In June 1979, a Health Services Act was passed by the Solomon Islands Parliament resulting in the recentralization of a variety of health services which were transferred several years ago to local councils under the Plan of Operations. No local council was consulted or informed about the measure before it became law. The passage through Parliament of the Health Services Act was as arbitrary as it was swift, rendering into shambles many years of careful planning under which local councils received substantial functions in the area of medical and health care.

Under the Local Government Act of 1963, the new local councils were empowered "to safeguard and promote public health"; "to provide health and medical services"; "to operate clinics, aid posts, dressing stations and health centers"; "to operate hospitals and referral centers"; and "to establish, maintain and control cemeteries or burial grounds" (Section 22). These were potential functions that councils could perform when they were deemed prepared to undertake them. When the Plan of Operations came into existence, health services were deemed prepared to undertake them. When the Plan of Operations came into existence, health services were distributed between the central and local governments as follows:<sup>29</sup>

Central: National policy, legislation, standards, staff training and registration. Principal referral and teaching hospitals; specialist services. Central procurement of supplies; major campaigns and central recording and reporting machinery. Coordination of measures against major health threats. Capital and recurrent aid to local government and provision of staff on secondment.

Local: Provision of all rural health services and hospitals. Public health and preventative measures. Collaboration with central government in campaigns and epidemiological measures.

A dispute developed between the Ministry of Medical Services and Health at the national level and the Malaita Provincial Council at the local level. The crux of the problem stemmed from the transfer of a medical doctor seconded from the Ministry to the council. Complaints over the performance of the doctor in question at a provincially-run hospital had reached the Ministry. The normal channel for

complaints to be acted upon would lead first to the provincial council, then the national Ministry. The Malaita Council insisted that the seconded doctor remain in the service of the province. The Ministry in turn demanded that he be transferred to another province. Failure to resolve the dispute led to the enactment of the Health Services Act of June 1979. Under the Act the Minister of Health was empowered to "make arrangements as appear to him desirable" to compel any provincial council to carry out health services "as an agent of the Ministry."<sup>30</sup> Also, the Act stated that councils would be called upon to "provide, equip, and maintain" their own clinics with "advice and assistance" from the Ministry of Health.<sup>31</sup>

The Health Services Act was almost a clandestine operation. Neither Malaita nor any other province was aware of its introduction as a bill in Parliament. What was even more intriguing about this Act was that it was only applied to the Malaita provincial council. When interviews with other councils about the Health Act were carried out as part of this project, it was discovered that no other council had its health services recentralized. Clearly, the central government sought to solve a minor dispute by utilizing a massive form of remedy. The crucial point was that a Health Services Act with sweeping powers of recentralization was used almost casually even though it threatened to undo a major part of the devolution exercise.

Further investigation of the background of the Health Services Act yielded evidence that the Ministry of Medical Services and Health had the worst relationship with councils among central ministries over the transfer of functions. The Malaita Council noted that even after health functions were transferred to local councils, "direct orders were issued by the Ministry to seconded nursing staff, posting them to undertake Ministry functions, without consultation with the Province or working through the proper channels."<sup>32</sup> The upshot was the undermining of the authority of local councils in directing the duties of seconded staff.

### 3. The Western Breakaway Movement

The Western Province is one of seven provinces in the Solomon Islands. It contains about 20 percent of the country's total population and occupies about 30 percent of the land area. The evidence on comparative regional economic well-being presented earlier shows that the Western Province is the most developed part



of the Solomons. The Western Provincial Council, which represents the western region, demanded, prior to the Solomon Islands' independence, a federal form of government for the country as a whole. The Western submission stated:

It is envisaged that when the state government system is established, it is highly desirable that the national constitution should define the areas of responsibilities, functions, and powers which would regulate and justify the existence and activities of the central and state governments, and in so doing the central government and the state should be self-ruling coordinate bodies rather than subordinate to each other as is the case under the present system of government.<sup>33</sup>

Several reasons motivated the West to seek such a constitutional arrangement. In the Solomon Islands' multi-ethnic setting, the West held a minority status both in population and in parliamentary representation. "Malaitan domination" was a major Western concern. Fear of "internal colonialism" that would diminish the pre-eminent standing of the West's economic well-being led the West to charge that it obtained less in benefits from the central government than it paid in revenues. Further, the West argued that centralizing forces were at work in the national government.<sup>34</sup> Local initiative was being stifled. The philosophy and practice of the government, it was charged, tended to emphasize a centralist approach to nation-building, final decision making, and ultimate direction in most significant matters. In this scheme of things, local government units such as Western Province, were relegated to serve as an agent of the central government merely carrying out decisions made at the center. Said the Western submission to the central government:

The present local government Councils act only as local coordinators, overseers, and agents of the central government's plans and policies.<sup>35</sup>

The Westerners requested a system of government that returned initiative to them for local development. They wanted a meaningful division of powers entrenched in a constitution. When maximum powers were assigned to them, they wanted to ensure that the concession was not a temporary measure that could be easily revoked at the convenience of the central government. Hence, they demanded a federal arrangement in which separate spheres of exclusive powers could be created.

The response of the central government was based on fear. Such sweeping powers, if extended to the West, would be but one short step to full independence. What was equally alarming about the West's demands was the encouragement concessions might give to other self-differentiating groups in the Solomons. The accommodation of diversity through adopting a federal system could drive the various linguistic and island groups further apart. National unity would be thwarted. These were some of the underlying views of the central government. However, narrow political motivations were also at work. The West's demands could only be met by the loss of significant functions and powers by politicians and bureaucrats who prospered at the level of the central government. The alterations to the political system would be fundamental. New centers of power would be created at the provincial level. In addition, decentralization would entail transfers of public personnel from the capital city to rural provincial centers.

The central government's response attempted to placate the West's demand for more financial benefits by introducing a system of "deprivation" grants. Under this formula, the different regional councils received central government grants in proportion to the monetary value of their economic contribution to production. There were other elements in the final formula that was adopted. However, the symbolic aspects of Western demands dealing with decentralization and internal colonialism were unattended. The central government acceded to the formation of a parliamentary committee to solicit views and make recommendations for a system of provincial government. This was conceded as a means of temporarily relieving secessionist tensions generated by the Western movement. David Kausimae was appointed Chairman of the Committee. Independence was finally attained on July 7, 1978, but the issue of decentralization remained unsolved. The report of the Kausimae committee advocated an extensive system of decentralized powers short of a complete federal system. The Kenilorea government which postponed facing the issue of decentralization by creating the Kausimae committee had discovered that the demands would not go away by delaying tactics. Failure to grant extensive powers to local councils through temporizing had led to a build-up of further frustrations. The act of postponement had exacerbated provincial-central government malaise. The Kausimae Report, in turn, had underscored the urgency for action.

We can set forth graphically the government's response to the three issues briefly examined.

Issue	Demand	Response
1. Western Breakaway	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Greater provincial autonomy</li> <li>2. Powers similar to a federal system</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kausimae Committee; fear of national fragmentation at national interest level; fear of loss of powers to provinces creating a weak central government; fear of loss of political power.</li> </ol>
2. Honiara Town Council	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To be left alone.</li> <li>2. To be treated equally to other local councils.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Suspension; Discrediting of Opposition Party in preparation for elections.</li> </ol>
3. Medical Health Act	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To recognize the powers and functions devolved to provinces.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Re-centralization of health functions.</li> </ol>

These three cases suggested that the Kenilorea government placed its own political future as a matter of first priority in implementing reform in local or provincial government. In the Honiara Town Council case, it dissolved an entire local council so as to discredit the Opposition party. The government was oblivious of the repercussions this action would have for local autonomy. Primarily, local councils lived thereafter in fear that they would also be suspended if they happened to espouse political views or to harbor political parties with views contrary to that of the government. The Honiara Town Council case established a precedent that any deficient performance by a council can be used as an excuse to rein a provincial council into line with central government wishes. The Honiara Town Council suspension brought vividly to the surface the meaning of "national interest" to the Kenilorea government. The Medical Health Act case pointed to the arbitrariness and inconsistency that overshadowed the experiment in devolution.

One of five major functions transferred to the local councils was in a single stroke recentralized. No council was consulted. The Act was pushed through Parliament without ceremony. It would be difficult to argue in support of recentralizing an entire division because of a minor personnel problem over a medical doctor. This could only happen where the transfer of functions was regarded lightly by MHA. Finally, there are many perspectives from which the Western breakaway movement can be analyzed. For our purposes, the Western movement summarized the demands by local authorities for greater involvement in decisions affecting their lives. The government's response was intended to "buy time" by appointing the Kausimae Committee. It hoped that the problem would disappear. It is, in effect, a dangerous if not irresponsible form of national policy making to promote the national interest.

Overall, the central government's attitude to the devolution of local initiative to provincial councils was motivated to preserve its own political power. Because the devolution exercise became intermixed with the quest and competition for control of the central government, its course was marked by general inconsistency. Not much of a sense of local autonomy had been imparted. "National interest" had provided a useful cover to conceal the political interest of those who governed. In one notable interview with a council president, he referred to the central government's commitment to the development of local government and autonomy as "a lot of talk." What he meant was that the governing regime had not discarded the rhetoric of decentralization but in practice it acted to strengthen the powers of the central government.

- (3) "There should be a well-understood division of functions between central and local government based on the principle that all those functions which in the opinion of the governing council could best be performed by a well-established local authority should be progressively allocated to local government."

In the implementation of the Plan of Operations the phrase "transfer of functions" was used very frequently. Rarely, however, was the enabling phrase "transfer of powers" used. It is from the connection of these two phrases which would lead to confusion. In speaking of "transfer of functions," the idea communicated was that of an administrative exercise in which councils merely served as agents of central government fiat. However, the phrase "transfer of

powers" communicated the idea of autonomous decision making. Any plan that advocated devolution of functions must inevitably entail the means by which the functions were to be executed. Yet it was precisely in this area of powers that the most bitter inter-governmental disputes would transpire.

There was implicit fear in the Plan of Operations to discuss "powers" to be transferred as against "functions." In a submission to the Kausimae Committee, the MHA argued that it was asked by councils to transfer more powers than were intended by the Plan of Operations. Interviews with officials of several councils, however, indicated that their uncertainty about the extent of their powers required them to consult too frequently with MHA officials about their activities.

The MHA was partly forthright in commenting on the clear division of functions when it said:

. . . in the transfer of functions . . . there are still many areas ill-defined and confusion exists as to the control of staff and certain capital projects. Indeed, in some ministries still there is some doubt as to the role of local councils.<sup>36</sup>

This statement was part of the MHA submission to the Kausimae Committee in 1978, that is, five years after the Plan of Operations was first implemented. At the time of research, in the area of staffing, the question of loyalty and source of direction had been resolved for the most part. The clerks of councils gave orders to all seconded staff from the central government. However, new ways of interference with staff had been designed. The most extensively used strategem was the use of inquiries and requests for information from the central government ministries about activities in the provinces. In these "inquiries," guidelines were directly and indirectly dispensed.

The recentralization of powers in the Health Act pointed to another area of clarity or lack of clarity in the division of functions. Although it was clear where immediate power resided in field Health services, the ministry of Medical and Health Services decided to bypass the powers of councils in directing a seconded staff member to a new post. That is, even where clarity of division in functions existed, that was not enough to empower the Ministry of Health to act within its sphere of authority.

Areas in which local councils contended that they lacked well-understood powers were land and natural resources. The councils regarded control over the use of provincial land and resources as their own exclusive monopoly. Because they had very limited powers to raise their own revenue depending on the central government for over 70 percent of all their funds, they demanded powers to decide on the use of their land and natural resources. All councils felt very strongly about their dependency on the central government for revenues. They wanted an independent revenue base which could be employed as they wished in directing council projects and activities.

The central government on the other hand was concerned about the loss of control over councils if they were to become relatively independent of external financing. Further, some provinces better endowed with resources, were likely to benefit from private and foreign investment more than other provinces. The problem of provincial inequality could be the cause of national disunity. Finally, control over the use of land, in particular, could conflict with the constitutional provisions allowing freedom of movement of all citizens. Several councils were likely to misuse this power to exclude other provincial residents from migrating or working wherever they wished.

In the end, the implementation process did not create clear-cut divisions of functions and powers to avert confusion. Many areas of ambiguity existed. These were clouded by controversy not only over division of functions, but demands for more functions and powers by local councils. When the political aspects of the issue are considered, it is clear that "powers" meant autonomous decision-making devolved to councils. The impulse of the central government was to deconcentrate administrative functions without relinquishing much decision-making powers to councils. The interest of the councils were diametrically opposed seeking to maximize decision-making at the grassroots level. The acrimony over this controversy would grow to a swell of demands from the periphery for a re-evaluation of the entire devolution exercise under the Plan of Operations. The issue exploded in menacing proportions when one province, the West, sought either more provincial autonomy or else full independence via secession. The upshot was the Kausimae Inquiry to which we turn next.

## Footnotes to Chapter Five

<sup>1</sup>J. L. Pressman and A. Wildavsky, Implementation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 177-194.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Lipsky, "Standing the Study of of Policy Implementation on Its Head" in American Politics and Public Policy, editors, W. Dean Burnham and Martha Wagner Weinberg (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1968), Ch. 16.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Extracted from The Plan of Operations, Appendix, pp. 21-22.

<sup>5</sup>See Ralph R. Premdas and Stephen Pokawin, Decentralization: The Papua New Guinea Experiment (Waigani: University of Papua New Guinea Press, 1979). See David Kausimae's piece in the same volume.

<sup>6</sup>Plan of Operations, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>12</sup>1974-75 Agricultural Statistics Survey, Feb. 1978.

<sup>13</sup>Population Census 1976, Preliminary Results, March, 1976.

<sup>14</sup>Ministry of Home Affairs Submission to Kausimae Committee, No. 35, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>18</sup>Plan of Operations, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>MHA Submission to Kausimae Committee, No. 35, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup>South Pacific Agricultural Survey: Choices and Constraints (Asian Development Bank, Manila, 1975), p. 381.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>MHA Submission to the Kausimae Committee No. 35, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup>For a study of the elections, see Ralph R. Premdas and Jeffrey S. Steeves, "The Solomon Islands: The First Elections Since Independence" in Peter Lamour, editor, Politics and Government in the Solomon Islands (Suva: Institute for Pacific Studies, 1981).

<sup>26</sup>See John Chick, "Electoral Politics in the Solomon Islands," Pacific Perspective, June, 1980.

<sup>27</sup>See appendix to the Auditor-General's Report on the Suspension of the Town Council (typed), Honiara, 1980.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>See Plan of Operations, Section 3: 24.

<sup>30</sup>The Health Services Act, 1979, section 10.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., section 12.

<sup>32</sup>Minutes of the Malaita Council, June 1979, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup>The Western Submission to the Kausimae Committee, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>MHA Submission to the Kausimae Committee.



## CHAPTER SIX

### THE COMMITMENT TO PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

The Plan of Operations which had set out to devolve a measure of responsibility to local councils fell into an administrative quagmire. Widespread grassroots protests against the manner in which it was implemented came swiftly on its heels. In a sense, the Plan provoked a sleeping tiger into a marauding animal. Promising in its rhetoric development and respect for local initiative, the central government succeeded in evoking complaints of bad faith. Confronted with frequent and vociferous demands to devolve more powers to the peripheralized local councils, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) countered that the people expected more from the reform than was promised. The tension between council demands and central government recalcitrance would progressively deteriorate into an unhealthy atmosphere incapable of supporting cooperation in inter-governmental relations. A stalemate of mutual distrust and disrespect between the parties persisted unto the time of this research undertaking. Regardless of the claims and counter-claims, it cannot be gainsaid that the implementation of the Plan of Operations did instigate new impetus towards extensive local autonomy. The case of the Western province's demand for a federal structure to safeguard its regional interests was not necessarily an extreme expression of the sentiment for devolution across the Solomons. What would demonstrate beyond doubt that people practically everywhere wanted government closer to them, responsive to their needs and under their control, was the Kausimae Committee of Inquiry into provincial government. While the appointment of the Kausimae Committee was a tactic by the Kenilorea government to facilitate the movement of the colony towards independence under its control, the impact of the protracted inquiry was to activate and mobilize demands for further devolution. Touring the country extensively and convening meetings with villagers to solicit their views, the Kausimae committee commanded the attention of the media continually for nearly two years. The decentralization issue literally explored as an intractable problem bedevilling the central government. It could not be swept under the rug or rendered stale by procrastination. Its appetite for attention was fueled by the approach of new elections in 1981, the first since independence. The demand for decentralized provincial government was

associated by a number of candidates with meaningful decolonization, symbolizing a return of power to the people. In this chapter we examine the Kausimae Inquiry and its findings.

The Special Committee on Provincial Government was given extremely broad terms of reference and included in its membership David Kausimae as Chairman, backbench M.P.'s who did not hold ministerial portfolios and the Presidents of the seven provinces. The Special Committee undertook a thorough-going review of provincial government including extensive tours by sub-committees of the country to hold public meetings in each of the provinces. In response to Western demands, the full committee spent two days in Western Province at a special meeting called just before Independence.<sup>3</sup> The committee received and considered a wide range of briefs, drew upon background and option papers and had the advice of three external advisers as well as a full-time secretary. Decisions taken by the Special Committee were based on consensus and the Special Committee decided in August 1978 to circulate a draft of its report to seek the reaction of provincial assemblies and ministries of the central government before proceeding in March 1979 to produce the final draft for presentation to Parliament in May 1979. This extra-consultative device added to the aura and legitimacy of the Committee's report. In addition, the Chairman and Secretary made two visits abroad to study the decentralization experiment in Papua New Guinea and the system of state government in Malaysia.

In the past, the decentralization process had been subject to administrative direction and control. The political leadership affirmed the principle and commitment to decentralization but left the design and pace of reform to the central bureaucracy. Not surprisingly, senior public servants defined decentralization in highly technical and pragmatic terms. Policy evolved from an evolutionary and incremental process which determined local government reform as a series of administrative readjustments. These readjustments reflected central perceptions and preferences.

The report of the Special Committee changed the entire context and substance of decentralization away from the technical, pragmatic and realist approach of the administration. In its place, the Report provided an ideological framework or set of ideas, characteristic of a mobilization approach to decentralization, which stood to be a coherent whole. In conceptual terms, the Report

marked a real distance from the past, including fascinatingly, the submissions presented to the Committee. Let us offer several examples of this new approach. From the very beginning, the Special Committee denied a view which would suggest that decentralization might threaten and undermine national unity.

The committee believed that centralization does not necessarily encourage national unity, and that decentralization does not necessarily discourage it. Political decentralization can work both ways: providing a base to challenge unity, or a base for building unity. It depends on the time, the circumstances, the systems of decentralization and how it is used. The committee believed that for some time after Independence, decentralization of power will be necessary for national unity . . . . The system the committee has recommended—particularly the method of division of powers—is based on cooperation not conflict. It assumes a unitary state with devolution and local autonomy within it: technically, it is a "unitary devolved" system.<sup>4</sup>

Although the Special Committee was enjoined in its letters of appointment that "no recommendation should be made which increases substantially the cost of local government administration,"<sup>5</sup> the Special Committee took a unique view of the cost constraint. This view was based on the important realization that the political development of new institutions was at stake:

The recommendations offer opportunities for saving and spending money. Even if the system ends up costing more, the costs must be measured against the benefits in political development and national unity. The costs must also be measured against the costs of alternatives, particularly the costs of continuing centralisation, including—administrative delay; the costs about failure to consult about projects early on; poor coordination in the field; cutting off local initiatives.<sup>6</sup>

The most revealing example, however, marks a critical point of departure from the past—that is, decentralization is fundamentally a political process where new centers of political power are created which open up new political opportunities and lead to the formation of a new political leadership. At issue are political questions, not just simply a series of administrative reforms and rearrangements:

The Committee felt that decentralization of government should be a political process. It should involve the development of institutions that would provide opportunities for local leadership, participation and responsibility. These institutions should be based in local communities and provide a place for traditional leadership. Independence, and the negotiations that led to it, brought political changes at the centre, but fewer changes outside. People sometimes talked about a need for "political education" but often only meant instructing other people about what had already been decided in Honiara (or London). Committees went on tour, but the institutions they reported to were in Honiara. The Committee felt that the development of political institutions is an essential part of the whole process of development.<sup>7</sup>

The Special Committee, therefore, marks a major break with the administrative direction and control of decentralization. The reassertion of the preeminence of the political and not the administrative process is reflected throughout the Report. Consider, for example, the following statement:

Part of the framework for provincial government is already set out in the national constitutions (which, for example, brings provincial assembly members under the Leadership Code). The rest of the framework should be designated to encourage provincial and local leaders to make their own decisions, and to make sure they have the resources, time and good advice to use the opportunities the framework provides.<sup>8</sup>

This challenge for a fundamental change in the approach to decentralization and a corresponding transfer of powers and resources sufficient to realize it in practice is forced upon the National Parliament. Decentralization, from the Committee's perspective, requires an act of political will and, moreover, national politicians must be aware of and support the political dimensions of the process.

Although the Report covers the full range of concerns associated with provincial government, the core recommendations and reforms appear under the headings of Political Leadership and Structure, Powers and Functions, Finance, Staff and Relations Between Governments.

The basic structure of provincial government includes elected provincial assemblies with four-year terms of office which have the power to coopt a paramount chief and representatives of church, business and community interests.

National parliamentarians and civil servants could not be so coopted. Further, if they intend to seek election to a provincial assembly, national parliamentarians and civil servants must resign their positions upon nomination for election. In addition, national parliamentarians should be invited to attend meetings of the provincial assembly but they may only do so if invited. Coordination between politicians at the two levels would be achieved by the creation of coordinative committees:

Each provincial assembly and the Honiara City Council must establish a co-ordinating committee in which its members meet regularly with members of National Parliament constituencies in the province or city to discuss common problems, future policies and proposed laws.<sup>9</sup>

Provincial assemblies would operate as legislative bodies in every sense of the word. The chief executive and political head of each province, designated the Premier, would be chosen from among members of the Assembly on nomination and by means of a vote. The same process for selection of a Prime Minister in the National Assembly would operate in the case of a Premier. A vote of no-confidence in the Premier could be held on a week's notification and would require a two-thirds majority. The executive as a whole could either be chosen from among members of the Assembly by the Premier or by the body as a whole depending upon each province's determination. The minimum and maximum size of the executive would also be left to provincial decision. Similarly, the structure of the Executive was subject to various alternative methods of operation: "They may carry out their duties—by working together in a single executive committee, by forming special subject committees or by accepting individual responsibility for particular subjects."<sup>10</sup> As with the Premier, the members of the Executive must hold the confidence of the assembly. The Assembly could be dissolved at any time providing notice of motion to do so was given in sufficient time and a majority of the members voted in support through a secret ballot.

To highlight the essential political nature of provincial government and the pivotal role of the Premier as a political leader, the Committee made provision for the post of political secretary to the Premier or Mayor. As the Committee stated:

The political secretary should act as advisor to the premier or mayor, and should not be allowed to give instructions to civil servants or direct employees of provincial governments or the Honiara city council.<sup>11</sup>

This position would be open to recruitment from either inside or outside the civil service and would have a salary range reflecting the significance of the new role.

In addition to provincial level institutions and relationships, provision was made in the Report for the creation of a further tier of local government units below the councils. To cite the Report:

An Act of the National Parliament should say that local governments must be set up in every province; and must be given protection in the provincial constitutions . . . against being arbitrarily suspended, dissolved or deprived of their powers, functions and sources of revenue.<sup>12</sup>

The Report envisaged that such structures would be dominated by traditional leaders selected according to local custom rather than election. In such cases, it would be important to assure that other interests were represented by means of co-optation. These new local units, their area of jurisdiction, their size and how members were to be selected, would be matters of provincial government determination.

Unlike previous references to area committees and local level village politics, the Report was careful to make certain that the new grassroots units would become significant and assure local participation in development. The Committee suggested the following provisions:

An Act of the National Parliament should say that the new subprovincial local government units must . . . .

- have the power to act, collect and decide how to spend the taxes and fees . . . including basic rate;
- have the power to make by-laws under provincial laws . . .
- be consulted before provincial laws are made . .
- be capable of receiving from the provincial governments law-and policy-making powers . . . revenue-raising powers . . . and responsibility for carrying out government functions . . . provided that the recipient agrees; and
- be endowed with disciplinary powers to be delegated to local government clerks . . . to see that civil servants and direct employees of provincial governments in rural areas attend relevant meetings and work together with local governments.<sup>13</sup>

The Kausimae Report in its overview on these grassroots units came to the point of suggesting a federal approach whereby their powers and relationships to other levels of government are entrenched in the country's constitution.

A major contribution of the Kausimae Report lay in its approach to the issue of the division of powers between the central and provincial levels of government. In the past, the situation with respect to provincial power depended heavily on the discretion of the central government, to make room within its powers, for provincial action. By the dependent nature of the relationship, provincial action required ministerial approval and could be overridden by the predominant force of national laws. In this situation of uncertainty and dependence, the Committee outlined the result:

The committee found that provincial assemblies have not made full use of the powers they have because—(a) they did not always know they had them; (b) they did not know how far they could go without being overruled; (c) they lacked sufficient skilled, committed or trained staff to advise them; (d) they lacked money or staff to carry out their decisions; or (e) they were told that they could not do what they wanted.<sup>14</sup>

Essentially, to resolve the dilemma of provincial ineffectualness, the Special Committee adopted a decentralist approach. In this, the Committee, after having undertaken an intensive effort to tap popular opinion, used the popular demand that provincial government should be given more power and greater autonomy to legitimate their proposals for far-reaching changes.<sup>15</sup> These changes were based upon "the power to make laws and policies on more subjects and the right to have the final say on certain subjects."<sup>16</sup> At a minimum, the decentralist approach required a clear definition and description of powers and responsibilities for each of the two levels of government. To quote the Report,

The Committee decided that the simplest and most effective way of—(a) giving effect to its recommendations about the division of powers between the national and provincial government; and (b) securing provincial autonomy within a united Solomon Islands was the scheme outlined below. The scheme has three main elements —(a) a list of subjects on which provincial assemblies have the final power to make laws and policies (List A); (b) a list of subjects on which provincial assemblies may make laws and

policies, but on which the National Parliament has, once it has consulted the provinces, the final say (List B); and (c) the vesting of final authority over all unlisted subjects in the National Parliament (with provision for consultation with provinces affected by laws and policies on some of these subjects).<sup>17</sup>

The entire thrust of the Special Committee's recommendations was calculated to ". . . make space for provincial governments."<sup>18</sup> Lists A, B and C are presented in an Appendix at the end of this monograph.

The Special Committee's overview of the reforms of powers and functions of the provinces and central government anticipated four major consequences for the decentralization process. First, in place of a narrow view of provincial power which would focus exclusively on law-making, the Special Committee argued that policy-making powers for the relevant subject areas would also fall to their provinces. To quote the Committee,

The scheme covers powers to make policy as well as laws. Laws are made by Parliament or provincial assemblies. Policies may also be made by the cabinet or provincial executives, or other bodies legally empowered to make them. The Committee decided that the division of law and policy-making powers should be written into the law to ensure clarity, certainty and autonomy. Every government's policies must be lawful: they must be made within or under a law. But policies need not take the form of laws. If provincial and national governments respect each other's autonomy, they need not waste time and legal resources giving legal form to every policy they make.<sup>19</sup>

This is a critical point. Not only are provincial governments to be autonomous units with their own jurisdictions for legislative purposes, but as forms of government, provincial governments will have the same executive authority to issue new policies and directives as is the case with the national government. To reinforce the autonomy of the provinces and to give effect to their policy-making as well as law-making powers, the Special Committee felt the need to reiterate firmly that staff were to be under the control of and responsible to provincial governments:

Both civil servants and directly employed staff carrying out functions for which a provincial government or the Honiara City Council is legally



responsible should be under the control of the provincial government or City Council, not of national government ministries. The staff should be legally responsible for carrying out their duties to the provincial government or City Council.<sup>20</sup>

A major concern for staff loyalties, their quality and behaviour was keenly felt by the Special Committee. Chapter Six on Staff was careful to reiterate time and again the concept of provincial control over civil service staff.<sup>21</sup> The major mechanism to achieve such control lay in the powers of supervision and discipline which would fall to the Provincial Secretary (the former Clerk to the Council). The Provincial Secretary is to be the chief executive officer of the province armed with wide powers over staff to assure compliance with provincial wishes:

As the senior civil servant in the province, the Provincial Secretary should be responsible for—(a) coordinating the work of all civil servants, including those performing national functions; (b) ensuring that all government officers, including directly employed staff, work efficiently and together; and (c) the exercise of disciplinary powers, including delegated powers . . . while in the province, staff carrying out C List functions that have become the responsibility of the provincial government will become responsible to the Provincial Secretary.<sup>22</sup>

The power to discipline civil servants would be delegated to the Provincial Secretary by the Public Service Commission.

The third major implication of the chapter on powers and functions was the continued strengthening of provinces beyond the functions transferred under the Plan of Operations. The Special Committee, for example, included social development as a provincial function under the C List.<sup>23</sup> Beyond the specification of new areas of jurisdiction, the recommendations would have the effect of further dismantling the central bureaucracy. Thus, the clear implication of the suggested reforms would be a major restructuring of the state in the Solomon Islands.<sup>24</sup> This restructuring would mean a progressive reduction in the power of the inherited colonial administration. Associated with the decline of the center was the Special Committee's call for provincial representation on statutory authorities, which had been created by the center, whose operations were felt at the provincial level. The Committee also provided that provincial governments could, if they so desired, establish statutory authorities of their own.<sup>25</sup> A major instrument of development would henceforth be available to provincial governments.

The division of sources of revenue and taxing powers are crucial elements of any scheme to decentralize power to levels of government below the national level. Autonomy to act in some fields requires the ability to raise money and pay for services independent of the national government. Thus, meaningful decentralization must include known and stable revenue sources being available to provincial governments.

Under the Plan of Operations some progress had been made in the direction of establishing assured and acceptable levels of provincial revenue.<sup>26</sup> This took several forms. The Plan clearly delineated a range of subjects which fell within provincial taxing power. These included the basic rate and a series of license fees. Block grants were introduced to permit provinces to maintain existing services at the time of the transfer of a function. Provincial governments were free to decide whether or not to maintain the particular service at the current level of funding or to place their priorities elsewhere. These block grants were calculated on the basis of a formula which related population and contribution to productivity by a particular province to the total national income. In addition, the Plan of Operations encouraged the national government to try to convince aid donors to untie development assistance so that external funds for development projects could be transferred to provinces on an unconditional basis.

Although these reforms represented a first step toward revenue creation for the provinces, the Kausimae Committee found that the existing arrangements remained inadequate to assure provincial revenues. Yet to go any further would prove to be exceedingly difficult. The Committee identified two factors which critically limit a redistribution of revenue sufficient to meet provincial needs.<sup>27</sup> First, the largest proportion of provincial budgetary expenditure can be attributed to recurrent expenditures. Revenues to meet recurrent expenditures must be raised within the Solomon Islands which offers an extremely limited revenue base. Therefore, increased revenue cannot be attained by creating a more efficient ability to tax nor by simply redistributing existing revenue. To allow national, provincial and local governments to meet their future revenue needs requires a considerable expansion of productivity, export earnings and circulation of money within the country. The second constraint falls on the capital expenditure side. Here, the Solomon Islands is and will remain heavily dependent on external aid donors. The Special Committee conceded that the responsibility for foreign aid

must continue to rest with the national government. Instead of imposing any radical changes on the management of aid funds, the Committee recommended a number of procedural and substantive conditions governing their use. Such procedural changes would include, for example, a strengthened consultative process between the two levels of government on aid projects. On the substantive side, the Committee worked from the fundamental principle that aid policy should reflect the interests of national, provincial and local governments. Such a policy would,

- (1) emphasize the need for untying aid;
- (2) give preference to projects which help rural areas, equalise development, spread money-earning opportunities, and increase internal trade;
- (3) deal with the problem of projects with high recurrent costs for which aid is not provided; and
- (4) recognize the social costs of dependency on aid.<sup>28</sup>

The recurrent expenditure problem required a redefinition of the formula upon which block grants would be calculated, although one of the original criteria—to maintain the same level of service as a means of calculating revenue transfers—would form one of the basic principles underlying the formula. Fundamentally, the Kausimae Committee was concerned to establish the principles of the formula rather than specifying its actual calculation. The Committee recognized its inability to suggest specific figures:

The Committee discussed whether it should try and put figures into the formula, suggest ways of measuring needs, or try to reach a consensus about which needs should get priority. But it felt it did not have sufficient information about how different figures, measures, and priorities would affect the revenue available, and the share each province might get. So the Committee preferred to recommend only the principles that the formula should follow. The principles are clear, and should be termed into a formula for implementation.<sup>29</sup>

However, a significant new emphasis appeared with the decision to alter the calculation—away from a population/productivity formula toward one which would place more weight on equity and equalization in revenue distribution between provinces. This represented an attempt to break the pattern of development which favored larger island groups at the exclusion of smaller island communities. The principles enunciated by the Special Committee were as follows:

- the actual cost of carrying out functions at the same level as when they were transferred, even if provincial governments decide to cut back or change them . . .
- contribution to national revenue (including manpower); and
- need, which should be defined to take account of--
  - land area;
  - remoteness of province from Honiara and of parts of a province from each other;
  - lack of development for reasons, including cultural reasons, other than unwillingness;
  - disturbance and stress caused by development;
  - loss of land due to alienation;
  - depletion of non-renewable resources (e.g., minerals);
  - environmental damage;
  - equalisation of development between provinces and parts of - provinces; and
  - national welfare.<sup>30</sup>

To assure that provincial revenue would not fall dramatically or lag behind the level of increase in national revenue, the formula would be tied to national government revenue. To give provincial governments sufficient lead time in project planning and budgetary development, the formula would have a four-year lifespan. Renegotiation would be undertaken by a special committee composed of provincial and national representatives.

On the taxation side, provincial governments and the Honiara City Council would be assured " . . . the final power to decide whether the following taxes should be collected in their areas, to collect them and set the rate. . . ." <sup>31</sup> In addition to the taxes already granted under the Local Government Act, provinces would be given further tax room by adding the following areas—sales taxes, land and property taxes, produce taxes, specific purpose head taxes, and taxes on animals, etc. Parallel to the transfer of powers and functions, these tax areas would be enumerated on a special list which could not be altered without provincial

permission. Provinces would also acquire the power to borrow and loan money, to charge fees for services and to impose license fees. Provinces would have final power in the preparation of their annual budgets.

A significant reform designed to strengthen local government at the grassroots level of rural society appeared in the recommendation that ". . . (provincial governments) . . . must give local governments the power to set and collect basic rate."<sup>32</sup> In the past, these units had been restricted to receipt of 25 percent of the basic rate which was collected in their area. Other taxing powers could be devolved by provincial governments as well. In this entire sector of area committee-council relations, the Kausimae Committee adopted a federal stance whereby area committees would fall under the jurisdiction of the provinces, not the national government.

On balance, the Special Committee introduced a series of reforms in revenue and taxation that were designed to reinforce the earlier division of powers between provincial and national government. However, the reality of the Solomon Islands economy with a narrow total revenue base and its dependence on external sources of development capital represented clear constraints on the level of provincial activity which could be achieved in practice.

The Special Committee devoted a full chapter to relations between governments in an attempt to establish procedures for conflict resolution in the political arena rather than through the courts.<sup>33</sup> Aside from earlier recommendations which advanced the need for active consultation between the two levels of government on a wide ranging basis, and for interaction between national, provincial and local politicians, the Committee advanced an institutionalized consultative process to resolve serious disputes. The main institutional forum would be the annual Premiers' Conference which would include the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Home Affairs, the Mayor of Honiara, the Premiers of the Provinces and the Mayor's and the Premier's political secretaries. Beyond its role as a forum for exchanging views, the Conference could make recommendations and perform as a body of inquiry under its power,

. . . to invite national politicians, public servants or others to attend its meetings, to provide information, or to prepare papers and answer questions.<sup>34</sup>

The national government would be under an obligation to respond to matters raised at the Conference:

The national government should report directly, promptly and in detail to the mayor, the premiers and the Premiers' Conference on action taken or not taken on the recommendations of the Conference. It should give reasons when recommendations are not followed.<sup>35</sup>

A second institutional setting proposed by the Committee sought to reconcile anticipated differences between the Honiara City Council and Guadalcanal Province with the creation of a Joint Consultative Committee composed of an equal representation of both government bodies and two members chosen by the national government.

A central concern of the Special Committee focused on the need to provide for the suspension of provincial government by the national government and yet to guard against this power being used in an arbitrary manner. The power to suspend Provincial Assemblies was granted to the national government in the following situations:

- natural disasters, including epidemics, which prevent provincial governments from working effectively;
- states of emergency declared during war-time in accordance with section 16(a) of the national constitution;
- bankruptcy or persistent overspending of budgeted or available funds;
- corruption which cannot be effectively dealt with in other ways;
- financial mismanagement;
- administrative breakdown, including failure to maintain services essential to public health, safety or welfare; and
- unlawful use of power.<sup>36</sup>

The provision for such an extraordinary power was carried even further in 8.35 which stated,

The national government should also have the power to suspend a provincial assembly for up to six months if the assembly has persistently and seriously--(a) frustrated lawful national government directives, or (b)

obstructed, whether through lawful means or not, the national government's ability to carry out its functions in a province provided that due notice has been given of the intention to suspend.<sup>37</sup>

As counterpoint, the Special Committee advanced the use of arbitration and mediation to resolve differences. To guarantee that the national government would not abuse its power of suspension for an indefinite period of time, the national government would be required to dissolve a provincial government and call elections within six months of the suspension. This entire discussion reflects the ultimate supremacy of the national government operating within a unitary system. The wide range of situations under which suspension can be invoked is qualitatively distinct from a federal system where each sphere of government is coordinate with and equal to the other with respect to its areas of jurisdiction.

The Special Committee on Provincial Government received a wide range of submissions from central ministries, local councils, concerned individuals as well as hearing from local people through the tours held in each province. In all, approximately 140 documents and papers were available to the Special Committee for consideration. It is not our intention here to provide a systematic overview of the total submissions. Rather they will be analyzed under the following headings: (1) submissions by central ministries of government; (2) the responses from public meetings; (3) the views of field officers and traditional leadership; and (4) the position advanced by Western Province politicians.

The perspective of central ministries on further decentralization to local councils and the process of province building elicited a variety of responses from outright hostility to continuing the momentum for change. A submission from the Secretary for Foreign Affairs adopted a strict view of the dichotomy between national as against provincial functions, placing foreign policy unmistakably within the jurisdiction of the national government. The tone was harsh and unyielding:

On the outset, we should be clear in our mind that foreign policy and provincial government are not inter-related subjects but two entirely separate issues performing entirely separate functions. . . . The main objective of any state in its relations with other states is to direct and influence these relations for its own maximum benefit. Therefore, the formulation of foreign policy is one of the aspects of national politics and is the task of the politician of National Parliament. It is therefore clear,

foreign relations has nothing to do with domestic affairs which is in the case of provincial government.<sup>38</sup>

Another administration response reflected, on the one hand, a concern for the speed of change, yet, on the other hand, reluctantly accepted the political will to decentralize further. The submission from the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Natural Resources adopted this stance:

Frankly, I think we are rushing our political changes too quickly. Local Government reform is yet to be settled, and now we are to abandon it for provincial government, and probably next the State Government. However, the political decision has been made that we are to proceed in examining the introduction of a Provincial system of Government throughout the country post-independence. So be it . . . .<sup>39</sup>

Coupled with hesitancy and a pessimistic view of decentralization, this response was clear and firm in its concern not to undermine the national government.

Provincial Government should direct control the affairs of the area council and . . . [ be ] . . . subordinate to the National Government. I say subordinate here, as I see it, the National Government still has the overall responsibility over the entire nation, and that the Provincial Government operate [s] at a lower level within the framework of the National Government. No relationship is on equal terms between Provincial and National Government, as this will mean sovereign power and authority for individual provinces thus the idea of having a National Government become [s] meaningless.<sup>40</sup>

Another common reaction by central officials was highly functional in nature. Decentralization of power to provincial governments was accepted as an on-going reality. Therefore, the task was to calculate the most effective and efficient functional division of powers. This approach viewed decentralization as a matter of technical and administrative readjustment balancing provincial as against national interests, for example, the submissions of the Ministries of Agriculture and Lands and Transportation and the Central Planning Office.<sup>41</sup> The need to develop a national policy which would transcend narrow provincial interests became the rationale for a strong central role with or without further decentralization. The Central Planning Office (CPO) brief represents a good example of this perspective:



While there is a need for increased planning capability at a Council (or P.G.) level, there will also be a continuing need for planning within Central Government . . . . CPO will still be required to define national objectives, and to draft and monitor national plans. The CPO will also be responsible for safeguarding the national interest in plans prepared by Provincial Government, by ensuring that projects also conform to the overall objectives of the national Government through the Council of Ministers. Although devolution of authority to Provincial Government is beneficial in that it enables decision making and responsibility to . . . [ be ] . . . carried out more closely to the people affected it is also important to realize that excessive fragmentation can be wasteful of scarce resources. It is necessary to be aware of the need to maintain a balance between devolution and efficiency of larger scale activities.<sup>42</sup>

The Public Service Office advocated the advantages of a unified public service for the Solomon Islands. As well, the brief attempted to dispell the myth that central public servants seconded to provincial governments would continue to identify with the national government. The Secretary for the Public Service declared firmly,

It has been argued that by staffing Provincial and Local Government posts with Central Government Public Service officers the Provincial and Local Governments will not have the control over these Public Officers which they need. This is not so. The arrangements for the posting of Public Officers to Local Government which are in force at present provide that these officers must serve faithfully and fully the Local Government Authority to which they are posted, within the scope of functions allocated to that Authority. By and large this has proved successful and I see no reason why it should not continue to be so under a Provincial Government structure. . . .<sup>43</sup>

The Ministry of Home Affairs—the one responsible for overseeing provincial governments and for the implementation of further changes—provided a number of important documents including reports on progress achieved to date, the constraints which have appeared in implementation and possible future developments. In one paper, "Submission by Ministry of Home Affairs on the Local Government

Plan of Operations Implementation,"<sup>44</sup> the Ministry revealed that the rhetoric of past decentralization went considerably beyond actual achievements. In particular, the MHA recognized that part of the difficulty could be traced to recalcitrance and resistance by central departments of government,

Whilst the Government has stated the priority of development of local government the message has taken many years to reach certain ministries and initially there was obstruction and an attitude that the councils would fail and then ask the ministries to take back the services. When it was seen that this was not to happen, attitudes gradually changed but often co-operation between ministry and council still remains poor.<sup>45</sup>

To Home Affairs, the key constraint to the effective operation of decentralization to date and the first priority for the future was the need to improve the management and financial systems of local government.<sup>46</sup> The major emphasis of Home Affairs suggested that the experiment with local government had revealed a number of major flaws which required concerted attention by the central administration before any further change could be contemplated.

This careful administrative reaction to further decentralization cut against the grain of council submissions and the expression of popular views which emerged from the public meetings. Public meetings tended to concentrate on the major failure of government to bring development to the grassroots<sup>47</sup> and, coincidentally, to support the strengthening of provincial power. The smaller island councils also expressed a fundamental dissonance with being left behind in development in favour of the larger islands and areas with concentrations of population.<sup>48</sup>

The key field officers at the local government level—the Clerks to the Council—reinforced the demand for greater provincial power and autonomy. Not unexpectedly, the frustrations of field officers were expressed in strong terms:

The Solomon Islands obviously need Provincial Government set-up to ensure that a greater degree of autonomy is transferred to the lower level of political governmental bodies, the Local Authorities. Decision making at present is limited or restrictedly governed by the Local Government Ordinance. Councils in that respect are confined within the Law, which consequently result in frustration by the rather discontented rural population to a certain extent. The paternalistic approach in the hand-outs of grants both by the Central Government and Aid Donors, paralysis

the Councils to attempt at exploring to the furthest depth, the ways and means of raising their own internal revenue from sources that are available locally, or even abroad through established agencies. Provincial Government could thus be a stimulus to productivity in the rural fields of economic, political and social developments. It would also attract better-able persons to go into local politics at Provincial level, so as to improve and raise the political standard of decision making. It should also stimulate the much-needed aspects of regional self-reliance, pride and greater active participation in the regional developments within the respective Provinces by the the rural population. Much could be achieved under a more autonomous Local Authority than at present, when Provincial Government set-up is established.<sup>49</sup>

One officer challenged the very basis of the central government's commitment to decentralization:

The question often springs to mind as to whether Central Government is really committed to the devolution and decentralization which it preaches so effusively, and towards which end it inaugurated the recent Local Government Reform, or whether this is merely a convenient smokescreen for its own shortcomings. It is a never-ending source of amazement to me to hear some of the failures which are blamed upon Councils. The media are also largely at fault in this respect. . . . The lack of respect for Council decisions and proposals, and the inadequate programme for rural development also stem from Government officers' and politicians' reluctance to face up to the realities of the roles which they themselves have created for councils. The tone of Local Government Conferences and Clerks' Seminars is a sufficient indicator of the uneasy and unequal relationship which exists between Councils and Governments, one which is beautifully summed up in NDP Review: "In the Circumstances the Councils have done remarkably well." Well, I think that "in the Circumstances" the Central Planning Office has done remarkably well to produce its report, as it did not even bother to consult Councils. I fear that old attitudes die hard, and little is being done to give them the coup de grace.<sup>50</sup>

From the periphery then—both official and public—the very strong expression of the need to move further in the decentralization of administrative and political power became the general theme.

The one dissonant voice was expressed in the claims of traditional leaders. The tensions of social and political change were revealed in their desire for a recognition of their central place as the authorities most appropriate for governing and representing the people.

I, the Prince of Kwara'ae and the 180 Tribal Chiefs believe that no matter whatever type of Government we try to adopt for the Malaita People if it is from outside our Traditional Culture, it will never meet our peoples' needs. We want to have our inherited Traditional Government which was lost about 600 years ago. We want people who are in the top posts of our future Government, people who are born leaders and that understand and respect our Kwara'ae Culture. We want people who are to serve and not just work as at present.<sup>51</sup>

This call for a reassertion of their past status also advocated the fragmentation of existing council areas to fulfill their desire for the reemergence of traditional states.<sup>52</sup>

The most compelling feature of the submissions was the continuation of a Western challenge to the centralist perspective in the Solomon Islands. This found expression in the demand by the West for quasi-federal status. Despite the counterarguments of the Minister of Home Affairs at a meeting of the Western Council Executive Committee in March 1978, the Western councillors passed a motion which proposed and led to a boycott of the independence celebrations in July.<sup>53</sup> At a meeting of the entire Special Committee with the Western Council in June 1978, the Western members pressed their argument to the point where the Chairman of the Special Committee conceded that the West represented, ". . . a special case."<sup>54</sup> The meeting accepted, as an appropriate gesture, a motion proposed by David Kausimae which stated,

We in the Committee cannot make an interim report, but we are prepared to recommend that government give serious consideration to the matters set out in your resolution of March this year.<sup>55</sup>

An explanation for the distance between the Kausimae Report and the submissions and briefs presented to the Special Committee has to be sought in relation to the demands of Western Province. The political leadership articulating the Western position fundamentally undermined the central perspective and its incremental approach to decentralization. In the end, the process of formulating a framework for provincial government was intimately bound up in accommodating Western demands and extending the reforms which derived from such an accommodation to the entire country.

Taken together, the Special Committee's recommendations amounted to a reconceptualization of the role and powers of provincial government. The Committee was conscious not only of the administrative implications but more significantly of the political implications of its decentralization framework. A new political field would be created at the provincial level which would become the arena for crucial development decisions. The reforms envisaged a qualitatively improved provincial government able to attract capable political and administrative leadership. The Special Committee's recommendations would have far-reaching implications for the predominant structure of power in the Solomon Islands—the central bureaucracy. New centers of administrative power with sufficient resources and staff would be formed at the expense of the center. In both political and administrative terms, therefore, the Kausimae Report proposed a major transformation of the political system.

## Footnotes to Chapter Six

<sup>1</sup>Solomon Islands, Constitutional Conference 1977, Principles (Honiara: Government Printing Office, 1977), preamble, 2(e).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 15-15a.

<sup>3</sup>Western demands for a special status were pressed upon the central government continually from 1975 on with the threat of possible secession if the demands were not met. Consider, for example, the following motion presented by Councillor Kelosi at a meeting of the Western Council Executive Committee in 1978:

"That the Solomon Islands Government should give serious consideration at the forthcoming Legislative Assembly meeting to granting State Government to the Western Solomons with full control over finance, natural resources, internal migration, land, legislation and administration before Independence and if this is not granted the Western Solomons will not be participating in the national Independence Celebrations and may possibly declare eventual unilateral independence."

"Political Future of the West," Minute 20/78, Western Council Executive Committee, Background Paper Number 13, to Special Committee on Provincial Government (December 1977-May 1979), Chairman: David Kausimae (Honiara: Ministry of Home Affairs, 1979).

<sup>4</sup>Solomon Islands, Special Committee on Provincial Government (December 1977-May 1979), Report (Honiara: Ministry of Home Affairs, 1979), p. 19.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid. p. 6.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. p. 33.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., pp. 48-49.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>15</sup>Special Committee on Provincial Government, Report On the Special Committee on Provincial Government Tour of Rennell and Belona from 19th-16th May 1978, Background Paper Number 26 (Honiara: mimeo, 1978), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup>Special Committee on Provincial Government, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 54-55.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. pp. 94-114.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid. pp. 99-100.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>24</sup>"To achieve a transfer of posts and staff without an overall increase in the size of the civil service will also require—a continuing review of posts and staff in Honiara . . . [and] . . . a way of sharing some staff carrying out C List functions . . . . If posts are transferred rather than new posts created, and if increases in provinces are matched by reductions or slower growth in Honiara, then there will be less room for wasteful duplication and competition between two sets of civil servants trying to do the same job, and a real change in the relationship between Honiara and the provinces." Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 74-76.

<sup>26</sup>Plan of Operations, op. cit., pp. 73-89.

<sup>27</sup>Special Committee on Provincial Government, op. cit., pp. 77-79.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 131-141.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Special Committee on Provincial Government, "Foreign Policy Implications on Provincial Government," Background Paper No. 34 (Honiara: June 12, 1978).

<sup>39</sup>Special Committee on Provincial Government, "Provincial Government," Background Paper No. 43 (Honiara: May 16, 1978).

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Special Committee on Provincial Government, "Provincial Government: How It Might Affect MAL," Background Paper No. 41 (Honiara: n.d.); "MTC's Submissions to Sub-Committee on Provincial Government," Background Paper No. 48 (Honiara: July 12, 1978); "The Role of the Central Planning Office and Planning Activities Under Provincial Government," Background Paper No. 33 (Honiara: June 13, 1978).

<sup>42</sup>Background Paper No. 33, pp. 2-3.

<sup>43</sup>Special Committee on Provincial Government, "Public Service Office: Honiara," Background Paper No. 39 (Honiara: June 28, 1978), pp. 1-2.

<sup>44</sup>Special Committee on Provincial Government, "Submission by Ministry of Home Affairs on the Local Government Plan of Operations Implementation," Background Paper No. 35 (Honiara: June 16, 1978).

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>46</sup>"Whilst most local councils have received adequate upper and lower management and financial staff, it is readily apparent that there is a serious shortage of middle management/finance staff, who can take over from the present higher level officers. This is also reflected in the Public Service and serious thought must be given to the urgent recruitment and training of Solomon Islanders to fill these vacancies." Ibid., p. 4.



<sup>47</sup>A telling example arose from a subcommittee tour of the Eastern Outer Islands:

"In general, people seemed less concerned at the form of government than with its performance: how effectively it provided services. 'You talk about big things, but you can't do the simple things. Government sent us a water tank, but without a tap and sheet iron for catchment. It's been sitting here useless. You are playing the fool with people.'"

Special Committee on Provincial Government, Report of Subcommittee Tour of Eastern Outer Islands (26 April-10 May 1978), Background Paper No. 24 (Honiara: May 17, 1978), p. 3.

<sup>48</sup>"People felt they lost out in government services because though they had a large population, they had small land area (grants are allocated on an area/population basis). 'We are the last and least of everything.'" Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>N. Waena, Clerk to Council, Eastern Islands Council, "Provincial Government for Solomon Islands," to the Secretary, Special Committee on Provincial Government, Background Paper No. 45 (Graciosa Bay: May 25, 1978), p. 1.

<sup>50</sup>Anonymous, Makira and Ulawa Council Office, "General Comments on the present Local Government set-up," to the Secretary, Special Committee on Provincial Government, Background Paper No. 46 (Kira Kira, San Cristobal: May 23, 1978), pp. 1-2.

<sup>51</sup>Prince A. Taki, M.P. letter to the Hon. Chairman, Provincial Government Committee, Background Paper No. 94 (Honiara: August 27, 1978), p. 1.

<sup>52</sup>"The 1976 census showed that Kwara'ae population is well over 20,000. We have been neglected by our present provincial Government, when you think about such a population in relation to equal distribution of Funds and Developments that took place and are taking place. We, the People of Kwara'ae believe that decentralization of power and developments will be more meaningful to our people if we have a separate Province for the Kwara'ae People." Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>53</sup>Special Committee on Provincial Government, "Political Future of the West," Background Paper No. 13, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>54</sup>"Notes of a Meeting with Western Council," Background Paper No. 80 (Gizo: June 21, 1978), p. 2.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### DEVOLUTION, PARTICIPATION, AND DEVELOPMENT

The study in this monograph focused on the devolution of powers and functions from a central government to subordinate local council units in a unitary state. The Solomon Islands case was intensely studied in this experiment. Part of the explicit purpose of the devolution exercise was to endow the councils with the capability to become agents in development. That is, apart from performing the traditional service functions such as building local roads, sanitation facilities, water supply, and medical clinics, the subordinate units of government were to be geared to participate in the country's efforts in economic and political development. In the chapter dealing with the colonial origins of local authorities, we indicated that traditional forms of decision-making at the village level were arbitrarily displaced by the colonizer's own administrative system. For nearly fifty years, attempts were undertaken to devise council organizations which would be accepted by Solomon Islanders. Maasina Ruru, a massive indigenous protest movement that was initiated on the island of Malaita against the externally imposed forms of government, underscored the futility of all previous externally-initiated efforts. The cardinal lesson imparted by Maasina Rule was that Solomon Islanders could govern themselves without outside assistance. More specifically, the lesson pointed to the inescapable conclusion that any council that became legitimate had to be run by local leaders widely recognized and chosen by the village people. Up until the 1963 local government act, all positions in the previous forms of local council were appointed by the British administrators. Hence, local councils were not only creations of an alien power but so were most of the leadership appointed to the councils.

When the task of reforming local government was launched, then, a major priority was to convert the councils into elective bodies responsible to the people. The democratic procedure was a familiar form in Melanesian culture. At the village level where most Solomon Islanders live, decisions were reached after extended discussions among villagers and only after a consensus had been reached on specific items or issues. The introduced councils tended to encompass large numbers of villages thereby invalidating the direct face to face method of

democratic decision-making among people who shared the same values. Nevertheless, by introducing the elective principle by which representatives were chosen, some recognition was given to the will of villagers in council behavior.

The 1963 Local Government reform inaugurated a system of elections for political offices in local councils. Ten years later, under the Plan of Operations, the councils were to be charged with wider responsibilities for managing community and village affairs. The impulse to decentralization of powers and functions was part of a larger democratic movement occurring at the national level where institutions for self-government were being introduced. Simultaneous with the transfer of sovereign powers from the overseas metropolitan power to the colony's central government was an exercise to transfer concentrated functions from the central government to widely dispersed local councils. The ideology of political change emphasized indigenous participation in collective decision-making at all levels of government.

The Solomon Island citizen was under three tiers of government all of which professed to represent his interests. After self-government was attained, a House of Assembly elected by all the people under universal adult suffrage, was the national democratic institution that represented Solomon Islanders. Our field research has showed that the typical villager knew who was his member of Parliament. A parliamentary seat was a highly coveted prize. Attached to it were various tangible rewards such as a salary, paid trips to the capital city, overseas trips, and publicity in the mass media. At the level below the national parliament was the local council renamed provincial councils. The seven provincial councils were divided into wards which constituted the basis for electing local representatives to the councils. Tables I and II provide samples of election results for the provincial councils. When the Plan of Operations was announced to the public, great interest was galvanized around council activities. Participation for the elective council offices drew high percentages of villagers. Subsequently, participation fell from about 70 percent to 50 percent, still a very respectable figure for a preponderantly rural country with difficult communication barriers. The position of a provincial councillor was not as prestigious as that of a national parliamentarian. The president of the council obtained a monthly salary of about \$200, but councillors were paid only sitting allowances. The prestige of a councillor was also likely to be extended only to his own ward. Rarely would a

TABLE I  
GUADALCANAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS - 1974

<u>WARD</u>	<u>Candidates</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>Elected</u>
1. SAGALU	IMOGEN VIDA PHILLIPS E. O. Torling Total Votes	119 40 159	Elected
2. SAVULAI	PAUL WAINONI		Unopposed
3. TANGARARE	LEONARD ASHLEY SYDINHAM Savino Kokopu Romano Vaolu Total Votes	186 124 31 341	Elected
4. WANDERERS BAY	MICHAEL SAMBONA Cecil J. Tetega Bartholemus Belei Total Votes	197 53 28 278	Elected
5. DUIDUI	WILFRED ISOM DIDIVERA Marcus Pipisi Alpheus Tohavi Timi Chaku Total Votes	198 113 63 30 404	Elected
6. VATUKULAU	JOCHIM GAPU Albert Pitu Jackson Gray Total Votes	111 53 34 198	Elected
7. TALISE	LASI W. WATCH Wilson Low Samuel Lavea Total Votes	103 97 34 234	Elected
8. AVUAVU	LEONE LAKU		Unopposed
9. MOLI	ISHMAEL BOLAKE Benjamin Manganikoe Elihu Sinoi Kalisto Agu Timotheus Touosia Total Votes	81 32 31 23 19 186	Elected

10.	TETAKANJI	JAMES MANE Saddias Chachia Jimmy Suiolia Joseph Goraiga Total Votes	67 58 25 6 156	Elected
11.	BIRAO	JOEL KIKOLO John Vulu Julius Tiapou Total Votes	186 102 15 303	Elected
12.	VALASI-LONGGU	CHARLES KAOMANE MAU Mareko Done Casper Kokoluvia Reuben Bula Mark Masodo Total Votes	243 125 27 27 9 441	Elected
13.	KOLOKARAKO	ERASTUS AVINIA Adriel Kotiuania Jesineth Sui Total Votes	32 25 2 59	Elected
14.	AOLA	DAVID KAULI Manegoli Buluvua Solomon Votaia Total Votes	138 76 23 237	Elected
15.	PARIPAO	ERIC KUTA JIM KOMPAAO	Equal Votes	Election void. Another election will be held for this ward in due course.
		Eric Kuta Jim Kompao Joel Lember William Teteo Phillip Samanea Total Votes	43 43 42 40 27 197	

TABLE II  
SANTA YSABEL COUNCIL ELECTIONS - 1974

<u>WARD</u>	<u>Candidates</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>Elected</u>
1. KIA	WILSON SAGEVAKA		Unopposed
2. BAOLO/ SAMASODU	HEDLEY VIKASI	62	Elected
	Ernest Panisi	58	
	Total Votes	120	
3. HOBOKOIO	HUDSON KIKOVAKA	189	Elected
	Ernest Supa	41	
	Total Votes	230	
4. BUALA	DANIEL DARA	185	Elected
	Baldwin Tangogaba	80	
	Total Votes	265	
5. TIROTONGA	PAUL KOKOMANA		Unopposed
6. KOVILOKO	CHARLES THEGNA		Unopposed
7. KMAGA	HUGO MANEHEVA		Unopposed
8. KALOKA	PAUL BEN RENTON		Unopposed
9. TATABA	PHILIP MANEHATHA	75	Elected
	Nathaniel Supa	42	
	Benjamin Analau	40	
	Ernest Huinodi	32	
	Total Votes	189	
10. SIGANA	JOSES BOGESE	102	Elected
	Daniel Tafuselo	77	
	Total Votes	279	
11. JPAUANA	CULWICK VAHIA	183	Elected
12. EAST TASIMBOKO	JOHN MANEKA	198	Elected
	Samuel Ono	78	
	Joseph Tobani	24	
	Joel Inu	14	
	Total Votes	314	

13. VULOLO	JACK RAE	26	Elected
	Peter Ramidiha	12	
	Mareselino Manevera	10	
	Joachimo Gala	7	
	Total Votes	55	
14. WEST TASIMBOKO	BARNABAS BAESODUA	86	Elected
	Jacob Vouza	85	
	Bill Letega	68	
	Total Votes	239	
15. MALANGO	MOSES ALBERT RERE	89	Elected
	Alpheus Vla	54	
	Jesmiel Kesi	37	
	Total Votes	180	

Honiara.  
30th July 1974

E. Bulu  
Returning Officer

councillor receive mention in the mass media. In spite of these comparative limitations, councillors tended to be persons with high standing and achievement in their community, but not as high especially in educational achievement as national parliamentarians.

Finally, below the tier of provincial councils, were area committees. Officially, these were the units of government which were closest to the people. As pointed out in the previous chapter, area committees were constituted through a nominating process and tended to be staffed by local chiefs and assorted community leaders. The meetings of area committees were also attended by government field officers in the province's agriculture, health, education, works, and administration divisions. They were given responsibility for a few services and had at their disposal about 25 percent of all basic rate collected in an area. Generally, the area committees had functioned well in some parts of the Solomon Islands more so than others. They complained that they worked in isolation and that their meetings were not attended by provincial councillors and national parliamentarians. One council president described their role as "dreaming" meaning that they tended to have little conception of how projects were identified and implemented. The area committees also lacked permanent staff to carry out any projects that they undertook. Consequently, they tended to be sporadic in performance with only minimal interest in their activities. The role of area constables was transferred to the police commission. Little prestige attached to area committee positions. Part of the basic rate funds were used for sitting allowances, an item which engaged much of the committee's deliberations. Overall, the area committees, although the closest unit of government to the villager, were still remote from the villagers' interest. What was probably required was yet a further tier called "village committees" to obtain the direct participation of the villager in community affairs.

The total effect of having three tiers of representation for the Solomon Islander in national and community decision-making should be a close correlation between the public will and public policy. Yet much of this correspondence depended on the inter-relationship between these levels of representation. There was little cooperation generally between representatives at the national, provincial, and area committee levels. The national parliamentarian often felt threatened by the provincial councillor who was likely to be one of his challengers in the next elections. The provincial councillor, in turn, might feel a stranger to



attend area committee meetings in villages which did not practice his customs or might see no point in talking to area committee leaders who had very few functions and little prestige. A number of provinces had created "political coordinating committees" constituted of parliamentarians and councillors from a province. These committees, when they are activated, served to put pressure on the national government to meet a particular provincial demand. Both the Western and Malaita provinces utilized these coordinating committees when they individually experienced crisis confrontations between themselves and the central bureaucracy. Apart from these committees which were not universal among the provincial councils, the areas of collaboration and cooperation between parliamentarians, councillors, and area committee persons were weak and sporadic.

At the provincial level, some attempt had been made to involve councillors in local government decision-making. This had been done by creating a variety of committees within the council with the task of developing policy alternatives and oversight responsibilities vis-à-vis the provincial bureaucracy. For example, a typical council had an executive, agriculture, health, works, and administration committee. The agriculture committee was constituted of a number of councillors whose task was to receive, and process, demands about agriculture in the province. From this committee would come recommendations about what agricultural policies should be adopted by the province. The health, education, administration, and works committees operated the same way. The premier role was played by the executive committee which was in continuous operation. It was a type of collective cabinet with responsibility for the day to day policy direction of the council. The clerk of the council was the chief executive officer of the province. The research team in this project has found that the most invigorating participant role in decision-making at the provincial level took place at the level of these council committees. Attempts were made both by these committees as well as the council setting as a whole to convene regularly scheduled meetings at various parts of a province so as to bring "government closer to the people." At a number of these meetings attended by these researchers, we have found the participation of the public extensive. Periodically, local chiefs were brought into the council meetings as consultants. But, for the most part, provincial councillors preferred to work through their own contacts and networks, avoiding area committees, to obtain their views of local demands. Area committee minutes were written out; demands in them reached the councils in that form. Clearly, the connection between

councillors and area committee persons need urgent bridging. This, notwithstanding, provincial council committees operated fairly vigorously. Apart from spending an inordinate amount of time dealing with sitting allowances and other self-serving benefits, they did maintain a strong and vibrant connection between provincial policy and action.

Political participation of villagers via their representatives in provincial decision-making may be regarded as an end in itself. The idea of democracy in this regard bears heavily on its symbolic significance. The Plan of Operations, however, had more pragmatic objectives in transferring functions to local councils. It had envisaged that people at the grassroots would become actively involved, especially in aspects of council activities dealing with development. Indeed, an examination of the Plan of Operations' original internal re-organization scheme for the provincial councils showed the existence of a "Development Committee." The role of development committees was to plan development programs for each province. The committees were to bring together various social and leadership groups in a province to identify projects for capital development. Through the development committees, local initiative, energies, and resources were to be tapped for provincial development. At the time of researching this project, no council had adopted the development committee structure. In effect, the initiative for promoting local development was left to the competing representatives of the three tiers of government. In practice, development became an item heavily entangled in the political careers of politicians who wanted to get re-elected. Demands for development were consequently heard from many quarters at the same time. Intra-provincial council committees became embattled places where they were deluged by demands for capital projects for agriculture, works, health, and education. The lack of a central coordinating committee to receive and process the myriad demands for projects meant that a coherent and rational plan for deploying scarce resources was lacking. Partly, this void was filled by a provincial planning officer, where one was available to be seconded from the central government to the provincial councils. Each province was still in the process of establishing a planning unit at the time of research. In any case, the provincial planning office would have benefitted enormously by the guidance over priorities coming from a provincial planning committee.

Part of the reason why the provinces have failed to establish a development committee was traceable to the continuing frustrations in obtaining competent staff to implement even the recurrent budget. A Council received revenues from three main streams of funding:

- 1) Collection of basic rate; a rate counterpart grant; business licenses; court fines; etc.
- 2) A service grant from the central government to defray the cost of the new functions transferred to the councils.
- 3) A capital grant for development.

The capital grant was referred to as "the general development allocation" (GDA). This was derived from the central government which in turn obtained it as foreign project aid from the United Kingdom. The GDA was to be utilized for six types of projects: (1) roads; (2) wharves; (3) water supplies; (4) drains and sewers; (5) staff housing; and (6) minor works. The amount of GDA allocated to a province was decided by a complex formula utilizing several variables including the area and population of a province. For a council to undertake a capital project involving the use of GDA funds, it must research the project, estimate its costs, and give it a priority. Then it is submitted to the Central Planning Office and the Ministry of Home Affairs for analysis to ensure that it fitted in with country's development plan. The entire process, complex and cumbersome as it was, was to be part of the province's long term plan which was also to be prepared. The exercise in itself was a deterrent to provincial planning. But it was done, however, haphazardly. In the end, the development of a council's annual activities was not frustrated so much by the lack of planning capability and central government bureaucracy, as by the lack of skilled staff and equipment to implement the few capital projects that were undertaken. Table III shows clearly the extent to which the government's annual development budget expenditures were realized from 1975 to 1979:

TABLE III (Actual expenditures against budget in \$'000)

Development Budget	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
Estimates	6,505	8,157	10,329	18,639	25,246
Actual Expenditure	4,781	7,039	7,690	13,434	15,000
Shortfall as % of estimate	26.5	13.7	25.5	27.9	40

(Source: Solomon Islands National Development Plan, 1980-84, Vol. II, Table 3.15, p. 31. Government Printery, Honiara, April 1980.)

Development funds are spent by the councils for projects they identify. An average of about 30 percent of these funds go unspent annually. Further, the sorts of projects undertaken by councils are rarely capable of generating revenues. The large and significant projects in the country were national undertakings. The national government itself suffered from the lack of trained manpower. It was a competitor with the provinces for skilled personnel. Several provinces had said that their dependence on the central government for seconded staff had led consistently to frustrations. They challenged the concept of a unified public service demanding they be empowered to recruit their own staff on their own terms. They underlined the proposition that continued frustrations stemming from unskilled and inadequate staff and equipment tended to discredit the image of councils as responsible and capable bodies. Councillors had openly expressed suspicion that much of the denial of staff was a deliberate ploy by central government politicians to discredit them. If the provincial governments could demonstrate their competence in discharging their functions, then the call for further decentralization would be justified. The gain of the provinces in this script becomes the loss of the central government. Put politically, the development aspect of provincial functions has become embroiled in the political aspirations of politicians at both the national and local level.

The "participation" and "development" themes in the devolution of powers and responsibilities are entangled also in the debate about autonomy. The provincial councils complain bitterly about the restraints by the central government on their

expenditures. They were required to submit their plans and estimates to the Ministry of Home Affairs for practically whatever activity they undertook regardless of whether it was a recurrent or capital project. The central government justified its close oversight of council expenditures on the basis that over two-thirds of council revenues were derived from the national treasury. The councils in turn were demanding new and more extensive powers to raise their own revenues to win greater control over expenditures and general decision-making. As it currently stood, the councils' main source of internal revenues came from basic rate. However, this must be extracted from a rural population that was not rich or extensively engaged in cash employment.

The sorts of items which provincial councils can tax to obtain additional revenues include:

- 1) Business licenses
- 2) Dogs fee
- 3) Slaughter house licenses
- 4) Auctioneers, insurance agents, and cinema licenses
- 5) Liquor licenses
- 6) Death, births, and marriage fees
- 7) Petroleum licenses
- 8) Investment interest
- 9) Rest house fees
- 10) Library fines
- 11) Hire of equipment
- 12) Refuse collection fees

Revenues from the basic rate and the other items enumerated above without any form of central government grant constitute about 10 to 15 percent of the total expenditure budget of a typical provincial council. Councils needed a subsidy of over 70 percent of their budgets from the central government. This is why they were demanding powers to raise revenues from their own natural resources and from control over their land. These two items "land" and "natural resources" had become rallying points around which all the councils seek their autonomy. They calculate that, given their own sources of funds, they would be able to proceed in identifying and implementing projects. This, in turn, would stimulate greater

citizen pride in council performance and perhaps generate greater participation in council activities. But, as it stood, the councils felt that they were being stifled by the central government.

The exercise in devolving powers and functions in the Solomon Islands shows the complexity of the problems involved. Fundamentally, the experiment invoked political stakes that converted the pragmatic administrative issues into intense controversy over regional equality and national unity. Devolution, from the foregoing analysis, must not be a task devised and implemented mainly by administrators. Politicians whose interests are affected must be brought into the exercise. Much of the frustration in implementing the Plan of Operations can be traced to political interests that were threatened. This is not to deny the role of social, cultural, and physical constraints in the implementation environment. It is to underline that devolution means that power must be shifted from one source to another. Devolution, in this context, is intensely political. The virtues of devolution and decentralization—political participation, grassroots autonomy, effective administration etc.—are all secondary to the powerful political interests that are likely to be affected in the experiment. In the end, what this means is that political organization—political parties; pressure groups; movements; rallies etc.—is the prerequisite factor to create and mobilize support in forging into existence a new order. Decentralization entails no less an ambition and undertaking than the politicization and mobilization of the rural population.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### SOME BROAD OBSERVATIONS: THEORY

No one has as yet identified and empirically validated the optimum conditions under which decentralization can be best achieved. Several factors have generally been noted. These include: (1) skills; (2) communications; (3) stage of development; (4) political culture; (5) stability and crisis; and (6) political parties and leadership.<sup>1</sup> The item, "skills" points to the increased demand for trained personnel stemming from the creation of more units of government. A viable governmental organization that provides for health services, non-tertiary education, the building and maintenance resources. A typical developing country lacks skilled and professional staff. A decentralized form of local autonomy would have to compete with other pressing priorities in the allocation of scarce skilled personnel. The United Nations workshop on Decentralization states the issue as follows:

Staffing is the most vital element of any programme of decentralization for development purposes. A government may organize effectively for decentralization, mark out optimum areas of administration, allocate functions rationally between units at different levels and arrange for popular participation and representation in the programme; but the success of the programme will, in the end, depend largely on the availability of qualified staff for sustained work in small towns and rural areas, the rapport between staff and the people, the ability of staff members to work effectively together and the administrative as well as technical support and supervision they receive.<sup>2</sup>

The communications factor becomes salient in societies which are territorially extensive and topographically difficult to traverse. Where the population spread out, the decentralization of responsibility would appear to be an expedient necessity.

The "stage of development variable" is problematic to pin down. The idea that a country is at a particular stage of development suggests, *inter alia*, that only certain things can be appropriately undertaken at specific junctures of time. There is some merit in this proposition if economic factors such as available skilled

personnel, level of literacy, transport infrastructure in a social system are considered in relation to the basic requirements of operating a government. However, when the political dimension is examined, the question that may be asked is whether a group of people needs to be at any stage of development to qualify to govern themselves. The "preparation" concept is controversial as it is ill-defined. It was thrown up as a tactic to delay the independence of numerous colonies in the Third World. Within a country, the same objections can be raised against a community being granted devolved responsibility for its own affairs. The issue basically turns on whether political autonomy precedes or follows the establishment of certain minimal conditions associated with governmental viability. In our mind, while the pragmatic economic issues are obviously important for viability, they are secondary to the need to first grant the political kingdom.

Underlying the factor political culture is the proposition that social structure and political behavior should be congruent for the smooth functioning of political institutions. Are the habits and history of the people supportive of a democratic device such as suggested by decentralization of responsibility? If they are, what are these social traits and in what proportions are they required? Clearly, in the face of many communities acquiescing or succumbing to patterns of local domination, the issue is a crucial one. If the political culture argument is maintained, however, then it would be tantamount to endorsing elitism and local autarky in perpetuity. That a traditional order has been seeped in differential distribution of status and access to privileges from time immemorial should not be equated with the proposition that the traditional is the only legitimate order that can be visualized. The Third World environment is rapidly changing; most traditional systems have already been eroded substantially. In this situation, we suspect that most persons would prefer to have some sort of institutional mechanism by which their views can be expressed and accommodated in community decision-making. There is no single decentralization format; local autonomy and participation can be expressed in various ways consonant with indigenous practices. Indeed, one of the fundamental motifs of decentralizing decision-making is to adapt it to the myriad cultural forms that exists in the typical Third World environment.

Both the factors "crisis" and "stability" have been associated with optimum conditions for initiating and implementing decentralization. Clearly, the two factors are diametrically different. The first proposition suggests that a crisis is required to initiate decentralized change while the other emphasizes the need for



stable conditions. On the one hand, it is said that "crisis" is a prerequisite to jolt an established hierarchic order out of its ways, while on the other hand, it is argued that a stable order provides the security to central decision-makers to undertake the challenge of re-arranging the periphery. We can see how both factors can be useful or conducive to change to a decentralized system of local responsibility. The "crisis" variable, however, may have to precede the "stability" factor. A radical re-arrangement of the old order is not likely to be initiated with the consent of the existing power wielders at the grassroots. To that extent, a "crisis" is literally required to dislodge the prevailing order. After the crisis stage has passed, however, a new consolidated regime committed to devolving responsibilities to the grassroots may strive on stability to implement its program.

Finally, the factors leadership and party organization are briefly examined. Essentially, these factors postulate a need for a movement broadly based and led by a charismatic-type leader as prerequisites for radical change. A mass party would be in a superior position to challenge and overthrow an ingrained hierarchic order than a weak sporadically organized electoral-type movement. The mass party must not merely confront the old elites and local autocrats in the struggle for power, but also the experts in the public bureaucracy. Together, they constitute a formidable block against change. The leadership and party factors are pre-eminently political devices aimed at acquiring power first then converging the strength gained from its mass support into desired goals. The main obstacle such a movement must transcend is the tendency for it to lose its enthusiasm and momentum before full implementation of its goals has been attained. In such an eventuality, the old order can be restored with the bureaucrats back in de facto control of the state.

Taken together, then, the preceding variables—skills; communications; stage of development; political culture; crisis and stability; and leadership and party organization—are all related in different ways to a successful transfer of responsibility and initiative from the center to the periphery. It is clear that they would have to be inter-related in some way to formulate a theory of decentralization. This is, however, not our undertaking in this monograph. We have seen in the body of the monograph how all these factors have played a role in the determination of the course of the decentralization experiment in the Solomon Islands. If we have to put our fingers on any single critical variable, it would be the political ones related to the struggle between party and bureaucracy. Yet this

struggle has not fully taken form in the Solomon Islands, accounting for the domination of the devolution process by the public servants. In other case studies contemplated under this project, our data base would be extended and enriched so that at some point we should be in a position to propound a general theory of decentralization.

#### Footnotes to Chapter Eight

<sup>1</sup>Most of these materials are scattered throughout the literature on decentralization. See in particular Maddick, op. cit. and Decentralization for National and Local Development (United Nations, 1962); and Douglas Ashford, Democracy, Decentralization, and Decisions in Sub-National Politics (London: Sage Publications, 1976), p. 13; pp. 40-49.

<sup>2</sup>Decentralization for National and Local Development, op. cit., p. 45.

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