

INTRODUCTION: PAPUA NEW GUINEA AT TWENTY-FIVE

On the eve of Papua New Guinea's independence in 1975 there were many – Papua New Guineans, resident expatriates, and overseas observers – who were sceptical about the future of an independent Papua New Guinea. While people in the New Guinea highlands were apprehensive of being dominated by better educated coastal and Island people, and Papuans around the capital, Port Moresby feared being swamped by immigration from the highlands, well informed commentators, looking to the experience of post-colonial states elsewhere, spoke of the likelihood of political anarchy, an army coup or authoritarian single-party dominance, and of economic collapse. Australian journalist Peter Hastings, for example, commented in 1971 on the 'inescapable similarity between Africa and Papua New Guinea', and suggested that after independence 'the Army will inevitably be involved in the political direction of the country' (Hastings 1971:32); the perceptive historian Hank Nelson wrote, around the same time: 'After the formal withdrawal of Australian authority the new government may seem to work well, then, as corruption, inefficiency and secessionist movements become more obvious, the few educated and competent will take over, either dismissing the institutions of government established by Australia or ignoring them', (Nelson 1972:208); and former patrol officer, politician and planter Ian Downs wrote a novel which centred on a Mau Mau style uprising on the eve of independence (see chapter 18 below). Such fears appeared to have been partly justified in 1975 when, prior to independence, both the

North Solomons (Bougainville) and Papua unilaterally declared their independence.

Notwithstanding all this, Papua New Guinea made a smooth transition to independence and in its first decade as an independent state performed well: it introduced several major policy reforms (including the introduction of provincial government and the renegotiation of the Bougainville Copper Agreement); it reelected the Somare government in 1977 and then achieved smooth changes of government in 1980, 1982 and 1985; it enjoyed generally good external relations, including successful intervention by the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) to end a rebellion in newly independent Vanuatu, and it experienced a measure of economic success (the kina actually appreciating against the \$A). Papua New Guinea is still one of the few post-colonial states that has maintained an unbroken record of democratic government, avoiding both an army takeover and an authoritarian civilian regime. (An assessment of the first decade of independence is reproduced in chapter 2.)

Nevertheless, from around the mid 1980s several adverse developments became increasingly evident, particularly: a decline in the level of government service delivery (especially in remote areas) contributing, by the late 1990s, to a negative movement in several social indicators; increasing problems of urban and rural lawlessness and the spread of nepotism and corruption; poor economic management, exacerbated by the forced closure of the Bougainville Copper mine and threats to other major resource projects; increasing pressure on land, and environmental degradation associated with mining and logging in some areas, and, of course, the Bougainville conflict itself, which amongst other things brought tensions in Papua New Guinea's relations with its eastern neighbour, Solomon Islands.

The following chapters, written over a period of some 25 years (but mostly over the last decade), look at a number of aspects of Papua New Guinea's political development since independence. Before turning to these, however, the following pages briefly

examine some of the key issues facing Papua New Guinea at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Political institutions

At independence, political parties in Papua New Guinea were embryonic, but though some commentators predicted a transition to a single-party system, most foresaw the natural development of a two-party system. A shift from a preferential voting system to one based on a first-past-the-post poll was implemented partly with a view (informed by political science literature) to encouraging the development of a two-party system. In fact, however, a viable political party system never did develop. Parties, which – apart from pre-independence differences about the speed of the movement to independence – were never sharply differentiated ideologically, remained fluid organisations, lacking a mass base and generally revolving around a small group of prominent politicians. Outside of parliament, they seldom had much presence except at election time. (For a discussion of parties in the first decade of independence see chapter 6.)

Despite predictions to the contrary, over successive elections parties have tended to become less rather than more salient, and as the number of candidates contesting elections has steadily increased, the proportion of independent candidates has also grown; in 1997, 73 per cent of all candidates, and 33 per cent of winning candidates, stood as independents (Electoral commissioner's figures, see Kaiulo 1997:11). Many candidates in fact choose not to align themselves with parties (or at least not to declare alignments) so that, if elected, they are in a better position to negotiate with the political brokers who, in the aftermath of the election, scramble to put together a winning coalition. Every government in Papua New Guinea since the pre-independence election of 1972 has been a coalition government, and because party loyalties are generally weak, and many members can be readily persuaded (by, say, the offer of a ministry in a new

government) to change partners, coalitions have shown little stability. Since independence, in every parliament the government has changed mid term. This pattern of parliamentary behaviour has made for a pork-barrelling style of politics which is not conducive to commitment to longer-term national policies. The fact that in every election since 1972 a majority of candidates have lost their seats exacerbates the situation and encourages MPs to use their office to seek immediate gains. Politics, in other words, is widely seen as a form of *bisnīs*.

While there is little doubt that most voters expect the candidates for whom they vote to serve *their* interests to the exclusion of others', there has nevertheless been a growing cynicism about the behaviour of politicians, in and out of parliament. By the latter part of the 1990s this was reflected in a growing demand for political reform. Calls for reform focused on two principal features of the political system: the large and growing number of candidates at elections, and the frequency of movement of MPs from one party to another and of parties from one side of the parliament to the other, associated with votes of no confidence against the government in office.

The number of candidates contesting national elections has increased at every election since 1972. In 1977, when the National Parliament first reached its present size of 109 members, there were 879 candidates, an average of just over 8 per electorate; in 1982 the number rose to 1125, in 1987 it was 1513, and in 1992 (notwithstanding a substantial increase in candidates' deposit fees) it had risen to 1655; in 1997 the number of candidates increased again, by over 40 per cent, to 2372. This represented an average of 22 candidates per electorate. In fact, several electorates had more than 40 candidates and one, Northern [Oro] Provincial had 61. This has had two effects. First, with so many candidates, no strong party system, and a first-past-the-post voting system, the winning candidate's percentage of the total votes cast has often been relatively small. In 1997, 16 candidates (14 per cent of all winning candidates) won with less than 10 per cent of the

vote; 95 (87 per cent) won with less than 30 per cent of the vote; only four gained an absolute majority (Kaiulo 1997). For some people, at least, this has raised questions about the extent of candidates' mandates: in 1999, under a headline, 'House is full of "rejects"', former prime minister Sir Michael Somare was reported as telling a seminar organised by the Constitutional Development Commission that, with reference to the 1997 elections, 'We were rejected by 80.20 per cent of the population. The national figures do not mandate the current Members of Parliament to make decisions on their behalf' (*Post-Courier* 7 September 1999). Second, with, say, 40 candidates, a candidate can (theoretically) win with just over 2.5 per cent of the vote; in an electorate of (typically) around 30 000 voters this translates to around 750 votes. With the possibility that electoral contests might be won with such small numbers, there have been increasing tendencies (especially, it seems, in highlands electorates) for candidates to tie up their 'line' by enforced bloc or clan voting, for supporters of a particular candidate to forcibly prevent rival candidates from entering their area, and for stronger candidates to put up lesser candidates within a rival candidate's home area in an attempt to split a clan or village vote. This sort of behaviour has tended to restrict political campaigning in some parts of the country, and has contributed to increasing electoral violence (see for example the papers by Dinnen and Standish in Saffu 1996). In 1987, with a view to reducing the number of candidates, it was proposed to raise candidates' fees from K100 to K1000 (a figure slightly higher than per capita annual GNP). This was overruled by the judiciary, but before the 1992 elections the legislation was revived, and passed; it did not, however, prevent the steady growth in candidate numbers, which thus remains an issue of concern. In 2000 there was talk of raising the fee to K10 000.

The other issue of concern relates to *votes of no confidence*. In 1991, following several votes of no confidence, the constitution was amended to increase, from six months to 18, the grace period within which a government cannot be dismissed through

a parliamentary no confidence vote. However, this has had only a marginal impact on parliamentary behaviour: in 1993 Prime Minister Wingti attempted to avoid an impending vote of no confidence by resigning as prime minister and immediately seeking reelection at a parliamentary session at which attendance was dominated by his supporters (this stratagem was subsequently invalidated by the judiciary and Wingti lost office), and in December 1998 Prime Minister Skate adjourned parliament to gain a similar reprieve (but lost office in July 1999). At the time of writing (September 2000) Prime Minister Morauta has announced his government's intention to adjourn parliament for six months beginning December 2000. Ultimately, however, the movement of members across the floor of parliament and the frequency of no confidence votes are a reflection of weak political parties.

Demands for electoral reform were formulated in the 1980s and legislative proposals were put forward, but the proposed reforms did not materialise. Following a change of government in July 1999, the incoming prime minister, Sir Mekere Morauta, declared that a priority of his government was 'to restore integrity to our great institutions of state'. A Constitutional Development Commission was set up to organise public consultation and recommend action. Two principal measures have emerged from this process.

The first is a draft Organic Law on the Integrity of Political Parties and Candidates. In an attempt to strengthen the role of political parties, the legislation provides for: registration of political parties; public funding of registered parties (on the basis of the number of their elected MPs); limitations (albeit generous limitations) on contributions to party funding, from local and foreign sources; financial incentives to encourage parties to nominate women candidates (in 1997 only two women were elected to the 109-seat National Parliament); and restrictions on 'party hopping' and the voting rights of independent MPs. Under the proposed legislation, independents cannot vote on the election

of the prime minister (and a candidate elected as an independent may not join a party until after the election of the prime minister), or on amendment to the constitution, or on the budget. Once affiliated with a party, if MPs leave that party their reasons for doing so must be investigated by the Ombudsman Commission, who may refer the matter to the Leadership Tribunal; depending on the outcome of this review, members may lose their seats, or at least be made to refund campaign expenses paid by the party and be barred from holding ministerial or other parliamentary office. Opponents of the proposed measures argue that the public funding of parties will advantage the existing major parties, and that restrictions on the rights of independent MPs and on 'party hopping' are undemocratic; however there appears to be a good deal of support for the legislation, which passed the second reading stage in August 2000.*

The second important measure is a proposal to change the electoral system from first-past-the-post to some form of optional preferential voting (as was introduced at the provincial level in Manus in 1993). This proposal runs counter to the opinion expressed by the Electoral Commissioner, who in his report on the 1997 election said:

The re-introduction [of optional preferential voting] is premised on the need to reduce the number of candidates to ensure that the MP has a wider basis of support and endorsement, and also to promote collaboration amongst candidates and counter the surge in violence. Whether that system will be able to achieve all these, if it were re-introduced, is a moot point. What is very clear, though, from the point of view of administering the election process, is that it will be more costly, become slower and less tidy. [Kaiulo 1997:13]

It is certainly far from clear that a change in the electoral system, if implemented, will bring about the desired change in elec-

* In November 2000 the government failed to get the bill through the third reading, but the following month it was passed.

toral behaviour, and the arguments against more complex voting procedures are strong. Nevertheless there appears to be widespread support for this measure also, even amongst MPs, on whom it will have an unpredictable impact.

Amongst other measures to restore integrity to the nation's political institutions, the Morauta government has announced its intention to set up a National Anti-Corruption Agency, which will coordinate the activities of several government departments and agencies involved in addressing the problem of growing corruption, and there is support for a separate Independent Commission Against Corruption.

Law, order and state capacity

Questions about politicians' mandates and the susceptibility of governments to votes of no confidence – and thus, ultimately about the legitimacy of the state – have both affected and been affected by what is generally referred to as the 'law and order' situation.

Already in the 1970s Papua New Guinea was experiencing an upsurge of inter-group ('tribal') fighting in the highlands and growing lawlessness associated with 'raskolism' (essentially gang-based petty criminality) in both urban and rural areas. There were even calls for the deployment of the PNGDF in support of police to quell inter-group fighting. Such problems became worse during the 1980s, as inter-group fighting escalated and growing numbers of disaffected young men in both towns and villages joined the *raskol* ranks. In 1984 the PNGDF was first called out during a state of emergency in Port Moresby, and subsequently police and soldiers carried out joint operations during states of emergency in the highlands and other provinces, as well as further operations in the capital. Increasingly frustrated by their inability to counter the rise in criminal activity, police mobile squads resorted to draconian measures, including, on occasion, the burning of houses, killing of pigs, assault of suspects, and even looting and rape. Such actions further alienated

citizens from the state, and by the 1990s the state had acquired a sizeable liability for compensation payments to communities, arising from police action.

A number of commentators has suggested that deteriorating discipline within the PNGDF, which became evident both before and after the Bougainville conflict began, was at least in part a consequence of the PNGDF's involvement in internal security operations. Adverse perceptions of the security forces were certainly exacerbated by the politicisation of both police and the PNGDF and by the evidence of declining morale and discipline within both police and the army. On the anniversary of independence, in September 2000, disgruntled soldiers of the PNGDF's Second Battalion in Wewak went on a rampage, burning down the regimental headquarters and officers' mess. A subsequent Ministerial Task Force on Defence headed by Defence Minister Taranupi reported that the basic needs of the PNGDF were not being met, that basic management structures and systems were not appropriate or not working, and that critical issues relating to the mission and purpose, capacity, resourcing and structure of the Force needed to be reviewed. The prime minister overshadowed a 'radical overhaul' of the PNGDF and Defence Department.

By the 1990s private security was one of the fastest growing industries in Papua New Guinea – particularly around urban businesses and big resource projects – and there were suggestions that a Gurkha force be brought in to support police and army in internal security operations. It was a short step from this to the engaging of the 'military consultants' Sandline International in 1997 in an attempt to do what the security forces had proved incapable of doing, namely bringing an end to the Bougainville rebellion. The rejection of Sandline by PNGDF Commander Brigadier General Singirok was popularly acclaimed at the time but set an unfortunate precedent, and in the aftermath of the Sandline affair the PNGDF has been factionalised. These subjects are addressed in chapters 10 and 11.

Within government itself there has been an increasing incidence of nepotism and corruption; in 1996 then governor of the Bank of Papua New Guinea, Mekere Morauta, commented that 'the most corrosive and intractable problem we face now is corruption'. This situation perhaps reached a climax during the government of Bill Skate (1997-1999), despite the widespread demand, during the 1997 elections, for clean government. As noted above, the Morauta government is addressing these issues; it has also handed down guidelines to regulate the controversial Rural Development Funds, which are allocated to each MP for expenditure in his or her electorate. Nevertheless, a number of members of the former Skate government have retained ministerial portfolios in the new government and a culture of exploiting public office for personal gain seems to have become entrenched. This in turn contributes to popular cynicism about politics and politicians, and is frequently cited as a rationalisation for *raskolism* and other criminal activity: if political leaders can steal from the people and get away with it, some argue, *raskolism* is just another form of income distribution.

The same attitudes have contributed to a culture of compensation demands, including rolling demands for compensation for land used for schools, missions, airstrips, roads, and other public infrastructure, which have become a significant source of local tensions and an impediment to development and the provision of government services.

Provincial and local-level government

As described in chapters 7 and 8, in 1976 Papua New Guinea introduced a system of provincial government, in part to counter the separatist threats on Bougainville. Over subsequent years provincial government had a mixed record, working well in some provinces, especially as the capacity of the national government to deliver services deteriorated, but poorly in others.

In 1987 I commented, 'Whatever its shortcomings, provincial government now seems to have become an inescapable part of

Papua New Guinea's political landscape'. By the 1980s, however, many national MPs were beginning to see provincial governments as a threat to their electoral base, and in several instances the suspension of provincial governments seemed to have as much to do with tensions in relations between national and provincial politicians as with poor performance (particularly financial mismanagement) by provincial governments. In 1995 the system of elected provincial governments was replaced, under an Organic Law on Provincial and Local-Level Governments, by a system in which provincial governments were to comprise the national MPs from the province and representatives of local-level governments, up to three 'paramount chiefs or their appointed nominees',¹ a nominated woman representative and up to three other appointed members. A range of functions was decentralised further to local-level governments. At the time, critics of the 'reforms' argued that, in most provinces, local-level governments did not have the capacity to carry out the tasks delegated to them, and that the inevitable effect of the new legislation would be to re-centralise powers under national MPs (see chapter 8). Opposition to the 1995 legislation from within the government resulted in several members being dropped from cabinet, and precipitated a split within the Pangu Pati.

Five years after these reforms were introduced the critiques of the changes seem to have been largely borne out. In May 2000 Prime Minister Morauta observed that the system was not working. The capacity of local-level governments is for the most part weak, and although no comprehensive study has been undertaken to date, in most provinces joint district planning and budget priorities committees appear to have been dominated by national MPs. At a legal seminar held in September 2000 it was claimed that since 1997 all 18 provinces and 284 local-level governments have been operating illegally (reported in *Post-Courier* 11 September 2000). As this volume was going to press, two provincial

¹ The re-discovery of 'chiefs' is discussed in chapter 9.

governments were suspended. A new review of the provincial and local-level government system has been foreshadowed.

Bougainville

Initially, the Sandline affair boosted the peace process on Bougainville. Negotiations between the Papua New Guinea government and the Bougainvilleans were resumed in 1997 and meetings in New Zealand in July and October resulted in the 'Burnham Declaration' and the 'Burnham Truce', which laid the basis for continuing peace talks. A further meeting in Australia produced the 'Cairns Commitment on Implementation of the Neutral Regional Truce Monitoring Group (TMG) for Bougainville'; the TMG, which included unarmed military and civilian personnel from New Zealand, Australia, Fiji and Vanuatu, commenced operations in December 1997. The following month, another meeting in New Zealand culminated in the 'Lincoln Agreement on Peace, Security and Development on Bougainville'; this provided the basis for a ceasefire, which came into effect at the end of April 1998, and paved the way for the Papua New Guinea government's agreement to rescind the call-out of the PNGDF and to establish a demilitarised neutral zone around the minesite town of Arawa. On the Bougainvillean side, it was agreed to establish a Bougainville reconciliation government.

The ceasefire duly came into effect and the TMG was replaced by a Peace Monitoring Group (PMG). The reconciliation government was also established, in the form of a Bougainville People's Congress (BPC), elections for which were held in May 1999. Former premier Joseph Kabui became chairman of the BPC. Peace talks continued throughout 1998 and 1999; at the same time, reconstruction and restoration of services proceeded, and reconciliation processes were undertaken at the local level. The peace process did not go smoothly, however. First, at the end of 1998 the National Parliament rose without passing the necessary legislation to continue to exempt Bougainville from the provincial and local-level government legislation which had been en-

acted in 1995, thus potentially undermining the situation of the reconciliation government. Second, in 1999 the Bougainville regional member, John Momis (who stood to become provincial governor if Bougainville were to come under the Organic Law on Provincial and Local-Level Governments) challenged the continuing suspension of the provincial government; in November 1999 his appeal was upheld. This could have been a serious threat to the peace process. Once again, however, the various parties were able to come together; the BPC and a Bougainville Interim Provincial Government (BIPG), headed by Momis, have maintained the dialogue with the national government, with the BPC acting as an advisory body to the BIPG.

The main sticking points in the negotiations have been the issues of disarmament and weapons disposal, and the Bougainvillean demand for a referendum, which includes the option of independence. The national government has agreed to grant Bougainville 'a high degree of autonomy' and its chief negotiator, Sir Michael Somare, has ultimately supported the demand for a referendum 'in an effort to avoid a dangerous impasse in the current peace talks'; but the content and timing of the referendum have yet to be agreed upon, and Prime Minister Morauta has maintained the position adopted by his predecessors in rejecting the possibility of independence for Bougainville.

In mid 2000 Bougainville leaders were again expressing frustration at the slow progress of negotiations and apparent lack of commitment on the part of the national government, and former Bougainville Revolutionary Army leaders Sam Kauona and James Tanis were forewarning of a possible resumption of armed conflict if Bougainvillean demands were not met. A substantial agreement was to have been reached by 15 September 2000, the 25th anniversary of independence, but in September the deadline was extended. In short, the peace process has come a substantial way since 1997, but it remains fragile.

External relations

Shortly before gaining independence Papua New Guinea adopted a foreign policy of 'universalism' – 'taking the middle path without veering to either side on questions relating to political ideologies, creeds or governmental systems'. This policy was revised in 1981 to one of 'selective engagement', recognising the significance to Papua New Guinea of its relations to Australia, Indonesia, Solomon Islands, and the country's major economic partners. In the early 1990s Prime Minister Wingti gave the policy a 'Look North' emphasis, acknowledging the economic and potential political importance of relations with Papua New Guinea's Asian neighbours, and implicitly questioning the continuing strength of the 'special relationship' with Australia.

The shift in Australia's development assistance programme, progressively, from one of general budgetary support to one of targetted programme aid has not been well received in Papua New Guinea, and as the Bougainville crisis developed there was a growing sentiment in Papua New Guinea – especially within the PNGDF – that Australian military assistance fell well short of Papua New Guinea's needs. Relations reached something of a low point during the Skate administration, but turned around after the election as prime minister of Sir Mekere Morauta.

Following tensions across the Indonesia-Papua New Guinea border in 1984, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia in 1986 signed a Treaty of Mutual Respect, Friendship and Co-operation (see chapter 14). The same year the Melanesian Spearhead Group was formed between Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. (Fiji, which had experienced its first coup in 1987, was not an initial signatory but the way was left open for Fiji to join.) On Papua New Guinea's initiative, a Joint Declaration of Principles was signed by Australia and Papua New Guinea the following year.

During the Bougainville conflict Solomon Islands became a conduit for escape from Bougainville, and for the supply of weapons, ammunition, medicine and other items to Bougainville.

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Consequent heavy-handed actions by the security forces, including raids into Solomon Islands, caused a pronounced deterioration in relations between the two Melanesian neighbours. In 2000, relations had recovered, but the rapid escalation of conflict within Solomon Islands, primarily (but not exclusively) along ethnic lines between people from Guadalcanal and Malaita, has raised possibilities of the Solomons conflict spilling over into Papua New Guinea, particularly if the western Solomons (where there have been longstanding separatist sentiments) gravitate away from the Guadalcanal-Malaita conflict and towards Bougainville.

With the re-emergence of regional conflicts in Indonesia following the fall of Soeharto, and renewed demands for West Papuan independence, there is also increased possibility of new tensions along Papua New Guinea's western border.

The next twenty-five years

Where does that leave Papua New Guinea, 25 years after independence? In chapter 15 I have argued that while the prophecies of doom in 1975 were not borne out in the first decade of independence, developments over the first 25 years have been disappointing. While Papua New Guinea has maintained an unbroken record of democratic government, the promise of the early nationalist leaders has failed to translate into a sense of national identity and purpose: electoral politics remains essentially parochial; national politics has for the most part been dominated by personal politicking for short-term gain; political parties have not developed to play the expected role of selecting candidates, articulating issues and keeping MPs accountable; there has been little development of a civil society, and the quality of governance has been poor. In chapter 15 I have suggested that Peter Ekeh's concept, derived from Nigerian experience, of a primordial culture, was useful in explaining some of the problems confronting Papua New Guinea at the beginning of the twenty-first century; certainly, as is also argued in chapter 16, these problems are not unique to Papua New Guinea.

State and Society in Papua New Guinea

On the positive side, despite its extreme linguistic fragmentation and potential for conflict along ethnic lines, ethnic tensions have been relatively minor. This is particularly so with respect to language itself: Papua New Guinea does not have an explicit policy on language, with the result that Tokpisin has naturally developed as the dominant *lingua franca*, while English has become the principal language of education, administration and commerce, and the country's 850 or so vernacular languages are being used in early education and adult literacy programs. Another positive element in the situation is that Papua New Guineans themselves are aware of their problems – none more so than Prime Minister Morauta – and are taking steps to address them. What is needed, however, is less institutional reform than a fundamental shift in patterns of political behaviour. If Papua New Guinea can achieve this, it will have done what few other post-colonial states have managed to accomplish.