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ISSUE ON THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

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ISSUE ON THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

I. INTRODUCTION

On 7 July 1978 the Solomon Islands will accede to independence. The present monograph, published to coincide with this event, aims at giving a general picture of the new country as well as of its evolution to independence.

II. BASIC INFORMATION ON THE TERRITORY

The Solomon Islands are an archipelago of mountainous volcanic islands and low-lying coral atolls stretching approximately 900 miles (1,500 kilometres) in a south-easterly direction from the island of Bougainville in Papua New Guinea. The six major islands are Choiseul, New Georgia, Santa Isabel, Malaita, San Cristobel and Guadalcanal, where the capital, Honiara, is situated. With a total land area of 28,560 square kilometres (11,500 square miles) and a population of over 200,000 ^{1/} the Solomon Islands were, since the independence of Fiji in 1970, the largest British dependent territory in the Pacific.

About 94 per cent of the population is Melanesian by origin. There are numerous vernacular languages spoken in the country but the basic means of communication are English, which is the official language, and Pidgin, a hybrid language with a vocabulary and syntax derived from English and Melanesian, which is closely related to the pidgin spoken in neighbouring Papua New Guinea.

Ninety-five per cent of the Solomon Islanders are christian, of whom about one-third are reported to belong to the Church of Melanesia (Anglican). Another one-third is shared, in approximately equal numbers, between the Roman Catholic mission and the South Sea Evangelical Church. The remainder are mostly adherents of the United Church and the Christian Fellowship Church. Some five per cent of the population follow traditional beliefs. ^{2/}

III. BRIEF HISTORICAL OUTLINE

The first European contact with the islands took place in 1568 when a Spanish expedition under the command of Alvaro de Mendaña sailed from Peru looking for some reportedly rich islands which had been given the name of

^{1/} The last official census in 1976 showed a population of 196,823. The annual rate of population growth is estimated at three percent.

^{2/} Solomon Islands Annual Report 1976, Part II, Chapter I, submitted by the Administering Authority in pursuance of Article 73 (e) of the United Nations Charter.

the Isles of Solomon. The expedition reached Santa Isabel and explored some of the islands lying to the south-east but the archipelago disappointed the Spaniards who dismissed it as of little importance having found no evidence of gold, silver or spices. A second expedition led by Mendaña in 1595 for the purpose of establishing a settlement of colonists with himself as Governor succeeded in reaching the Santa Cruz islands but was otherwise a miserable failure.

After that it was only in the second half of the eighteenth century that European knowledge of the Solomons was completed with a series of voyages undertaken mainly by French navigators, Philip Carteret, Louis de Bougainville, Bruni d'Entrecasteaux and others.

In the period 1820-1870 increasing contact took place between the islanders and foreign traders and whalers. In 1845 a short-lived attempt was made by the Marists to set up a Catholic mission but they met with such resistance from the indigenous population that they were compelled to abandon it three years later. 3/

The 1850s saw the beginnings of the labour trade in the South Pacific. Unscrupulous recruiters raided the New Hebrides and the Loyalty Islands, off New Caledonia, in search of cheap labour for work in plantations mainly in Queensland and Fiji but also in places like New Caledonia, Tahiti and Peru. The labour traffic was uncontrolled and developed into something like the slave trade, with kidnappings, murders, and appalling conditions aboard the ships. 4/

By the 1870s the reservoir of labour in the New Hebrides was drying up and the recruiters began to move to the Solomons. Though some of the worst features of the traffic eventually disappeared, recruiting for Queensland continued until 1904 and for Fiji until 1911. Altogether nearly 19,000 Solomon Islanders are estimated to have been taken to Queensland and more than 10,000 to Fiji, many of them never to return.

The first step towards British annexation of the Solomons took place with the passing in 1877 of the Western Pacific Order in Council which created the office of the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific Islands based in Fiji - which had become a British colony in 1874. The main purpose of the Order was to regulate the labour traffic by giving powers to the High Commissioner over British subjects in a wide area of the Western Pacific. The Order did not on the other hand give jurisdiction to the High Commissioner over the indigenous peoples of the islands, nor did it involve an extension of British sovereignty over new territory.

3/ The bishop and three other missionaries lost their lives.

4/ See for instance the report by Captain G. Palmer of H.M.S. Rosario concerning the schooner "Daphne" in 1869. Licensed to carry thirty labourers from Queensland, the Daphne had instead kidnapped a hundred men who were being kept stark naked without even a mat to lie on; there were no bunks or partitions, merely "shelves ... just the same as might be knocked up for a lot of pigs". Quoted in Morrell: Britain in the Pacific Islands, Oxford U.P. 1960.

Pressure from missionary groups now established in the Solomons and from humanitarian bodies in England such as the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society which opposed the labour traffic as well as a desire to forestall possible French annexionist moves in the area, prompted the fourth Gladstone ministry in Britain to proclaim a protectorate in 1893 over New Georgia and the Southern Solomon Islands. The protectorate was extended in 1897 and 1898 to cover "inter alia" the Santa Cruz group. In 1899 by the Samoan Tripartite Convention Germany ceded to Great Britain the central Solomon islands of Santa Isabel, Choiseul, the Shortland Islands and the remote atoll of Ontong Java in return for the abandonment of British claims over Samoa. Thus the British Solomon Islands Protectorate was born.

The development of the Solomon islands proceeded sluggishly before the Second World War. The Solomon Islands Protectorate, in keeping with a policy applied to other British possessions, was expected to pay its way out of its own revenue, with the result that after the expenses of police and administration there was little left for social services. Education and health were left to the various Christian missions. Between 1916 and 1929, for example, there was no medical doctor in the Territory. 5/ Meanwhile a large portion of the islands had been turned into plantations, chiefly copra, owned by British and Australian individuals and companies. Practically every able bodied male over sixteen years of age took turns at plantation work. Missionary influence and plantation labour combined to break down the old tribal system. In the early part of this century, the population of the islands declined. The Cambridge anthropologist Rivers in his "Essays on the Depopulation of Melanesia" written in 1922 attributed the decline to the "unintelligent and indiscriminating action towards native institutions". 6/ Others thought that the main cause lay in "the appalling number of deaths caused by diseases brought in by Europeans". 7/

During the Second World War the Solomons became a strategic focal point in the South Pacific. In 1942 Japanese troops invaded the islands, occupying the Central Solomons. From May 1942 until December 1943 the Solomons were constantly the scene of combat between the Western Allies and Japan, and it was in Guadalcanal that the Japanese advance in the South Pacific was turned back.

The War further disrupted the established pattern of life of the Solomon Islanders. It also led to the emergence of a political movement, called "Marching Rule" which became particularly strong between 1946 and 1952 in Malaita, the most populous and least westernized of the major islands in the Protectorate. The movement opposed any co-operation with the European authorities or churches, called for withholding payment of taxes and work from European

5/ Morrell, op. cit., Epilogue.

6/ Quoted by Morrell, ibid.

7/ Ibid., quoting the views of J.R. Baker and Drs. Lambert and P.A. Buxton of the London School of Tropical Medicine. - The downward population trend was arrested well before World War II. The present rate of population growth is at present three per cent per annum.

plantations and organized co-operative agricultural projects and collective development programmes. It also exhibited certain cargo cult overtones, characteristic of movements that occurred in other parts of Melanesia since the arrival of the Europeans, exemplified by the expectation that the material wealth of the white man, particularly of the Americans, would soon reach the Solomon Islanders through the intervention of some supernatural agency. 8/

The movement had within a year established a kind of government over virtually the entire island of Malaita, with local councils, tax-collecting agencies, independent courts and its own police. At first the colonial administration sought to work with the movement but when its overtures were rebuffed and disorders broke out it took repressive action, arresting thousands of followers and gaoling the movement's leaders. 9/

Though largely as a result of these measures the movement lost much of its impetus it did succeed in having a local council established for the whole island of Malaita in 1952. By 1964 elected local councils covered the great majority of the islands.

IV. CONSTITUTIONAL EVOLUTION OF THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

A. The Protectorate

From the proclamation of the British Protectorate and until 1973 the Solomon Islands was one of the territories administered by the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific. Until 1952 the Governor of Fiji was concurrently the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific with headquarters in Suva. The High Commissioner was represented in the islands by a resident commissioner. Beginning in 1953 the High Commission was transferred to Honiara in the Solomon Islands and the offices of the Governor of Fiji and High Commissioner for the Western Pacific became separate. As a result the office of resident commissioner became redundant in so far as the Solomon Islands was concerned. The Gilbert and Ellice Islands continued to be included in the Western Pacific High Commission Territories until 1971 and the New Hebrides until the end of 1973. With the separation of the New Hebrides, the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific was redesignated Governor of the Solomon Islands.

The constitutional evolution of the Solomon Islands has, on the whole, followed the traditional pattern of other British dependent territories. Until 1960 the High Commissioner was assisted by an Advisory Council of nominated official and non-official members. 10/ In that year wholly appointed Executive and Legislative Councils were established. 11/

8/ Area handbook for Oceania 1970, Chapter I, published by the American University.

9/ Ibid.

10/ In British Constitutional parlance an "official" member refers to a civil servant whereas the term "unofficial" is used to designate a member who is not a public official.

11/ The British Solomon Islands (Constitution) Order, 1960.

In 1961 a High Court of the Western Pacific was constituted 12/ with jurisdiction over the Solomon Islands, the New Hebrides and the Gilbert and Ellice Islands. Appeals lay from any decisions of the High Court to the Fiji Court of Appeal and from there, in certain circumstances, to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London. In 1975 the High Court of the Western Pacific was replaced by the High Court of the Solomon Islands as a superior court of record for the Territory. 13/

In 1964 the Constitution was altered to 14/ provide for the election of eight of the ten unofficial members of the Legislative Council. Except for Honiara, the capital, where the election was direct on the basis of universal adult suffrage, the election of the seven other unofficial members of the Council was indirect, by electoral colleges composed of local councillors who had themselves been elected by universal adult suffrage. In addition to the ten unofficial members the Legislative Council consisted of the High Commissioner as President, three "ex-officio" members - the Chief Secretary, the Attorney-General and the Financial Secretary - and eight official members.

In 1967 a new Constitution was promulgated 15/ altering the composition of the Executive and Legislative Councils. Whereas under the 1964 Constitution the Executive Council consisted, in addition to the three ex-officio members, of five official and five unofficial members, the new Executive Council contained only one public service member and up to five appointed by the High Commissioner from amongst the elected members of the Legislative Council. In the Legislative Council the number of unofficial members was increased from 10 to 14, all of whom became directly elected on the basis of universal adult suffrage. The 1967 Constitution did not yet provide for a mostly elected legislature in as much as in addition to the three ex-officio members, the number of official members was increased to a maximum of twelve. 16/

In 1970 a new constitution was introduced. 17/ It departed from the usual pattern of British colonial constitutions at a comparable level of political advance in that it replaced the existing Executive and Legislative Councils with a single Governing Council combining the functions of both. The Governing

12/ The Western Pacific (Courts) Order, 1961.

13/ The Solomon Islands Courts Order 1975.

14/ The British Solomon Islands Order, 1964.

15/ The British Solomon Islands Order, 1967.

16/ For a more detailed analysis of the 1967 Constitution see the 1968 Working Paper prepared by the United Nations Secretariat (Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-third Session Annexes, Addendum to agenda item 23, (A/7200/Rev.1) Chap. XVIII, annex I, paras. 46-58.)

17/ The British Solomon Islands Order, 1970.

Council consisted of the High Commissioner; the three ex-officio members, not more than six official or public service members appointed by the High Commissioner and seventeen members - directly elected in single-member constituencies on the basis of universal adult suffrage. Between 1970 and 1973 the public service membership was gradually discontinued and in the 1973 elections the number of elected members was increased to twenty-four.

When the Governing Council sat as an executive body its meetings and/or those of its committees were normally held in private and were presided over by the High Commissioner who was obliged to consult the Council for certain matters but was not bound by the Council's advice.

When the Governing Council sat as a legislative organ its meetings were held in public and were presided over by a senior civil servant appointed by the High Commissioner. The High Commissioner retained the power to assent to or veto bills passed by the Council as well as to reserve them "for the signification of Her Majesty's pleasure" (i.e. for the decision of the Secretary of State in London). 18/

B. Introduction of responsible government

In 1974 a new Constitution was enacted 19/ giving effect to the recommendations made by a Select Committee on Constitutional Development comprising all members of the Territory's Governing Council. The Constitution marked a return to the traditional division between the legislative and executive branches of government, and introduced for the first time a ministerial system of government and the principle of collective responsibility of the ministers to parliament. The Constitution also contained a bill of rights enforceable before the Courts.

The 1974 Constitution established a Council of Ministers presided over by the Governor and composed of the Chief Minister, the three "ex-officio members" 20/ and four to six ministers appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Minister from among the elected members of the Legislative Assembly. The Chief Minister was to be elected by the elected members of the Legislative Assembly from amongst their number and he lost his office if a motion of no confidence in him received in the Assembly the affirmative votes of two-thirds of all the elected members. The Constitution also provided that members of the Council of Ministers were to be collectively responsible to the Legislative Assembly. The Assembly was to consist initially of the three "ex-officio" members and twenty-four elected members. In 1975 the post of Financial Secretary - a civil service appointment - was replaced by that of Minister of Finance - a political post - and the number of elected members of the Legislative Assembly increased to thirty-eight. 21/ The Assembly was presided over by a Speaker appointed by

18/ For a more detailed analysis of the 1970 Constitution see the 1971 Working Paper prepared by the Secretariat of the United Nations, Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-sixth Session, Supplement no. 23 (A/8423/Rev.1) Volume III, Chap. XVI, annex I, paras. 75-86.

19/ The British Solomon Islands Order 1974.

20/ Under the 1974 Constitution the post of Chief Secretary was replaced by that of Deputy Governor.

21/ The British Solomon Islands (Amendment) Order, 1975.

the Governor, acting after consultation with the elected members of the Assembly. 22/

Under the 1974 Constitution, the British Governor still retained sole responsibility for defence, foreign affairs, internal security, the police and the public service. 23/ Though on other matters he was to act on the advice of the Council of Ministers he retained the power under certain circumstances 24/ to act without consulting the Council or against its advice, though in the latter case he was to report the matter to a Secretary of State in London with the reasons for his action. 25/

The Governor also retained the power of vetoing bills passed by the legislature and of reserving them for the Queen's assent. 26/ The Queen, acting on the advice of a Secretary of State retained a general power of disallowing laws assented to by the Governor. 27/ In addition, the Governor could, if he considered it expedient "in the interest of public order, public faith or good government", declare a bill passed or a motion carried if the Assembly failed to pass it or to carry it within such time and in such form as the Governor deemed reasonable or expedient. 28/

C. Internal self-government

Under an Order-in-Council made in November 1975 29/ the 1974 Constitution was amended with effect on 2 January 1976 to confer self-government on the Solomon Islands. As a result the Governor while still retaining responsibility for defence, external affairs, internal security, the police, and the public service, lost the power to act on other matters without consulting the Council of Ministers or against their advice. 30/ He also ceased to preside over the Council of Ministers which henceforward was to be chaired by the Chief Minister, 31/

22/ The Constitution of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, section 56 (1) (Schedule to the British Solomon Islands Order 1974).

23/ Ibid., section 22 (1).

24/ Ibid., section 22 (2) (3) and (4).

25/ Ibid., section 23.

26/ Ibid., section 50.

27/ Ibid., section 52.

28/ Ibid., section 53.

29/ The Solomon Islands (Amendment) Order, 1975.

30/ Ibid., section 3.

31/ Ibid., section 8.

while the Deputy Governor was excluded from membership of the Council 32/ which was to consist only of the Chief Minister, eight other Ministers and the Attorney-General (a public service post).

The Governor's right to veto bills and the Queen's power of disallowance were limited to legislation affecting matters for which the Governor or the British Government retained responsibility. 33/ Likewise the Governor's reserved power to declare a bill passed or a motion adopted without the consent of the Assembly was confined to bills or motions relating to matters for which the Governor was responsible. 34/ At the same time the Deputy Governor and the Attorney-General, while retaining "ex-officio" membership of the Legislative Assembly, lost their right to vote.

D. The Independence Constitution

In September 1977 a Constitutional Conference was held in London under the Chairmanship of Lord Goronwy-Roberts, British Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. The Conference agreed on the basic principles of a constitution for an independent Solomon Islands and that the territory would become independent within the Commonwealth on 7 July 1978.

The outlines of the independence constitution 35/ provide for a parliamentary form of government with Queen Elizabeth II as Head of State. The Queen is represented in the Solomon Islands by a Governor-General who must be a citizen of the country and who is appointed by the Queen for a five-year term of office renewable only once, on the recommendation of the National Parliament of the Solomon Islands. 36/ The Queen may be advised to remove the Governor-General by a two-thirds absolute majority vote in Parliament.

The executive power is vested in the Queen and the Governor-General on Her behalf, acting in accordance with the advice of the Cabinet which consists of a Prime Minister and no more than eleven other Ministers. The Prime Minister is elected by the National Parliament much in the same way provided for the election of the Chief Minister by the 1974 Constitution. 37/ The other ministers who must also be members of Parliament, are appointed by the Governor-General on the advice of the Prime Minister. The Cabinet is collectively responsible to the National Parliament, and the Prime Minister must resign or be removed by the Head of State if Parliament passes a motion of no-confidence in him by an absolute majority. Provision is made for the person holding the office of Chief Minister to become automatically Prime Minister on Independence Day.

32/ Ibid., section 1 (4) (b).

33/ Ibid., sections 13 and 14.

34/ i.e. defence, foreign affairs, internal security, the police and the public service.

35/ This section is based on the Report of the Solomon Islands Constitutional Conference, London, September 1977 (London H.M.S.O., Cmnd. 6969).

36/ The constitution of other Commonwealth countries which retain the link with the British monarchy - except for Papua New Guinea - provide that the Governor-General is to be appointed by the Queen on the advice of the Cabinet of the country in question.

37/ See above page 7.

The legislative power is vested in a single chamber legislature to be known as the National Parliament of Solomon Islands. The normal life of the National Parliament is four years unless Parliament itself resolves by an absolute majority vote to request the Governor-General to dissolve it before the conclusion of its normal term. 38/ The number of members of Parliament may vary from 30 to 50 elected in single member constituencies by universal adult suffrage. A citizen must be 18 years of age or over to be qualified to vote. The National Parliament is presided over by a Speaker elected by the members of Parliament. To be elected the Speaker need not be a member of Parliament and if he is his seat must be declared vacant and a by-election take place.

The Constitution provides that the existing Legislative Assembly shall become the National Parliament on the day of independence and will continue in existence until June 1980 unless dissolved before in accordance with the provisions set out above.

The Constitution makes provision for a High Court, presided over by the Chief Justice, with unlimited jurisdiction to hear and determine any civil and criminal cases and for a Court of Appeal which is to be the final appellate court. There is no provision for a right of appeal to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London. 39/ The Chief Justice and the President of the Court of Appeal are appointed by the Head of State acting in accordance with the advice of the Prime Minister who must first consult the Judicial Service Commission. The other judges of the High Court and of the Court of Appeal are appointed by the Head of State too but acting on the advice of the Judicial Service Commission. The High Court and the Court of Appeal have jurisdiction to interpret the provisions of the constitution.

The Constitution incorporates with some modifications the bill of rights set out in the 1974 Constitution. It also contains more stringent provisions than the previous one regarding the declaration of a public emergency. According to the new Constitution a declaration of a state of emergency must be approved by an absolute two-thirds majority of the National Parliament within seven days if Parliament is sitting and within three weeks if it is not and has to be reconvened for this purpose. The State of Emergency can only last for a maximum period of four months unless it receives new Parliamentary approval and it may be revoked at any time by an absolute majority vote. Provisions are also included for the protection of persons detained under an emergency regulation.

38/ Unlike most other Westminster-style constitutions, the Constitution does not give the Prime Minister the right to ask the Governor-General for a dissolution of Parliament.

39/ The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council is the final court of appeal of all the remaining British dependent territories as well as of all independent members of the Commonwealth which acknowledge Queen Elizabeth II as their Head of State with the exception of Canada and Papua New Guinea. In addition certain Commonwealth countries which have severed their constitutional links with the British monarchy have maintained appeals to the Judicial Committee which derives its origins from the medieval "curia regis". The Judicial Committee is composed of English and Scottish "law lords" as well as of other British and Commonwealth judges who are Privy Councillors.

The Constitution provides for the office of Ombudsman whose functions are to investigate complaints against public officers, ministries and other public authorities, of unfair, discriminatory or unlawful action. It also provides for the establishment of independent Public Service, Judicial Service and Police Service Commissions and of the Offices of Public Solicitor and Auditor-General.

Regarding land, provision is made in the Constitution for the conversion of freehold or perpetual estates held by non-Solomon Islanders into fixed term estates and for the compulsory acquisition by the government of such land with payment of compensation.

The question of citizenship was one of the thorniest issues at the Constitutional Conference, particularly in relation to the 3,000 Gilbertese who had settled in the Territory over the past 20 years. It was finally agreed that the Constitution would provide for the granting of Solomon Islands citizenship to a broad category of persons including the Gilbertese provided they applied for it not later than two years after the date of independence. ^{40/} It is also laid down that Parliament may provide for the grant of citizenship to the descendants of the Solomon Islanders who were taken to Australia or Fiji to work on plantations at the turn of the century.

The Constitution of the Solomon Islands can only be changed by a Bill which clearly states its intention to change the constitution and which has been passed at two readings of the Bill by an absolute two-thirds majority of the National Parliament. Certain sections of the Constitution are specially entrenched and can only be modified by a three-fourths absolute majority vote. ^{41/}

V. OTHER POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

In common with some other Territories in the Pacific the growth of political parties in the Solomon Islands has been slow. In 1965 the eight elected members of the Legislative Council announced the formation of a party to be called the Democratic Party of the Solomon Islands ^{42/} but the experiment was ephemeral. It was in fact the lack of a party system which was cited among the reasons for the abandonment between 1970 and 1974 of certain aspects of the Westminster system with its traditional separation of powers and of government and opposition.

^{40/} Report of the Solomon Islands Constitutional Conference London, September 1977 (London H.M.S.O., Cmnd 6969) paragraphs 31-37.

^{41/} The sections so entrenched relate to the bill of rights, provisions relating to the elections to Parliament, provisions establishing the independence of the Judiciary, the Public Solicitor, the Ombudsman and the Auditor-General, and the provisions for the amendment of the Constitution.

^{42/} Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-second Session, Addendum to agenda item 23, (Part III), A/6700/Rev.1, chapter XV, para. 46.

Most candidates in the three general elections held in 1970, 1973 and 1976 stood as independents, though some successful candidates have either formed new political parties or joined existing ones. So far the elections have produced a large turnover of members of the Legislature. Of the 17 elected members of the 1970 Governing Council, only 6 were returned in 1973. Of the 38 members elected in 1976 only 14 had belonged to the previous Assembly.

With the introduction of responsible government in 1974, Mr. Solomon Mamaloni of the newly emerged People's Progress Party (PPP) was elected the Territory's first Chief Minister. His chief opponent was Mr. Benedict Kinika of the United Solomon Islands Party (USIP) formed after the 1973 elections. Mr. Mamaloni proceeded to include members of the Opposition party into his first government. In the second government formed by Mr. Mamaloni in December 1975, USIP held five seats, the PPP two and the eighth seat was held by an independent. The PPP and USIP differed on the timing of independence, the latter reportedly favoring an earlier date than the former.

The 1976 elections brought two new political parties to the Assembly: the Melanesian Action Party which claimed the allegiance of 12 members of the Assembly and the Nationalist Party, the Political wing of the trade union movement, which won six seats. Mr. Mamaloni's position was weakened by the defeat of two of his ministers and in the ensuing election for Chief Minister he was defeated by Mr. Peter Kenilorea, a 33 year old independent who had been elected member for Malaita for the first time. Mr. Bartholomew Ulufa'alu, who was general secretary of the Solomon Islands General Workers Union before being elected to the Assembly as head of the Nationalist party, became eventually Leader of the Opposition. Most members of the Assembly are, however, independent from any political party.

Mr. Peter Kenilorea, as Chief Minister at the time of independence, becomes the new country's Prime Minister on 7 July 1978 in accordance with the provisions of the Independence Constitution. Mr. Baddeley Devesi, aged 37, formerly Permanent Secretary for Utilities and Works, was appointed Governor-General, following his election by the Legislative Assembly.

VI. ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL CONDITIONS

The economy of the Solomon Islands is heavily dependent on agriculture which accounts for roughly sixty per cent of the country's gross domestic product (G.D.P.) while mining, manufacturing and utilities account for less than two per cent. Recently there has been a major growth in the Fisheries sector with exports tripling between 1975 and 1976. Most commercial fishing is carried out by a Japanese company, Solomon Taiyo Ltd.

/...

The balance of trade is in deficit. In 1976 - the last year for which official figures are available - imports exceeded exports by \$A.2.6 million. The main exports are copra, timber and fisheries which together accounted for over 85 per cent of the value of all exports in 1976.

Japan is the main export market for the Solomons, accounting, in recent years, for well over half of the Territory's exports. Australia is the main supplier of imports - over 40 per cent in 1974 - followed by Japan and the United Kingdom.

Until October 1977 when a new local currency was introduced, the official currency of the Territory was the Australian dollar. 43/ The new currency known as the Solomon Islands dollar has the same value as the Australian currency.

The Solomons' recurrent budget is balanced by a grant-in-aid from the United Kingdom and most of the capital budget is met from United Kingdom development funds. In 1977 the total grant-in-aid was expected to be \$A.2. million in a recurrent budget of over \$11.6 million. The Finance Minister in introducing the 1977 budget to the Legislative Assembly stated that he expected the whole of the capital budget to be financed by grants or soft loans from overseas, about two thirds of which would come from the United Kingdom, about a quarter from Australia and the rest from other sources including New Zealand and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Total British aid to the Solomon Islands in 1976 exceeded £9. million. 44/

At the conclusion of the Constitutional Conference the United Kingdom agreed to provide £26. million in development aid after independence spread over a four-year period. 45/ According to an estimate from the World Bank the "per capita" income in the Solomon Islands in 1974 was \$US.310. 46/

In 1965 it was estimated that about 96 per cent of the land total was held by indigenous people. However most commercial plantations are owned by expatriates. 47/ There has, for some years, been a programme to assist Solomon Islanders to purchase plantations and the new constitution contains provisions for the conversion of freehold estates held by non-Solomon Islanders into fixed term estates. 48/

43/ In January 1978 \$A.1 equalled approximately \$US.1.14.

44/ House of Commons Debates (Hansard) 5 May 1977. Reply by the Minister of Overseas Development to a question put to him in the House of Commons.

45/ Report of the Solomon Islands Constitutional Conference, London, September 1977, Annex C.

46/ House of Commons Debates (Hansard) 5 May 1977. Reply by the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to a question put to the Secretary of State in the House of Commons.

47/ Area Handbook for Oceania, op. cit., chapter 12.

48/ See above page 11.

The establishment of co-operatives has proved an important mechanism to facilitate marketing and credit in the islands. The total number of co-operative societies in the Solomons was 213 by the end of 1975 with a membership in excess of 12,000 persons. On the basis of five persons per family more than 60,000 people in the Territory were directly or indirectly effected by the co-operative movement.

The majority of the Solomon Islanders are engaged in subsistence agriculture though the number of persons in paid employment has been rising steadily to a total of 14,184 in 1974. 49/

The main trade-union is the Solomon Islands General Workers Union (SIGWU), formed early in 1975 with Mr. Bartholomew Ulufa'alu as its General Secretary. Mr. Ulufa'alu ran successfully in the 1976 general elections and is now Leader of the Opposition.

According to the last report of the Administering Authority the literacy level of the Melanesian population was approximately 10 per cent. 50/

In 1976 a total of 471 students (including 67 from overseas) were enrolled for full time courses at the Honiara Technical Institute. The number of Solomon Islanders attending higher educational institutions overseas, mainly in Fiji and Papua New Guinea, was 160, of whom 48 were enrolled for degree courses. There is no University in the Solomon Islands. 51/

The total expenditure on education in 1976 was \$A.2.3 million and accounted for just over 20 per cent of total government expenditure. 52/

Concerning health, the principal Government hospital is in Honiara with 158 beds. There are also three district and three rural hospitals maintained by the government with a total of 318 beds. In addition there are small hospitals maintained by religious missions.

Total expenditure by the ministry of health and welfare amounted to \$A.1.2 million in 1975, giving a per capita government expenditure on health services of \$A.5.82. 53/

49/ Solomon Islands Annual Report, 1976, Part II, chapter 2.

50/ Ibid. The calculation was made on the basis of the number of people aged 15 years and over who had ever attained Standard 7 in school.

51/ Ibid., chapter 7.

52/ Ibid.

53/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-second Session, Supplement No. 23 (A/32/23/Rev.1), chapter XVI, annex.

VII. ACTION BY THE UNITED NATIONS

A. Consideration by the Special Committee on Decolonization

The Solomon Islands was originally included in the 1946 list of Non-Self-Governing Territories together with the Gilbert and Ellice Islands and Pitcairn as part of the Western Pacific High Commission Territories administered by the United Kingdom. ^{54/} In the 1962 list of Territories to which the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples applied ^{55/} the Solomon Islands was listed as a separate Territory but the Special Committee charged with following up the implementation of the Declaration ^{56/} developed the practice of studying the situation in the Solomon Islands jointly with the Gilbert and Ellice Islands and Pitcairn. In 1976 the Solomon Islands became a separate item in the Special Committee's agenda.

The Special Committee in a series of conclusions and recommendations going back to 1964 repeatedly reaffirmed the right of the people in the Solomon Islands to self-determination and independence and reiterated the view that factors of size, geographic location and limited resources should in no way delay the implementation of the Declaration on Decolonization to the Territory.

In the period 1964-1973 the Special Committee urged the Administering Power to speed up the transfer of executive responsibilities to the elected representatives of the people of the Solomon Islands. It also expressed frequent concern at the slow pace of educational, social and economic development in the Territory, and called on the United Kingdom to accelerate progress in those fields.

The advent of responsible government to the Territory in 1974 and of self-government in 1976 was welcomed by the Special Committee which also declared itself encouraged by the speedier pace of social and economic development in the Islands.

The Special Committee repeatedly requested the United Kingdom Government to allow a special mission of the Committee to visit the Territory for the purpose of acquiring first hand information on the situation in the Islands and of assessing the needs and wishes of the people. However, no Visiting Mission was invited into the Territory.

The decision in 1971 by the United Kingdom to withdraw from participation in the work of the Special Committee was criticized by the Committee which considered that it had been deprived, as a consequence, of essential information on political developments in the Solomon Islands. In 1974 the Special Committee welcomed the decision by the new Labour government in the United Kingdom to resume participation in the Committee's activities.

^{54/} Resolution 66 (I). See Decolonization Vol. II, no. 6 of December 1975, Table I.

^{55/} Ibid., Table III.

^{56/} Its full title is: Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples.

B. Action by the General Assembly

The General Assembly considered the question of the Solomon Islands in the context of its annual discussion of the report of the Special Committee on Decolonization. Beginning in 1965 and up to 1974 the Assembly adopted a series of resolutions concerning a variety of small territories in the Caribbean, the Atlantic and Indian Oceans and the Pacific. ^{57/} The resolutions "inter alia" called upon the administering Powers to implement without delay the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and of the Declaration on Decolonization in particular; reaffirmed that questions of territorial size, geographical isolation and limited resources should in no way delay the implementation of the Declaration; deprecated any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and territorial integrity of colonial Territories; urged the Administering Powers to guarantee effectively the rights of the people of those Territories to own and dispose of their natural resources; and called upon those Powers to reconsider their attitude towards receiving United Nations visiting missions to the territories under their administration.

From 1975 to 1977 the General Assembly adopted specific resolutions dealing solely with the question of the Solomon Islands. ^{58/} The resolutions, after reaffirming the inalienable right of the people of the Territory to self-determination and independence, noted with satisfaction the achievement of self-government by the Solomon Islands in 1976 and of independence in July 1978; welcomed the comprehensive way in which the government of the Solomon Islands had approached the preparation of a sound political and economic foundation for independence and called on the United Kingdom Government, on the specialized agencies and other organizations within the United Nations system as well as on regional bodies to assist the people of the Solomon Islands after independence.

^{57/} See resolutions 2069 (XX), 2232 (XXI), 2357 (XXII), 2430 (XXIII), 2592 (XXIV), 2709 (XXV), 2869 (XXVI), 2984 (XXVII), 3156 (XXVIII) and 3290 (XXIX).

^{58/} Resolutions 3431 (XXX), 31/46 and 32/25. For the text of the last resolution see Annex I.

ANNEX I

GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 32/25

The General Assembly,

Having considered the question of the Solomon Islands,

Having examined the relevant chapter of the report of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, a/

Having heard the statement of the administering Power, b/

Recalling its resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960, containing the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, and all other resolutions and decisions of the United Nations relating to the Territory,

Recalling also its resolution 31/46 of 1 December 1976 on the question of the Solomon Islands,

Noting with satisfaction that an agreement was reached at a constitutional conference, held in London from 6 to 16 September 1977, between the administering Power and the Solomon Islands delegation, led by its Chief Minister, whereby the Territory will achieve independence in July 1978,

Noting with satisfaction that the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland will continue to provide assistance to the Territory after independence,

1. Approves the chapter of the report of the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples relating to the Solomon Islands;
2. Reaffirms the inalienable right of the people of the Solomon Islands to self-determination and independence in accordance with the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples;
3. Welcomes the comprehensive way in which the Government of the Solomon Islands has approached the preparation of a sound political and economic foundation for independence, which is to be achieved in July 1978;
4. Requests that further steps be taken towards diversifying the economy of the Solomon Islands and that the administering Power continue to enlist the assistance of the specialized agencies and other organizations within the United Nations system, as well as of regional bodies, in the development and strengthening of the economy of the Territory;
5. Requests the Special Committee to keep the situation in the Solomon Islands under review.

a/ A/32/23/Add.4, chap. XVI.

b/ A/C.4/32/SR.12, paras. 12-21.

