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Gradual development

The Australian Government's approach to higher education in the Territory of Papua and New Guinea (TPNG) changed over the 1960s. The establishment of the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) in the middle of the decade altered the dynamics around university education, opening access to students who could not obtain a scholarship to study in mainland Australia. However, a lack of universal secondary schooling ensured that access to university study was still difficult, given the requirements for entry. In addition, concerns within the Australian Administration about the revolutionary ferment that could be created by a university was ever present. This chapter also addresses the emergence of UPNG, and the way in which the Australian Administration fought to control a rapidly changing environment in TPNG.

As the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan took shape, and administrators across the Pacific rushed to avail themselves of the opportunities, Australia's colonial and trust power responsibilities in TPNG continued. Australian Government efforts to develop higher education and education more generally in TPNG had been based on the expectation that self-government for the territory was many decades in the future. A notice was issued in 1961 to inform education officers around TPNG that there would be 20 scholarships available for students to study in high school in Australia. Demonstrating the confused understanding of the place of the territories within Australian bureaucracy, the awards were termed 'overseas scholarships'.¹ Considering the lack of secondary schooling

1 'Circular Memorandum No 17 of 1961 – Scholarships to Enable Natives to Attend Secondary Schools in Australia', A452 1961/2382, 1961, National Archives of Australia (NAA).

available in TPNG, the provision of 20 scholarships would not have had any significant impact on the number of students as a proportion of the population. However, as is demonstrated shortly, those that were given these opportunities often had a disproportionately high impact on the future of an independent PNG.

The 1960s did lead to a greater international focus on decolonisation and the independence of former colonies. Australia could see the international focus not just through events in the United Nations, but also through interactions at the Commonwealth level, where former colonies were now peers at conferences of prime ministers and heads of government. A UN mission to the Trust Territory of New Guinea in 1962 was led by British representative on the UN Trusteeship Council Sir Hugh Foot. The mission 'was highly critical of the Australian Government's attitude towards PNG education'.² Despite Hasluck's desire that development in TPNG be gradual, building from primary education upwards, the Foot Report called for a 'comprehensive education framework encompassing primary, secondary and tertiary training ... because highly trained local public servants, politicians and lawyers were needed to make early self-government a workable reality'.³ The Foot Report was realistic in recognising the social, economic and geographical impediments to development in TPNG, but the Visiting Mission found that the number of educated New Guineans (and by extension Papuans who were in the other, related, territory) would multiply and 'they must be given every opportunity to play their full part'.⁴ In short, an educated elite was required to ensure self-government, and that elite needed to have access to, and be created by, educational institutions.

It can be argued that the Foot Report was the catalyst for a change in policy. However, historian Stuart Doran contended that there is little sign in documents that the UN was influencing officials in the Department of Territories. Rather, he argued: 'Hasluck thought a degree of movement at the top would deflect some of the Afro-Asian aggression at the United Nations and satisfy the related anxieties of Australia's allies'.⁵ Hasluck himself

2 Lyndon Megarrity, 'Indigenous Education in Colonial Papua New Guinea: Australian Government Policy (1945–1975)', *History of Education Review* 34, no. 2 (2005): 12, doi.org/10.1108/08198691200500009.

3 Megarrity, 'Indigenous Education in Colonial Papua New Guinea', 12.

4 *United Nations Visiting Mission to the Trust Territories of Nauru and New Guinea, 1962 – Report on New Guinea* (New York: United Nations Trusteeship Council, 1962).

5 Stuart Robert Doran (ed.), *Australia and Papua New Guinea, 1966–1969*, Documents on Australian Foreign Policy (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2006), xxii.

believed that his gradualist approach to the social and political development of Papua and New Guinea was shared by the people of Papua and New Guinea, and they would tell the Australian Government when they were ready for self-government: 'It is our firm intention to defend the freedom of choice and respect of the wishes of those dependent on us'.⁶

Nevertheless, following the Foot Report, in 1963 Hasluck took a concrete step towards advancing tertiary education in PNG, appointing a Commission on Higher Education.⁷ The commission, led by Sir George Currie, was established to report on:

the means for further developing tertiary education to meet present and prospective needs of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea and to serve the best interests of its people and enable them to take an active part in the social, economic and political advancement of their country.⁸

Currie's report recommended the establishment of a university and an Institute of Higher Technical Education.⁹ This led to the creation of UPNG in 1965.¹⁰ The mid-1960s were an important time in the development of TPNG. Not only was the university opened, but a Papuan member of the House of Assembly (to that point a body with little influence in the administration of the territories), John Guise, began work on a draft constitution.¹¹ These two concurrent events are important, and can be seen as linked, because educational institutions, according to Evangelia Papoutsaki and Dick Rooney, have acted as a point of contact for the hundreds of cultural and language groups in PNG – in a sense playing a nation-building role.¹² The university and other educational infrastructure built by the Commonwealth of Australia became locations where the people of TPNG could gather, find things in common, and work towards a shared future.

6 Commonwealth, *Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 7 May 1963, 1071 (Hasluck).

7 Doran, *Australia and Papua New Guinea*, xxi.

8 CE Barnes, 'Report of the Commission on Higher Education for Papua and New Guinea', news release, 30 July 1964.

9 Barnes, 'Report of the Commission on Higher Education for Papua and New Guinea', news release.

10 Jemma Purdey, 'Scholarships and Connections: Australia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea' (Alfred Deakin Research Institute Working Paper Series Number 46, 2014).

11 Doran, *Australia and Papua New Guinea*, xxiii.

12 Evangelia Papoutsaki and Dick Rooney, 'Colonial Legacies and Neo-Colonial Practices in Papua New Guinean Higher Education', *Higher Education Research and Development* 25, no. 4 (2006): 421–33, doi.org/10.1080/07294360600947434.

After more than 12 years in the position, in December 1963 Hasluck passed the baton of the Minister for Territories to Charles Barnes (who himself held the position for over eight years). Barnes's administrative style followed Hasluck's gradualist development approach. Stuart Doran wrote that 'under Barnes, the Australian Government was not a rapacious coloniser'.¹³ However, what coloured the style of administration was undoubtedly a sense of paternalistic responsibility, as Doran notes 'Charles Barnes was attracted to explicitly familial language – and his actions show that he lived by it'.¹⁴ The government and administration faced separatist movements in both Bougainville and Gazelle Peninsula, drawing attention to expressed fears that opening up the territories to education when the population was not 'ready' would lead to unwanted outcomes.

A comprehensive review of Australian external aid in 1965 highlighted the need to prioritise TPNG as recipients of Australian aid. This is a significant outcome, considering that Australia's obligations in TPNG were as the coloniser, not as a provider of external aid. Department of External Affairs officer CE McDonald highlighted this fact in a comprehensive paper he wrote in February 1968, titled *Transition Arrangements for Papua and New Guinea*. McDonald noted that PNG would continue to be reliant on Australian aid, and lessons could be learned from experiences across the world when a state financially dependent on its colonial power becomes independent. McDonald suggested that one option for Australia, rather than continuing to support PNG through providing grants to its budget, would be to structure aid to PNG like the Colombo Plan, with technical assistance, capital aid and scholarships. McDonald argued that 'this would fit into the pattern of worldwide programmes of a similar nature, and in political terms would gain more for Australia than a direct grant to the budget'.¹⁵

The Australian Government was not open to all offers of outside assistance, however. At the 19th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, the Australian delegation included members of the PNG House of Assembly,

13 Doran, *Australia and Papua New Guinea*, lv.

14 Doran, *Australia and Papua New Guinea*, liv.

15 'Paper by CE McDonald (Transition Arrangements for Papua and New Guinea)' A1838, 936/1/10 Part 1, NAA, in Doran, *Australia and Papua New Guinea*, 706.

and Hammer DeRoburt, at the time the Head Chief of Nauru.¹⁶ An urgent note was sent to the Prime Minister's Department in Canberra during the session noting that the delegates from PNG, and a number of 'Australian Aborigines' had spoken with the Minister for External Affairs from Kenya, Mr Joseph Murumbi. The record of conversation noted that the delegation had asked Murumbi about education and he had responded that:

if they did not receive sufficient assistance from the Australian Government they should let their needs be known to other governments; and he drew attention to the number of scholarships which, among other countries, the Iron Curtain bloc were offering to students of developing countries.¹⁷

Murumbi also offered to put the delegation in touch with any potential donors. The record of conversation is concerned that the 'blandishments' of these and other politicians 'may result in these relatively unsophisticated men believing some of the advice given to them'.¹⁸ The Prime Minister's Department was anxious about the interaction, and the Acting Assistant Secretary of the Department, AT Griffith, noted:

the practice of building a leadership on Communist lines in Commonwealth and African countries by offering training scholarships behind the Iron and Bamboo Curtains has been practised with great success in East Africa. There can be no doubt that these scholarships represent a very considerable security threat.¹⁹

Griffith also wrote that ASIO (the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation) was to be informed of the threat that these connections, and potential scholarships, represented. This interaction illustrates the dilemma faced by the Australian Administration, which was being forced to encourage indigenous leadership at the same time as wishing to keep a tight control on political influence in the territories.

16 Hammer DeRoburt was to go on to be 'problematic' for the Australian and British governments. His negotiations with Australia (and the United Kingdom and New Zealand) in the process of Nauru's push for independence (and separately the rights of Banabans) proved to be powerful – with the United Kingdom threatening 'the Banabans with prosecution under the British Official Secrets Act if they talked to him during the course of their ... negotiations for increased phosphate royalties': 'Australian Problems with Nauru (Airgram from US Embassy, Canberra)', RG59, Box 1840 – Central Foreign Policy Files 1964–66, 1966, National Archives and Records Administration (USA) (NARA).

17 'Record of Conversation at UN General Assembly | February 1965', A1209, 1965/6088, 1965, NAA.

18 'Record of Conversation at UN General Assembly | February 1965', A1209, 1965/6088, 1965, NAA.

19 AT Griffith, 'Note on Mr Murumbi', A1209, 1965/6088 1965, NAA.

Tension in the relationship between the growing 'elites' and the Australian Government was brewing, perhaps pointing to Hasluck's own prediction towards creating a group of elite, university-educated Papua New Guineans. The stress was clear in a meeting between ministers, officials and members of a Select Committee from the House of Assembly in Papua and New Guinea held in 1966. Discussions with the Minister for Immigration included questions about the travel of citizens born in Papua and New Guinea. Although they travelled with Australian passports, these citizens were prevented from freely entering Australia. Discussion also centred around what was to happen to students who had been sent to Australia for training or education. The Select Committee sought clarity on what Papuans or New Guineans might be able to do following their training in Australia: could they stay in Australia? This, the Minister for Immigration, Hubert Opperman, made clear, was not desirable:

[I] Can understand why [there are] some cases where people who come here and like it desire to remain. But any one with the interests of their country at heart and [who] can contribute to their country, should submerge those ideas and go back and help their own country.²⁰

Opperman's comments were, on face value, altruistic. The return of Territorians to their home was for the benefit of their territory. In the same discussions, however, Opperman also made clear that one of the impediments to PNG Territorians staying on mainland Australia was the risk of them failing to integrate, which, in the context of the White Australia Policy, was related to the colour of their skin.²¹ There was a clear shift in the relationships between those able to access educational and other opportunities in Papua and New Guinea and the administration. A 1966 intelligence briefing noted the administrator had 'lost the trust and respect of the younger educated section of the urban native community'. However, 'because of their education the influence of members of this section on other members of the native community is out of proportion to their numbers'.²²

20 'Notes of Discussions between Ministers, Officials and Select Committee', MS 8254, Box 8, Folder 1, National Library of Australia (NLA), in Doran, *Australia and Papua New Guinea*, 138.

21 'Notes of Discussions between Ministers, Officials and Select Committee', in Doran, *Australia and Papua New Guinea*, 136.

22 'Minute, Davis to Plimsoll', A1838, 936/3/15 Part 2, NAA, in Doran, *Australia and Papua New Guinea*, 11.

In addition, student protests occurred throughout the late 1960s, including a student march and petition in protest against the 'Act of Free Choice' that had taken place in Irian Jaya (West Papua).²³

While UPNG was established in 1965, rising concern is obvious in the writings of administrators and public servants tasked with the move towards self-determination, particularly in relation to the lack of a sufficiently educated workforce to fill the roles essential to the creation and maintenance of a nation-state. Pressure was coming from all sides – growing unrest in TPNG, the missions and questions from multilateral organisations like the UN and a sense that the Australian Government could no longer be fully in control of the future in TPNG. McDonald conveyed this sense of disquiet in a briefing paper on transitional arrangements:

In terms of world respect and influence, Australia gains little, if anything, from continuation of our colonial role, irrespective of the extent of our financial generosity and the considerations which make our administration wanted in Papua and New Guinea. A prolonged refusal to give effect to self-determination is even likely to weaken our standing in the eyes of our Western and Asian friends who now accept our bona fides towards the Territory.²⁴

By 1968 there was concern from within the Australian Government that more needed to be done to educate Papua New Guineans for specific bureaucratic, technical and educational roles to manage a state. Warwick Smith from the Department of Territories sent a terse telex to David Hay, the administrator, expressing his concern that:

no, repeat no, indigenes are currently being trained to full professional levels in key areas such as agricultural science, forestry and veterinary science as [I] believe it important (a) intrinsically (b) for political reasons that some indigenes be qualified to take senior and top Administration posts in these fields as a matter of urgency.²⁵

Smith's suggested solution involved specific and targeted scholarships, noting that with a lack of qualified candidates in the matriculating class of 1969, those already in Australia, or teachers or other already trained staff, may be required for further training. This training or educating for a specific, and

23 Doran, *Australia and Papua New Guinea*, xlv.

24 'Paper by CE McDonald (Transition Arrangements for Papua and New Guinea)', in Doran, *Australia and Papua New Guinea*, 695.

25 'Telex, Warwick Smith to Hay', A452, 1968/5647, NAA, in Doran, *Australia and Papua New Guinea*, 627.

often limited, purpose was evident in the government and administration's approach to education more broadly, but specifically in relation to tertiary education and scholarships.

With independence coming into view, the concerns that Hasluck had expressed in the previous decade about the development of a TPNG elite was highlighted. The physical and social realities of TPNG were stark. Megarrity described the situation by noting the 'urban-orientated elite were ... very removed from the predominately rural nature of the electorates they were later to represent in the PNG House of Assembly'.²⁶ This disparity included the gulf in educational attainment between the elites and the general population, in part because there had not been sufficient investment in primary and secondary education during the colonial era.²⁷ But independence was not necessarily the goal of all of these 'elites'. Two members of the Assembly who travelled to the USA to speak at the UN Trusteeship Council stopped in Fiji on their return journey, where they were interviewed by the *Fiji Times*. The report noted that 'the people of New Guinea did not want early independence'.²⁸ The two MPs, Mr Edric Eupu and Mr Zure Zurecnuoc were complimentary of the capacities of the Fijian 'locals' to 'run their own affairs', but they expressed that they did not seek early independence:

We told the Trusteeship Council that we didn't want independence forced on us by people outside. We want it at our own speed and in our own time. The Australian Government has not denied us the right to be independent and they will give us independence when we want it and not when anyone else wants it for us.²⁹

Eupu and Zurecnuoc and those who shared their view could not hold off the push towards self-government and independence for TPNG. The opening of a university in TPNG did allow for more access to higher education for the people of TPNG. Access to high school remained a problem for some. As can be seen in the stories of Cyril Chan and Joseph Aoae, the first non-European university graduates from TPNG undertook their secondary

26 Megarrity, 'Indigenous Education in Colonial Papua New Guinea', 14.

27 Megarrity, 'Indigenous Education in Colonial Papua New Guinea', 14.

28 "Right Calibre Men" – Fiji Politically Ahead of New Guinea Say MPs', *The Fiji Times*, 21 July 1967, 3.

29 "Right Calibre Men" – Fiji Politically Ahead of New Guinea Say MPs', *The Fiji Times*, 21 July 1967, 3.

education in Australia. Despite scepticism from Minister Hasluck, sending students to Australia had ensured that about 200 students had completed secondary schooling by the late 1960s.³⁰

As TPNG moved rapidly towards self-government and independence by 1975, the demand for educated Papua New Guineans to fill the roles formerly occupied by colonial administrators was high. And PNG was not the only nation on a path to independence, with many Pacific states on a similar trajectory in the 1970s. These dramatic changes in the Pacific complemented dramatic changes in the Australian domestic political landscape, which affected policy towards international students and scholarships. This is discussed in the next part of this book.

30 Ian Howie-Willis, *A Thousand Graduates: Conflict in University Development in Papua New Guinea 1961–1976*, ed. EK Fisk (Canberra: Pacific Research Monograph, ANU, 1980), 28.

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