

**STATE AND SOCIETY IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA**  
**THE FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS**

**STATE AND SOCIETY IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA**  
**THE FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS**

R. J. MAY



THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

---

E P R E S S



E P R E S S

Published by ANU E Press  
The Australian National University  
Canberra ACT 0200, Australia  
Email: [anuepress@anu.edu.au](mailto:anuepress@anu.edu.au)  
Web: <http://epress.anu.edu.au>  
Previously published by Crawford House Publishing Pty Ltd  
PO Box 50, Belair, SA 5052

---

May, R. J. (Ronald James), 1939- .

State and society in Papua New Guinea: the first  
twenty-five years.

New ed.

Includes index

ISBN 1 920942 06 8

ISBN 1 9209420 5 X (online document)

1. Papua New Guinea - Politics and government - 1975- .
2. Papua New Guinea - Social conditions. I. Title.

320.993

---

All rights reserved. You may download, display, print and reproduce this material in unaltered form only (retaining this notice) for your personal, non-commercial use or use within your organisation.

All electronic versions prepared by UIN, Melbourne  
Cover design by Michael Birch with a photo by R. J. May

First edition © 2001 R. J. May

This edition © 2004 R. J. May

## FOREWORD

Rt Hon Sir Michael Somare, GCMG, CH, MP

A 25th, or silver, anniversary tends to be an occasion for both celebration and reflection. Both activities are apt when, as on the occasion of Papua New Guinea's 25th anniversary of independence, silver itself has contributed significantly both to national revenue, as the third most valuable metal export, and to one of our greatest national tragedies, the violent conflict in Bougainville between 1989 and 1997.

The broad scope of this book on state and society in Papua New Guinea enables the author, Dr R.J. (Ron) May, to draw attention both to some of Papua New Guinea's greatest strengths and achievements and to some of our shortcomings since independence. It also provides an opportunity to explore some of the links between them – a vibrant constitutional democracy and enormous economic potential, especially in agriculture and the resources sector. The accuracy and pertinence of the author's observations are made all the greater because of the way that they draw on his two academic specialties, economics and politics.

In an essay written to explain Papua New Guinea to an Australian audience after 10 years of independence (reprinted here as chapter 2), Ron May writes of 'Port Moresby and the Bush'. In doing so, he refers indirectly to an old Australian dilemma – Sydney, especially (or some other Australian capital city), '*or* the bush'. At the same time, he draws attention to the reality that, for almost all Papua New Guineans, even those who have lived longest in towns, the focus of life is still Port Moresby, Lae, Mount Hagen, Rabaul, Wewak, etcetera '*and* the bush', or home.

In fact, even for the longest-serving Members of Parliament, including myself (I have been elected and re-elected for an unbroken 33 years), national politics and government in Port Moresby are only aspects of political life and public affairs: the clan and village, the local-level government ward where they are located, and (especially since the provincial government reforms) the District, the Province, and sometimes the region are also very important.

The various studies that make up this book recognise the diverse arenas in which Papua New Guineans pursue different interests as well as our national destiny.

In doing so, they draw on the author's detailed research in my home province, East Sepik; his work on the challenges of micro-nationalism; his practical experience in helping to set up two important national institutions, the Bank of Papua New Guinea and the National Research Institute (formerly, the Papua New Guinea Institute of Applied Social and Economic Research); his consultancies to government; as well as his knowledge of other developing countries, especially the Philippines. They also provide a glimpse into his appreciation of the arts in Papua New Guinea, both traditional and modern.

I am, therefore, pleased to introduce this book, which brings together a quarter century of Ron May's scholarly work on Papua New Guinea on the 25th anniversary of independence. Our views have not always coincided, though I appreciate the independence, clarity and knowledge with which the author has expressed his. I continue to value his learning, his contributions to mutual understanding with people in other countries, especially Australia, and his critical analyses of significant events and trends in development.

I commend this book to everyone interested in Papua New Guinea, both for the insights it provides into the first quarter-century of Papua New Guinea's independence and as a valuable stimulus to national self-examination.

*Foreword*

*Sir Michael Somare, known throughout Papua New Guinea as 'the Chief', was Chief Minister of Papua New Guinea from 1972 to 1975; the first Prime Minister from 1975 to 1977, and Prime Minister from 1977 to 1980 and 1982 to 1985; as well as a senior Minister in subsequent Governments. He was re-elected Prime Minister in 2002.*

# CONTENTS

- Foreword by Sir Michael Somare **v**  
Preface **xi**
- 1 Introduction: Papua New Guinea at twenty-five **1**
  - 2 Port Moresby and the bush: Papua New Guinea's first post-independence decade **17**
  - 3 Political style in modern Melanesia **36**
  - 4 Micronationalism in Papua New Guinea **48**
  - 5 The Political Education Programme **107**
  - 6 Class, ethnicity, regionalism and political parties **127**
  - 7 Decentralisation: constitutional form and political reality **147**
  - 8 Decentralisation: two steps forward, one step back **173**
  - 9 (Re?)Discovering Chiefs: Traditional authority and the restructuring of local-level government in Papua New Guinea **203**
  - 10 The PNGDF in troubled times **237**

11	The military factor in the events of March 1997	<b>246</b>
12	Challenging the State	<b>254</b>
13	The Bougainville Crisis	<b>273</b>
14	'Mutual respect, friendship and cooperation'? The Papua New Guinea-Indonesia border and its effect on relations between Papua New Guinea and Indonesia	<b>286</b>
15	From promise to crisis: a political economy of Papua New Guinea	<b>302</b>
16	State, society and governance: A Philippines–Papua New Guinea comparison	<b>324</b>
17	Nugget, Pike, et al.: The role of the Reserve Bank of Australia in Papua New Guinea's decolonisation	<b>347</b>
18	Nationalism and Papua New Guinea writing	<b>379</b>
	References	<b>391</b>
	Index	<b>428</b>

## PREFACE

In September 2000 Papua New Guinea celebrated 25 years as an independent nation. This collection was put together at the time to mark the occasion, and was originally published by Crawford House Publishing. It comprises papers written over a period of more than 25 years, since I first started working on and in Papua New Guinea. Most of the chapters included here, however, have been written in the past few years and address topics of central political concern: the role of the state, the army, decentralisation, the interaction of traditional and non-traditional authority, and political economy. A few were written more than a decade ago but have been included either because what they have to say is still relevant or because they offer a historical insight into issues of contemporary debate. Since the collection was first published, Papua New Guinea has survived another national election – albeit one marked by increased electoral violence – and Sir Michael Somare has been returned as prime minister. But many of the political and economic problems discussed in this volume remain, and the search for explanations and ‘solutions’ goes on.

The initial decision to produce *State and Society in Papua New Guinea* was encouraged by my old friend and publisher, Tony Crawford, and was brought to speedy fruition with the expert assistance of Claire Smith, Allison Ley and, especially, Jill Wolf. For preparing the new edition for publication, I am indebted to Richard Thomson, whose editorial and management skills were honed with the *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*. I would also like to acknowledge the help, stimulation and collegiality I have enjoyed over the years from a number of colleagues in Papua

*State and Society in Papua New Guinea*

New Guinea and at The Australian National University, who, like myself, have worked in and on Papua New Guinea for more years than we care to remember, particularly, David Hegarty, Bill Standish, John Ballard, Hank Nelson, Bryant Allen, Anthony Regan and Sinclair Dinnen.

R.J. May  
Canberra  
March 2004