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State Society and Governance *in* Melanesia

PARTY POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

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The presence of political parties has often been viewed as an integral part of democracy, and in particular, the Westminster parliamentary system. Parties representing different opinions, policies and ideologies are perceived as necessary for the representation of different interest groups. Also, political parties provide voters the opportunity to select leaders from a number of alternatives. It was, therefore, assumed that in order for democracy to work successfully parties must exist. Consequently, the newly independent states of Africa, Asia and Oceania that emerged in the post-World War II period and subscribed to democracy all attempted to develop a political culture where parties become significant. This is despite the fact that in most of these countries, especially in Melanesia, most voters had not yet understood the concept of party politics.

When Solomon Islands gained constitutional independence on 7 July, 1978 and adopted the Westminster system of government from Great Britain, it inherited along with it concepts such as party politics. Consequently, Solomon Islanders who took over leadership of the government were faced with the fact that, in parliament, for the purposes of forming a government they had to align themselves with groups called political parties. The idea that the main governing body is

made up of a government and an opposition was relatively new to most Solomon Islanders. However, despite this, political parties have become important in Solomon Islands politics today. Parties (or the absence of strong cohesive parties) have had a profound impact on the process of governance.

This paper discusses the emergence and development of political parties in contemporary Solomon Islands. It analyses how party politics influences the process of governance and the nature of politics. The discussions here are drawn largely from my experiences as a member of the Solomon Islands parliament for eight years.

PERCEPTIONS OF GOVERNMENT

To fully understand how Solomon Islanders relate to the concept of party politics, it is pertinent to first discuss their perceptions of 'government': how they define it, what or who constitutes government, and their understanding of how government operates or the responsibilities of government. In attempting to do so, I will, here, draw from experiences, not only in contemporary Solomon Islands, but also from the colonial era.

I remember an incident in March 1966, when my father, who was then one of the 42 members

of the Malaita Local Council, made a public announcement regarding the proposed visit of the District Commissioner to our village towards the end of April that year. I was only nine years old then. My father, being a 'People's Representative' to the Malaita Local Council, was referred to as a 'delegate'. Following the announcement, people worked to prepare for the occasion: the village was cleaned, pigs were fenced, cultural performances were prepared and village elders, teachers, and the local church leaders were invited. The arrival of the District Commissioner was treated with significance. This was because the District Commissioner was regarded as 'the government' or its pidgin derivative 'Gavman'.

What this incident illustrates is that during the colonial era, most Solomon Islanders perceived the government as represented by an individual, the District Commissioner. He was feared and highly respected as he had profound authority over local affairs. Government then, was not represented by a political party or a coalition of parties. Rather, an individual was regarded as the government. The recognition of the authority of an individual or a number of individuals rather than a party with policies and ideologies is something Solomon Islanders were able to relate to because it resembled the traditional political system where power and authority were vested, not on parties, but on individuals.

To illustrate this, I discuss below the traditional power structure in my own Kwara'ae society showing why it was difficult for many Solomon Islanders to quickly grasp the concept of political parties and the idea that parliaments can be made up of government and opposition. In fact, it was only in the late 1970s that Solomon Islanders began organising themselves into parties because it was regarded as a necessary ingredient of the Westminster system of parliamentary democracy.

TRADITIONAL POWER STRUCTURE IN KWARA'AE: A BRIEF ANALYSIS

In traditional Kwara'ae social organisation, there were three main bases of authority which were represented by spiritual, political and warrior leaders. The spiritual needs of society were represented by the *fata'abu*, who, in the conventional Western sense, can be regarded as the priest. The *fata'abu* was the medium between the people and the gods—the spirit world. He was appointed by the *Akalonimauria* or the god of feasting, and was responsible for religious matters in society. The secular and civil matters of society were the responsibility of the *aofia*, who was the political leader. He was the Big-Man or Chief who dealt with the political affairs of society, or more specifically, that of the tribe or clan. The *aofia* acquired his status through achievement and the influence he exerted on those around him by organising society and distributing his wealth in feasts. In some respects he was seen as the government, though not in the same sense as the District Commissioner. The third division of authority is the warrior chief or the *ramo*. He acquired his position after displaying bravery as a warrior. His acquisition of status was partly through achievement and by divine will.

However, in reality the divisions of authority were rarely as clear-cut as expressed above. There were overlaps and in many cases an individual could be a *ramo* and an *aofia* at the same time, or any of the other combinations, or all three. What is important to understand, however, is that in the Kwara'ae society the social structure is defined by a continuous interaction between the spiritual, secular and strategic authorities. This was the case on Malaita, and indeed in most parts of Solomon Islands.



Traditionally, throughout Solomon Islands there were different forms of government prior to *araikwao* (whiteman) contact. As Solomon Islander author Gideon Zoloveke noted:

Our forefathers had their own form of government before the arrival of European traders, blackbirders, missionaries and colonialists. Leaders supervised their followers with strict traditional codes of behaviour. There was no written constitution to blend together the rules of different lines, tribes, clans and islands. No single traditional leader was able to rule over all Solomon Islands (quoted in Alasia 1989:139).¹

What is important to note from the traditional social organisation was the significant role individuals play, rather than political parties. What made the *fata'abu*, *aofia*, or *ramo* accepted as leaders was not party policies or a set of ideologies. Traditionally, an individual becomes a leader because he demonstrates an ability to lead and the possession of the criterion one needs to become a leader. The ideologies and policies he implements do not belong to him or to a party. Rather, they belong to the whole society in the form of cultures and customs. He merely implements them and is accepted often because of his knowledge of those cultures and customs. Therefore, in the traditional political systems, there were no alternative parties, but there were alternative individuals. Hence, the power and authority to rule was contested, not between political parties, but between individuals.

These, however, changed with colonialism and the introduction of the idea of parliamentary democracy at the time of independence. The first task of the colonial administration was to bring the entire island under the rule of a single authority—the colonial government. Through the District Commissioners and High Commissioner, the colonial administration put into place a political structure that eventually made it necessary for the development of political parties. To understand that development, it is

necessary for us to briefly discuss the colonial history of Solomon Islands.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION

Foreign political interest in Solomon Islands occurred as a result of increasing *araikwao* contact. In 1886, German interest in the northern Solomons as a source of labour and a British willingness to 'protect' Australia from foreign neighbours led to the Solomon Islands archipelago, New Guinea and the adjacent islands being carved into German and British spheres of influence. France was interested in the islands, and for fear of French expansion, Britain strengthened her position in 1893 by annexing the south Solomons as a protectorate. The north Solomons, including Bougainville, Choiseul, Santa Isabel, New Georgia, Shortland Islands, Vella Lavella and other smaller ones remained as part of the German territory. It was in 1899, as a consequence of an agreement with Germany that Britain eventually took over the rest of the present day Solomon Islands.

In 1896 Charles Woodford was appointed as the first Resident Commissioner, answerable to the Governor of Fiji, who was also High Commissioner for the Western Pacific. The Solomon Islands was subsequently divided into four main administrative units or districts and each was headed by a District Commissioner, assisted by one or two District Officers.²

From 1893 to 1945, the colonial administration did nothing to encourage Solomon Islanders to participate in the affairs of the country. Generally, Solomon Islanders were relegated to being passive subjects of colonial rule. Their opinions were not sought and their wishes ignored. They were subject to a government not responsive to their wishes. In addition, the colonial government laid the basis for a centralised government and it did so at the cost of ignoring, and in some instances challenging, traditional leadership systems by

appointing headmen from amongst those sympathetic to the *araikwao* cause, rather than those held in high regard by the communities involved. This gave rise to the emergence of a new group of leaders who were often not recognised in the traditional context and, in cases, did not have the support of the entire community.

The manner in which the colonial administration carried out its affairs led to the displacement of Solomon Islanders from the political process—they were not participants, but rather, passive subjects answering to the needs and demands of the colonial institution. Such treatment caused many Solomon Islanders to resent the colonial government and rebel against its authority. It led to numerous incidents where the people demonstrated their dissatisfaction. The most significant manifestation of Solomon Islander rebellion was the Gwane'eabe massacre on Malaita in 1927 in which William R. Bell, a District Officer on Malaita, and most of his party were killed by a group of Kwaio men led by their *ramo*, Basiana. The colonial government's response was devastating. An army made of volunteers which consisted mainly of planters and traders supported by the armed constabulary of the H.M.A.S. Adelaide, an Australian warship, launched an attack on the Kwaio region. Villages were looted and burned, and approximately 70 people, mostly women and children, were killed. An estimated 200 Kwaio men were arrested and taken to Tulagi for trial. The leaders were executed whilst the majority were released (Keesing and Corris 1980).³ Also, in an act of rare cruelty Basiana's young sons, Anifelo and Laefi were forced to watch their father hanged. Before he died Basiana cursed Tulagi and the *araikwao* and promised that one day, they and what they stood for would be destroyed. Fourteen years later in 1942, Tulagi was bombed by the Japanese and the *araikwao* fled.

This Gwane'eabe massacre and the events that followed served to remind the people that

rather than challenging colonial rule with forceful means, a more peaceful approach was the better alternative.

Hence, in 1939, just before World War II, hundreds of people from Isabel and Gella islands attended a series of meetings organised by Reverend Richard Fallows of the Anglican Mission. The meetings discussed issues targeted against the administration. But perhaps the most well-known protest movement against the colonial administration was the *Ma'asina Ruru* which started on Malaita after the Second World War and then spread to other parts of the country, including Makira, Ulawa, Ngella and to parts of Guadalcanal. The main objective of the movement was to establish 'brotherliness' amongst its adherents and to work towards having a government that could be more responsive to the people's wishes. It encouraged cooperation and trust amongst Solomon Islanders, and consequently, many previously smaller communities came together to form bigger communities (Laracy 1989; Lindstrom 1993).⁴

Such anticolonial movements were often branded as millenarian or cargo cult movements (Worsley 1968).⁵ However, these were, in fact, early examples of protonationalist movements. Also, they could be regarded as indigenous political organisations that eventually led to the realisation of the need for the development of political parties in Solomon Islands. Jonathan Fifi'i, a leader of the *Ma'asina Ruru* Movement, in 1983 explained that people identified the movement as a cargo cult because they misunderstood its objectives

People said we were coming down to the coast to wait for cargo? What kind of cargo? This is something we can't make any sense of...We didn't expect other people to feed us. This is not our way. We have our own gardens. Our idea in *Ma'asina Ruru* was to show that we could do something ourselves, that we are prepared to govern ourselves...Most of the people who talked



and wrote about (what they called) Marching Rule didn't ask us what we were doing (Fifi'I 1989).⁶

Given these expressions of political interest, it would not be absurd to assume that had the leaders of the movement been exposed to the concept of political parties they may have organised themselves better. But whether or not the Movement could be identified as a political party, it was taken seriously by the colonial government which suppressed the movement in 1952. The positive thing, however, was that the colonial government, realising that Solomon Islanders were capable of organising themselves on a large scale, moved quickly to meet the major demand for greater participation in the political process. Subsequently, the first local government—the Malaita Local Council—was established in 1956 to ensure increased local participation in the affairs of local government. By 1964, local councils were established in almost all the districts.

Despite these developments, however, there was still an absence of political parties in the system and Solomon Islanders were still fairly under-represented because the Local Councils were dominated by expatriates. It was not until the late 1960s that political parties began to emerge.

THE EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES—1960–1970

Prior to 1960 the High Commissioner virtually ruled the Protectorate with the assistance of an Advisory Council which consisted of *araikwao* (all white expatriate male) advisors. It was not until 18 October 1960 that a new order was promulgated, thereby creating the Executive and Legislative Councils. In 1960, six of the twenty-one Legislative Council members were Solomon Islanders and two of the eight Executive members were Solomon Islanders. This was the first time Solomon Islanders participated directly within government. Further development

occurred when direct elections took place for the first time in the Protectorate during the 1964–1967 Legislative Council. This was, however, restricted to Honiara, the capital district, and an *araikwao* businessman, Eric Lawson, emerged the winner. For the 11 local seats, indirect elections through electoral colleges were held. The rest of the members of the Legislative Council, 13 in all, were either nominated or became *ex-officio* members through the positions they held normally as Directors of Government Departments.

It was also during this period that political parties began to emerge. In 1965, Eric Lawson and Mariano Kelesi, the members for Honiara and North Malaita, respectively, launched the first ever political party, the Democratic Party. Unfortunately, it was short-lived and disappeared in 1967. But again the post-1967 election saw Bill Ramsay, the newly elected member for Honiara, replacing Eric Lawson, attempting to form another political party. In 1968 Ramsey teamed with David Kausimae, the member for South Malaita and formed the Solomon Islands United National Party. This, however, was not maintained and disappeared not long after the election (Bennett 1987).⁷

These failures in the early attempts to form political parties can be attributed to three main factors

- a lack of understanding of the concept of political parties, both within parliament and amongst voters,
- a general lack of support by the populace and the members in the Legislative Council, and
- a lack of encouragement by the Colonial Administration for Solomon Islanders to form themselves into political parties.

The majority of educated Solomon Islanders in particular (most of whom joined the Civil Service) were prevented from engaging in politics under the Civil Service General Order which prohibited civil servants from being involved in politics.

So in the meantime, spurred by the difficulties encountered in organising a political party and a general lack of interest in the Legislative Council system, members of the Council began to discuss an alternative system of government that would be more appropriate to Solomon Islands in the Melanesian style of decision-making based on consensus. Thus in 1970, a general election was held to choose members to the new Governing Council. The Council operated on a Committee system, with each committee responsible for a specific field of government such as the Social Services Committee, Health and Medical Services Committee and Local Government Committee. There were five Committees, and though it was well intended, at least in theory, problems arose. Elected members opposed unofficial or nominated members on personal grounds and local interests were in conflict with national ones. The new system again failed.

So from 1969 to 1972, the political party concept was forgotten due to the failure of the Governing Council system. In 1973 there was a re-emergence of an interest to form political parties. A few Solomon Islanders had, by then, acquired some knowledge of organising political parties and new attempts were made to re-establish parties in the Governing Council.

THE RE-EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES—1973–1978

This period is important for two reasons

- it saw the establishment of parties that became permanent and continued to exist until today, although maybe in a loose fluid form, and
- talks on independence were progressing and Solomon Islanders were, therefore, encouraged to participate in politics as much as possible.

I see party politics as a form of competition for power. It consists of a whole range of activities associated with the formation, organisation and existence of parties. It is also

about their involvement in the competition process for power and government. When successful, a political party achieving power ensures that it maintains that power and the ability to govern.

Government on the other hand is mainly to do with the process of decision-making and for obvious reasons, is concerned to ensure effective implementation of its stated policies, projects and programs.

In this context, it would be true to argue that it was the competition for power and the authority to govern that prompted the re-emergence of political parties in 1973. Also, the governing Council was to be renamed the Legislative Assembly and a Ministerial system introduced. This situation thus created the need for good local leaders in the new house of 1973–1976. In response to this change, two new parties were formed in 1973 prior to the general elections. They were the Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) led by Solomon Mamaloni and the United Solomon Islands Party (USIPA) led by Benedict Kinika. However, after the 1973 general election no party had a clear majority and the independent group, led by Willie Betu held the balance of power.

In August 1974, a new structure emerged. The High Commissioner became Governor, the Chief Secretary became the Deputy Governor and more importantly, the elected members met at Kalala House to choose one amongst them to become the first Chief Minister. Solomon Mamaloni was subsequently elected ahead of Kinika to become the first Chief Minister of the Solomon Islands and his Peoples Progressive Party in partnership with some Independents formed the country's first coalition government.

It is important to note here that the first attempts to organise and establish political parties in the 1960s were initiated by the *araikwao* members of the Legislative Council. From the 1970s, formation of political parties was initiated, organised and led by Solomon Islanders — the indigenous leaders, at least, were actively



participating in party politics. This, however, is not an indication that the general Solomon Islands population either understood or actively participated in party politics.

During Mamaloni's tenure as Chief Minister, two important incidents occurred. First, in 1975 Mamaloni resigned after he failed to consult his Council of Ministers regarding the signing of an agreement with an American company to mint commemorative coins for the independent self-governing status of Solomon Islands. The incident came to be known as the Mint Affair. However, Mamaloni was subsequently re-elected as Chief Minister because as one opposition member put it: 'Mamaloni was the best person to clean up his own mess'. Second, Mamaloni led a delegation to London to negotiate a timetable for independence (Bennett 1987).⁸

Solomon Islands achieved self-government on 2 January 1976 and the final general election of the colonial era was held in July 1976. In a marked contrast to the situation we saw in 1973 in which two parties—the PPP and USIPA—had prepared themselves for the 1973 general elections, the involvement of parties in the 1976 general election was disappointing. No particular leader was able to mobilise enough support to claim a clear majority. The two major parties (PPP and USIPA) disintegrated and members stood as independents. The parties had broken up predominantly due to regional rivalries, leadership conflicts over religious affiliations, lack of agreed policy and a lack of support institutions outside the parliament.

However, within this seeming chaos, a new party emerged. The National Democratic Party (NADEPA), founded by Bartholomew Ulufa'alu, gained eight of the thirty-eight seats. This meant that NADEPA was able to act as the power broker between the aspiring candidates for Chief Ministership. NADEPA's support base came mainly from the urban and industrial labour force. In fact, the party was construed as the political wing of the Solomon Islands General Workers Union. On 14 July 1976, the newly

elected members met to choose a new Chief Minister. A newcomer to politics, Peter Kenilorea, was elected ahead of the more experienced Mamaloni. Kenilorea, through his standing as a former District Commissioner and a lay preacher of the South Seas Evangelical Church, was able to secure the votes of the majority of members. This came as a result of personal respect for the man. I believe that had the PPP and USIPA been strengthened in the 1973–76 House, and participated as strong parties in the 1976 election, the story in terms of Chief Ministership would have been different. Had they been strong Mamaloni would have been able to use them as the basis for seeking re-election to the post of Chief Minister. However, as it was Kenilorea became the second Chief Minister and led the Solomon Islands to independence on 7 July 1978.

In the meantime, Mamaloni, having failed to become Chief Minister, resigned his parliamentary seat in 1977. John Saunana was subsequently elected in a by-election to replace him as member for West Makira.

The National Democratic Party (NADEPA) with some Independents led by Bartholomew Ulufa'alu provided a strong opposition bench. A display of this strong opposition occurred prior to the Independence Resettlement Talks in London in September 1977. All the members of the Legislative Assembly were supposed to attend, however, the NADEPA's eight members with four Independent members refused to go and boycotted the conference. Five main factors were given as reasons for the boycott.

- The question of alienated land should have been sorted out by the colonial administration before independence could be granted.
- The independence financial settlement of \$43 million was viewed as not adequate.
- The issue of re-settlement of *I-Kiribati* descendants had not been adequately dealt with by the colonial administration.
- Compensation to be paid by the British Government for the Gwane'eabe

massacre on Malaita in 1927.

- The boundary line between the Solomon Islands and Bougainville should have been properly dealt with by the British and Australian governments (Bennett 1987).⁹

The opposition felt that independence was given too quickly and as a consequence the issues raised had never been adequately dealt with.

However, despite the boycott by the Opposition and the issues raised above, the Constitutional Conference in 1977 drew up a timetable for independence and it was agreed that independence for the Solomon Islands be scheduled for 7 July, 1978. Kenilorea then became the country's first Prime Minister on independence.

In leading the new nation, the Kenilorea Government was faced with two major challenges. First, the government had to carefully devise development programs to ensure there was economic and social development and the maintenance of political stability. The experiences of newly independent nations in Africa was already beginning to haunt the new government. Second, political stability was already under threat when the Western Solomons threatened to secede from the rest of the country (Premdas, Larmour & Steeves).¹⁰ The issue was exacerbated by the publication in a local newsletter of a poem—'West Wind'—by a Malaita public servant which contained ethnic slurs. Fortunately, the Western Breakaway movement was sorted out in 1979 after a compensation of US\$7,000 was paid to the Western Solomons Council.

The Kenilorea government stayed in power till the first post-independence general election in 1980. By then, parties were beginning to take root in parliament—at least they were known to exist. Whether they had any real impact on the formation of governments was debatable.

POLITICAL PARTIES AFTER INDEPENDENCE

The post-independence period was characterised by attempts to strengthen existing parties.

However, most of this so-called 'party strengthening' took place only within parliament and was predominantly Honiara-centred and biased. There were, however, attempts by some parties to establish institutional supports outside of parliament.

In preparation for the 1980 general election, we saw the repetition of the 1973 situation in which political parties competing for power organised themselves and competed for support.

A significant development was the merger of the USIPA led by Kausimae and the Mamaloni-led PPP a few months before the 1980 general election. Out of this merger they formed the new People's Alliance Party (PAP). Kenilorea, who first entered parliament in 1976 as an independent, also saw the need for the formation of a party. He was aware that secure leadership and government depended on reliable support in the House and this support could only come from having an organised party. Consequently, he formed the Solomon Islands United Party which was launched in March 1980, only a few months prior to the general election. NADEPA was still in the running and attempted to expand its power base beyond the union movement to the rural areas by campaigning nationwide. Its popularity, however, was affected by widespread misconceptions that it was a 'Communist' party. Also, there were many candidates who preferred to contest the elections as independents.

The 1980 election saw Kenilorea's United party winning sixteen seats, the PAP ten, NADEPA two, and the Independents ten. The independents and NADEPA held the balance of power between the two major parties and a coalition was inevitable. The United Party was able to attract the support of Independents and hence Kenilorea was re-elected Prime Minister. To strengthen the coalition, the leader of the Independents, Francis Billy Hilly was elected Deputy Prime Minister. Mamaloni led the Opposition with the NADEPA and some Independent members.



In terms of the history of political parties in the Solomon Islands, two factors became evident after the 1980 general election. First, three parties were beginning to emerge as the dominant groups in parliament — UP, PAP, and NADEPA. Second, it was the first time the same person (Kenilorea) was retained as leader after the election.

However, Kenilorea's government did not last for very long. After only fourteen months in office, the coalition collapsed in August, 1981. The main reasons were personality conflicts between the leaders and a lack of dynamic leadership by Kenilorea. The Independent group withdrew their support and realigned themselves with the Opposition. Mamaloni then took over as prime minister. His government consisted of the PAP, NADEPA, and the Independents. They retained power from 1981 to 1984.

During this period, 1981–84, the country saw some positive signs of economic growth. This was due to the dynamic Minister of Finance, Bart Ulufa'alu who introduced proper monetary and fiscal policies and measures. For example, in 1983, the strength of the Solomon Islands Dollar equaled that of the Australian Dollar. The Mamaloni government also accommodated local wishes for greater autonomy. Hence the *Provincial Government Act* was passed in 1981.

Mamaloni's government became popular. However, this popularity was not sufficient to ensure Mamaloni's hold on power. Just before the October 1984 general elections, two events greatly influenced the credibility of the Mamaloni government. These included the Kwaio Fadanga boycott of the impending election and the week-long strike by public servants. Solomon Islands Public Employers Union in September 1984 went on strike over pay increases. The public servants were agitated by the government's failure to agree on a pay increase. Certain senior members of the union, however, went further and pressured the union executive to direct a nationwide boycott of administering the impending general elections of October 1984.

This was not agreed to and the elections were allowed to proceed.

I was then the acting President of the Solomon Islands Public Employees Union, was therefore leading the strike by public servants, but was never invited by Mamaloni for talks. Instead, I was invited by the opposition leader, Kenilorea for discussions. It was agreed during talks with the Opposition that the strike should not be allowed to disturb the forthcoming general elections.

THE 1984 GENERAL ELECTIONS— THE STRENGTHENING OF POLITICAL PARTIES

The 1984 general election saw the establishment of a new party: Solomone Ago Sagefanua (SAS). Hence, the number of parties that contested the election increased from three in 1980 to four: the United Party, the People's Alliance Party, NADEPA, and the new SAS, and, of course, the independents.

The results of the 1984 general elections were as follows: United Party 13, PAP 11, SAS 4, NADEPA 1, and the Independents 8. These results showed that only PAP was able to gain more seats than it had in the previous election; 10 in 1980 and 11 in 1984. On the other hand, the United Party's seats had decreased from 16 in 1980 to 13 in 1984, and NADEPA from 2 to 1.

However, despite the decrease in the number of its successful candidates, the United Party was able to secure leadership of government in yet another coalition with four Independent members and the new SAS party. Kenilorea became Prime Minister, and Mamaloni again became Opposition Leader.

The new Kenilorea government of 1984–88, was faced with three main issues. First, the Kwaio Fadanga issue in which Chief Folofou swore by custom for elections not to be held in October 1984. The Mamaloni government went ahead with the elections and under Police security elections were held on 14 November, 1984 in the Chief's east Kwaio area. The

Kenilorea government paid US\$1,000 as compensation to Chief Folofou.

The second issue which shattered the credibility of the Kenilorea government was the scandal over the sale of government houses. Sethuel Kelly, the leader of the SAS Party and Minister of Agriculture and Lands, was responsible for the unprocedural sale of government houses. This resulted in another nationwide strike by public servants. The government was then under pressure to appoint a commission of inquiry into the sales. The inquiry has led to some houses being withdrawn from public servants by government. Kelly was subsequently sacked as Minister. In retaliation, he moved a motion of no confidence in parliament against Kenilorea in 1985. However, this was defeated.

The third important issue facing the Kenilorea government was cyclone Namu in 1986, perhaps the worst in the history of the Solomon Islands, with damages worth millions of dollars and the loss of 90 lives. But, for the government the main issue was over allegations of mishandling of aid money by Prime Minister Kenilorea. It was alleged that he had used relief money from France to rehabilitate his home village of Rara, on Malaita. As a result of these allegations, Kenilorea resigned as Prime Minister in 1986 and was replaced by his deputy, Ezikiel Alebua.

Two factors should be noted about the Kenilorea/Alebua government of 1984–88. First, it was the first time a government was able to stay in power for the entire four-year parliamentary span. This was in spite of the numerous problems and challenges referred to above. Second, the fact that Alebua replaced Kenilorea as prime minister (both were from the United Party) was an indication of the cohesiveness of the United Party, thus providing its ability to stay in power until the 1989 general elections.

THE 1989 GENERAL ELECTIONS— ONE PARTY GOVERNMENT

In preparations for the 1989 general elections, the political parties that contested included the Peoples Alliance Party led by Mamaloni, the United Party led by Kenilorea, NADEPA (which had changed its name to the Liberal Party), the SAS Party and another new party, the Nationalist Front for Progress Party led by Andrew Nori. So one could see that the number of parties contesting had increased from four to five in 1989. The independents obviously continued to campaign as individuals.

I entered the campaign race in January 1989 as a result of several requests from my Chiefs including paramount Chief Arnon Wadili and Chief Mesach, a former local court judge. I was Chief Administrative Officer in the Ministry of Education in 1989 and had to choose between going into politics or to further my own career in the public service as it was rumoured that I was to be a future Permanent Secretary. After much thought, I decided to enter politics.

I did not attend any party conventions prior to the election as I was not invited by any of them. In any case I had placed my hope and trust on the Chiefs who had requested that I stand. It was only a few weeks prior to the elections that I was approached by Nori to be his candidate for West Kwara'ae. After consultations were made with my Chiefs, they agreed that I campaign as an NFP Party candidate.

Fortunately, the Chiefs had proven to me that they meant business and so out of fifteen candidates, I was elected the MP for West Kwara'ae in February 1989. There were four MPs belonging to the NFP including myself. After the election for Prime Minister, I became a member of the Opposition.

The Peoples Alliance Party had won a landslide victory with 21 seats. Mamaloni then



became Prime Minister heading a single-party government for the first time. The opposition of seventeen members was divided between the United Party, Liberal, NFP, and Independents. SAS Party did not manage to secure a seat resulting in its demise.

With a secure hold on one-party rule, it was least expected that problems within the party itself could be devastating. Mamaloni and party president Kausimae came to be at loggerheads on certain issues. Moreover, out of tradition these issues were openly debated. It was unusual too for the party president to be openly criticised by the parliamentary wing. The last straw came in mid-1990, when the party president openly called for the resignation of the Prime Minister.

In a surprise move, Mamaloni sacked five of his Ministers and declared himself an independent Prime Minister. He brought in five MPs from the opposition and appointed them as Ministers in a new government of National Unity and Reconciliation.

I was one of those five Ministers from the Opposition that joined Mamaloni's government of National Unity. The other opposition MP was Sir Peter Kenilorea. I had joined government of National Unity as a Minister in the Mamaloni government only after approval was given by my Constituency Committee which consisted of paramount Chief Arnon Wadili.

In my case I could only say that the NFP Party meant very little to my people and this was why they permitted me to join Mamaloni's government. This was probably due to the fact that the NFP was just a new party and had not been associated with any government in the past. This could also mean that a party commanded by a person of high standing and experience in politics is more likely to last than say a new leader and new political party.

Four main factors could be noted about the one-party government and government of National Unity of 1989–93. They are

- that the one party government of 1989–90 was not based on any 'Solid

Foundation' as the traditions of a political party were not complied with. For example, rather than sorting out their differences within the party framework, and in private, the issues unfortunately were debated in the media. Furthermore, it was strange that members of the same party criticised one another in the media. This is a lesson that must be learned if we want our political parties to grow from strength to strength.

- that the Government of National Unity at that point in time was a better alternative to a one party government.
- a consequence of this formation of the Government of National Unity was that it weakened political parties. For example, Mamaloni's departure from the Alliance Party led to its demise and so did Kenilorea's departure from the United Party.
- this manifestation of the ability to return to power and government by Mamaloni indicates that he is a political genius.

Aware of the need to strengthen the Government of National Unity and in preparation for the 1993 general elections, I wrote to the Prime Minister in June 1992 requesting that the members of the government should formalise themselves into a political party. There was no initial keen response. However, as ~~the excitement and election fever was~~ approaching, it was quite late to formalise the group. Instead, members agreed to go into the election as members of the Group for National Unity and Reconciliation (GNUR).

THE 1993 GENERAL ELECTIONS— THE GRAND COALITION BY MINORITY PARTIES

The number of political parties and groups contesting the 1993 elections again increased from five in 1989 to eight in 1993. They were

- the Group For National Unity and

Reconciliation (GNUR)

- PAP, the United Party
- the Nationalist Front For Progress Party (NFP)
- National Action Party of Solomon Islands (NAPSI)
- the Liberal Party, the Christian Leadership and Fellowship Group, and the Independents.

As it turned out, the group for National Unity and Reconciliation GNUR was successful and 21 of its members were elected. This is out of a 47 member parliament. The GNUR only needed to attract three members to retain the government. However, two factors prevented this happening

- the smaller parties had all agreed to form themselves into a National Coalition Partnership [NCP] government
- a spokesman for the GNUR, Charles Dausabea made a public statement that the GNUR need not lobby for support.

This was a mistake and sure enough no MP was willing to join the GNUR. It was only after much lobbying that three independent MPs agreed to vote with the GNUR.

However, when the NCP candidate, Francis Billy Hilly was duly elected Prime Minister with twenty-four votes (a single vote majority), we knew that something was not right. It was clear that one member of the GNUR switched his vote and instead supported the NCP.

Nonetheless, GNUR had to be content with being in Opposition. Opposition leader Mamaloni then took up a legal challenge against the election of Francis Billy Hilly as not constituting an absolute majority. According to the Solomon Islands Constitution, absolute majority means half of the members plus one. In this situation half of forty-seven members is twenty-three and half. The court of Appeal ruled that twenty-four votes represented an absolute majority in the forty-seven seat chamber. The matter was then laid to rest.

During the 1993 elections, many national and local issues were raised. The other smaller

political parties made a determined effort to undermine the GNUR. There were claims that the GNUR was a corrupt government and there was a need for a clean and 'Jesus Government'. For example, the Christian Leadership and Fellowship group campaigned for a highly moral, and clean government. Unfortunately, two of the group's four members have since failed to live up to the standard of the group.

Twenty-three members of the earlier thirty-eight member house were re-elected. Perhaps one important contributing factor regarding their re-election was the use of the special discretionary fund introduced in 1992 to which MPs had access in providing finances to certain communities within their electorates. Obviously, the MPs standing within his own electorates and their relationship to the GNUR and Mamaloni for that matter could not be discounted. One overriding factor for the introduction of the special discretionary fund was to avoid having MPs behaving like beggars at the Foreign Missions in Honiara and another factor was to ease the mounting pressure from constituents by their demands upon their MPs.

When the NCP government achieved power, they made several changes, one of which was to change the special discretionary fund into the Constituency Development Fund and increase the amount to \$200,000 SBD for each constituency per annum. This in some regards is still unfair to highly populated constituencies, as it was not based on population.

The NCP was not without fault and in mid-1994, the Minister of Finance resigned over allegations of corruption. In terms of the Honiara Casino Licence it was the Minister of Home Affairs, Maeliau, leader of the Christian Leadership and Fellowship group that approved the licence in 1994.

The boat started rocking and there was increasing dissatisfaction with the NCP. It was rumoured that the NCP was more worried about maintaining its solidarity than addressing issues of concern and developing the country. It



obviously was difficult for an independent Prime Minister to control leaders of the various Political Parties and groups in government.

In preparation for the formation of an alternative government, I again wrote to Mamaloni in February 1994 to request formalisation of the GNUR into a political party. This was agreed upon. By August 1994, I announced the official existence of the Solomon Islands National Unity, Reconciliation and Progressive Party (SINURP), after members of the Opposition agreed on its constitution.

By October 1994, the opposition had completed in draft its proposed program of Action 1995–98. Armed with the fact that the opposition was united into a single party and recognising one leader, the road was now open. Rising public opinion against the NCP government, especially in terms of unnecessary spending and unwarranted overseas trips, could not help the situation and so we began to see defectors from the NCP camp to the SINURP Party. One could say too that ‘cheque or cash lobbying’ by both camps was at its height during this period. For example, it was rumoured that one NCP minister went around with a bag full of money to lobby SINURP members. The NCP could no longer hold its members together. Prime Minister Billy Hilly then finally resigned in November 1994 after running a minority government for two weeks.

Mamaloni was elected and sworn in on 7 November 1994 as Prime Minister of what purported to be yet another one Party government, that of the SINURP Pati. Certain improvements have been made in this regard, that is in terms of party politics. They were

- that Mamaloni was also recognised as the SINURP Party President so that no outside influential person could interfere with the policies and programs of the government and party. This was to avoid the repetition of the 1990 media clashes between Mamaloni and Kausimae
- it was the first time ever for a

government’s program of Action 1995–98 to be finalised and released on time.

The program of Action 1995–98 was duly presented in Parliament in December 1994 and accepted as a government document. In the foreword to the document, the Prime Minister says,

this programme of Action is focused mainly on the maximum utilization of the country’s natural resources for the generation of income, job opportunities for our growing population and provision of essential services to the general populace. Most of the programmes here are reflective of the need for the total development of the human being and society according to the principles of democracy, that there is equal development and fair distribution of benefits and that resources owners get maximum benefit from their own resources. This is true indeed since most of the resources in the country are not owned by the government but by the resource-owners themselves, who are the custodians of rural life.

In terms of managing our own resources, the present government (1997) has put in place certain measures. There is concern, however, over the current unsustainable rate of logging in Solomon Islands. For example, the latest statistics from the Solomon Islands Ministry of Forest, Environment and Conservation show that during 1996, the total round logs exports amounted to 791,134 cubic metres, an increase of 7.8 per cent over the 1995 figure. The total export revenue generated by these exports was \$US92.2 million [SI\$336 million] due to an increase in log prices on the international market during 1996.

This is well above the sustainable rate.

Nonetheless, the present government has earmarked 1999 as the year logging will eventually be stopped. There is also in place a logging code of practice approved by the government in late 1996. It is very much up to the Ministry of Forest and the Forest Industries Association to try and comply with this code of practice.

In terms of our sea resources, Solomon Taiyo Fishing Company [a joint-venture between the Solomon Islands government and Taiyo Ghio Ghio of Japan] has been in operation since 1972. It is one of the largest fishing companies in the South Pacific. There are concerns too that we could be over-harvesting our fish. However, the government is conscious of this and has not issued any new fishing licences.

In terms of tourism, the government wishes to encourage the establishment of small eco-tourism resorts. The Anuha Tourist resort is expected to be reopened and fully operated by 1998. A new international airline terminal funded by the Japanese government is being built and the Honiara main road improvement project is expected to be completed in 1998. It is the objective of the present government to tap the spin-offs from the Sydney 2000 Olympics, in terms of tourism.

One major undertaking which could give a boost to our economy when fully operational is the gold mine at Gold Ridge. This is a priority project of the government and the final head lease agreement had already been signed on March 12 1997. Construction work has commenced and it is anticipated that the first gold pour will occur in March 1998.

The World Bank has since lifted its moratorium on the Solomon Islands economy after the signing of the head-lease agreement between the government, Landowners and Ross Mining CO. Ltd of Australia. This agreement is reputed to be one of the best in the region as lessons from the Panguna case have been taken into account. However, there is currently a high court challenge from a few landowners against the company arguing the current compensation package is not adequate. It is hoped that a good solution will be arrived at. I have highlighted some of the projects initiated by the government to prove the point that these can only proceed within an environment of political stability and spearheaded by a strong and responsible government. Obviously, what is perhaps equally

important too is continuity in government.

This political stability was threatened in February 1997 when Mamaloni relieved Danny Phillip of the post of Deputy Prime Minister for the second time. The first was in 1990. Francis Saemala was promoted to Deputy Prime Minister. Saemala is currently leader of NAPSI. Mamaloni had not been satisfied with some of his Ministers [including Danny Phillip] and Party Executive members and had threatened to go independent for a second time. The first time was in 1990. However, on 20 February 1997, I as the SINURP Party secretary issued the following press statement,

As a result of a special SINURP Party caucus meeting today, it was resolved that the Hon. Solomon Mamaloni shall not resign as Prime Minister as he is still the leader of the ruling SINURP Party. The SINURP Party further acknowledges the appointment of Hon. F.J. Saemala as Deputy Prime Minister as one of the ways to strengthen and stabilise the present government. The government therefore does not wish to fail the people of the nation at this eleventh hour and attempts to destabilise the government would not be in the best interest of the people and nation.

So Political stability is assured until the forthcoming general elections in August/September 1997.

At this juncture it is only fitting that I point out some of my own observations:

- (i) There is sometimes slackness or a lack of seriousness by implementors [normally public servants] in the implementing of government policies, and approved projects. When the implementors fail, it is the elected government that gets the blame.
- (ii) Though a good number of public servants are dedicated and serious in their work, there are others who employ a 'no-care' attitude. This often leads to a lack of discipline and in some instances involvement in corruption. For example,



in 1996, some forty public servants were suspended for their involvement in misuse of public funds amounting to approximately SI\$35 million.

- (iii) There should be established in the public service an inspectorate and monitoring Unit to keep a close eye on performances of public servants.
- (iv) There is need too for the elected government to be disciplined and serious in terms of its performance and the delivery of the required goods and services to the rural populace.
- (v) The role of NGOs in the country should be to co-exist and cooperate with the elected government. There is concern that one NGO is behaving like a political party and has engaged itself in campaigning against many of the present members of parliament; and
- (vi) A dangerous trend that seems to be occurring is to make legal challenges against the good and noble intentions of the government's desire to fulfil its obligations. An example of this is the legal challenge taken by the Premier of Guadalcanal Province against the 1996 *Province government Act* passed by parliament in December 1996. This Act would have abolished the 1981 Provincial Government system and replaced it with Area Assemblies. The government has appealed against the high court nullification of the Act. There is a risk that the judiciary will be caught up in politics, then there is no respect for the judiciary.

I have highlighted these factors to help us improve on our failures and also to create an awareness that really the elected government is only one component of what government means in its broader terms. Government consists of the people, the elected MPs, the elected government, the NGOs, the churches, the judiciary and the public service. However, unfortunately, the elected government nearly always gets the

blame for almost anything that fails.

THE 1997 GENERAL ELECTIONS— WHAT NEXT ?

The 1997 general election is the most important since independence. I say this for two reasons.

They are that

- whoever becomes the elected government, they will have the important responsibility of leading the country into the next century and millennium and
- the election will prove whether party politics are here to stay.

Certain national issues are expected to feature prominently in the elections. These include

- the provincial government system
 - CDF [constituency Development Fund]
 - the Bougainville Crisis
-
- logging
 - corruption, and
 - the economy and cash-flow problem faced by the government.

Due to the unpredictable nature of politics in the Solomon Islands, it is quite difficult to predict who will form the next government but what is certain is that political parties and individuals alike will be campaigning hard to win the elections and form the next government which will take the country into the twenty-first century.

CONCLUSION

In a developing nation such as the Solomon Islands it is imperative that certain institutions such as political parties be strengthened so as to provide an environment that is conducive to progress and prosperity. This can only come about when we have political stability and continuity in government.

The good organisation and management of differing opinions as presented by the different political parties is a must. However, the Big-man or wantok system type of politics is still

influential as most voters tend to vote according to whom they know rather than the issues involved. This personal type of politics needs to be addressed.

The influence of the Big-man type of politics needs to be reduced and the party system strengthened. One of the approaches to help in this type of situation is for a mass education program to teach the populace about political parties and government. This includes involving more people in the political discussions.

Political parties need to be supported in terms of funding by government and a greater effort by leaders of political parties to reach out to the populace is necessary. Stronger political parties are required to avoid personality conflicts and to create political stability so that we can make predictions about the political situation.

It is also fair to say that party politics and government go hand in hand and I believe there needs to be some seriousness now by political leaders to strengthen their political parties. The 1997 general elections obviously will provide the test for our political parties and the greatest challenge that lies ahead is for the next government to take the Solomon Islands along a smooth, prosperous and peaceful path into the twenty-first century.

NOTES

- ¹ As quoted in Sam Alasia, 'Politics'. In *Ples Blong Iumi- Solomon Islands: the past four thousand years*. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, USP, 1989, p.139.
- ² For more on Solomon Islands colonial history, see Bennett (1987) which discusses the country's history from 1800 to 1978.
- ³ Roger M. Keesing and Peter Corris, *Lightning Meets the West Wind: the Malaita Massacre*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- ⁴ Hugh Laracy, *Pacific Protest: The Ma'asina Rule Movement, Solomon Islands, 1944-1952*. Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 1983. Also, see L. Lindstrom, *Cargo Cult: strange stories of desire from Melanesia and beyond*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993.
- ⁵ Peter Worsely, *The Triumph Shall Sound: a study of 'cargo' cults in Melanesia*. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.
- ⁶ Jonathen Fifi'i, *From Pig-theft to Parliament: my life between two worlds* (translated and edited by Roger M. Keesing). Suva and Honiara: Institute of Pacific Studies, USP and the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education, 1989.
- ⁷ Bennett, 1987.
- ⁸ Bennett, 1987.
- ⁹ Bennett, 1987.
- ¹⁰ R. R. Premdas, P. Larmour, and J. Steeves, 'The Western Breakaway Movement in Solomon Islands'. In *Pacific Studies*, Vol. 7, No.2, pp.34-67.

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