

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

EPW-10
Party Time Again

P. O. Box 628,
Port Moresby,
Papua,
Territory of Papua
& New Guinea

December 13, 1967

Mr. Richard H. Nolte,
Executive Director,
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366 Madison Avenue,
New York 10017, New York,
United States of America

Dear Mr. Nolte,

The emergence of political parties is often held to indicate the beginning of an important stage in the political development of a country. Unfortunately, very few of the standard texts on the subject seem able to define exactly what constitutes a political party. They are, therefore, content to define a political party as being any body that applies the name to itself. Political science aside, there is not even a legal definition of "political party" in either Australia or Papua and New Guinea, for Westminster-type systems take no formal cognizance at all of the existence of such a phenomenon. The aim of this "Newsletter" is to try to give some insight into just what the label "political party" may, in fact, stand for in an environment in which indigenous national political organization is just being experimented with for the first time.

Papua and New Guinea now has 6 political parties. I described in EPW-5 what seemed to be the background to, and the early history of, the first 2 of the present crop of parties, the PANGU Pati and the United Christian Democratic Party. I hope to be able to write at length in future "Newsletters" about the history of the All Peoples Party, the Territory Country Party, and the Agricultural Reform Party. This "Newsletter" is concerned with the newest arrival of the 6, the National Progress Party of Papua and New Guinea or NAPRO.

The leaders of both the All Peoples Party and the Territory Country Party have admitted that their parties would not have been formed had PANGU not preceded their establishment. The All Peoples Party seems to be led by a group of European traders and commercial men in the Sepik and Ramu River areas of New Guinea. It has the support of one indigenous Member of the House of Assembly (from Madang), the European member for the Gulf open electorate of Papua, and the member for the Madang-Sepik special electorate. It probably has the tacit support of at least 5 or 6 indigenous M.H.A's from the Highlands and other areas. The All Peoples Party is conservative in that it supports the status quo in the Territory and the broad outlines of Australian policy here. It seeks to express the more backward areas' present fear of desertion at independence rather than seeks to lead them to a gradual, and probably inevitable, acceptance of the need for gradually increasing internal responsibility for the Territory's government.

In short, the All Peoples Party exploits current fears rather than encourages careful thought about the Territory's future.

The Territory Country Party is more cautious in its attitude towards self-government than PANGU, but more progressive than the All Peoples Party. It was founded by a European journalist in Madang, J. D. McCarthy, and has the active support of a small number of public servants and students in Madang but who came originally from the Highlands and Manus Districts. It has no members in the recently prorogued House of Assembly, and lacks both the financial resources and the popular support of the All Peoples Party.

The Agricultural Reform Party has only a small number of supporters, mainly on the Gazelle Peninsula of New Britain. As yet, it has very little formal organisation and no clearly articulated policy.

None of the 6 political parties has taken firm root in the Highlands, although the All Peoples Party has the strongest potential appeal there. For the moment, local political leadership remains in the hands of informal groups of like-minded European and indigenous politicians there. They are progressive but cautious, keen for a gradual advance towards self-government, but fearful of the disruption that might follow its too early attainment.

NAPRO was formed in Port Moresby on November 13. The local press corps did not attend the party's inaugural meeting. The Australian public is probably sick of reading about the Territory's political parties, and only very radical or Rhodesia-type politicians provide really good copy. Fortunately, one of the party's founders works for the South Pacific Post and another is an A.B.C. radio announcer, so the party received some publicity.

The party's first public meeting was held in the Hohola Community Centre, a concrete block construction with only 3 walls which open on to a courtyard on the fourth side. It is the venue of most public meetings in Port Moresby that aim explicitly for an indigenous audience. Hohola is the suburb where most of the indigenous public servants in the Territory's administrative centre live, and the local community centre is the only hall that is readily available to such people.

About 40 people came to the meeting, but most of them arrived some time after the scheduled starting time. At least 6 of PANGU's more prominent leaders and supporters came, together with about half a dozen of those Europeans, including myself, who make a habit of attending most meetings of this type in Port Moresby. Public safety was ensured through the presence of a wellknown civilian member of the Police Special Branch.

The proceedings opened auspiciously with the announcement that the meeting had been called "to form a political party which will be known to the future generations of our country and the world as the NAPRO political party." After that, the meeting certainly did

not proceed according to the logic of most handbooks of formal meeting procedure, but no one was really conscious of its inadequacies - perhaps simply differences - except the few Europeans there. The long silences while we all waited to see what would happen next, however, embarrassed everyone concerned almost equally judging from the whispered asides that preceded many of the chairman's formal announcements.

The first item on the agenda was the election of a party chairman. When one young European objected that no one at the meeting even knew what the party's policy was, the young acting chairman asked the gentleman who had just nominated Bill Dihm, the man who had first conceived of NAPRO, what the party's aims were. The nominator declined, however, and left the matter to Dihm, who was then unanimously elected chairman of the party, and promised to explain NAPRO's aims as soon as the rest of the executive had been elected. At that stage, the party had a chairman but no formal procedure for acquiring membership in the party.

The remainder of the party's executive committee, i.e. 2 deputy presidents, a secretary, treasurer and 4 ordinary members of the committee, were then elected. In each case, one man was nominated and, there being no further nominations, the meeting was asked if it was "all in favour" of the nominee, and the new executive member at each point was invited to sit beside the chairman at the front of the hall as the unanimous choice of the meeting. 2 members of PANGU's executive even managed to be nominated for the executive of NAPRO, though both declined, amid some laughter, owing to their prior political commitments. As each member of the executive was elected, the chairman asked him to give a small speech telling just why he had joined NAPRO. All of them simply thanked the meeting for the great honour bestowed upon them, and pledged themselves to serve the party and the Territory to the best of their ability.

Bill Dihm, the party's founder and first chairman, is a mixed race employee of the Public Works Department in Port Moresby, and is in his early forties. He stood for the Moresby open electorate in 1964, and, after 2 months of extremely vigorous campaigning, came sixth in a field of 12 candidates. His performance then must be measured in terms of the difficulty that any candidate experiences in this country unless he has a firm base of ethnic support, or a well organised cargo cult behind him.

The party's executive, not all of whom are yet of voting age, consists of Kila Ono, a deputy president, who was educated in the Territory and Australia, and is an executive of the Local Teachers' (i.e. non-European) Association and the Port Moresby Workers' Association; Nelson Galo, a deputy president, who is a young technician and the executive's only New Guinean; Goodwill Tabua, secretary, a mechanic with some Australian education, and son of the member for the Fly River open electorate; Sevese Morea, treasurer, Australian educated, a radio announcer and member of the Port Moresby Local Government Council; and 4 ordinary members, Allan Rabura, a 19 year old mechanic, Rupa Luga, a senior teacher with some Australian education, Kila Wari,

a first year student at the University of Papua and New Guinea, and Ephraim Karara, a cadet journalist with the South Pacific Post. The social and organizational backgrounds of the executive, then, bear a very close resemblance to those of the leaders of PANGU and the Territory Country Party, though the NAPRO men are probably somewhat younger on average - and Dihm a little older - than the PANGU men. Indeed, one of NAPRO's senior executives had often said that he would like to be a candidate for PANGU at the 1968 elections, and may have joined NAPRO precisely because his likely electorate had been promised to one of PANGU's founders.

NAPRO's formal organisation is as elaborate, and potentially unworkable, as that of most of the Territory's other political parties. PANGU, for example, has, on paper, party branches, a national convention, a central executive, and a council which links the executive with the parliamentary wing. The All Peoples Party's structure is that of the Liberal Party of Australia without the complications induced by federalism. In fact, the founders of the various parties still run them as informally as they planned their formation. Their legal advisers have not provided them with simple solutions to their organisational problems, but have committed them to complicated solutions which derive from Australian practice rather than the circumstances of the Territory. Thus, NAPRO is committed to a structure which rises from the branches to a national congress, with an executive and a council which is supposed to meet quarterly and which includes the members of the national executive as well as a member from each branch of the party, who must somehow make his way to headquarters for the council's meetings. In fact, NAPRO's leaders run their party too, despite its formal organisation, and candidates are selected, or rather supported, on much the same informal basis as pertains in the other parties. None of the Territory's parties, except possibly the All Peoples Party, could afford the cost of maintaining even an outline of the structure to which they are committed, and they all lack the membership numbers and organisational skills to make the enterprise worthwhile anyway. While the parties' candidates may see party organisation as one way to gain strength, through numbers, in the House of Assembly, and even as a lever to use against other potential nominees in their own electorates, there is almost no understanding at all at the village level of what a party is or could do. Most of the parties' candidates have no real desire to recruit members at the mass level, for the very strength of a grassroots organisation could well present a very powerful threat to their own positions.

NAPRO's motto is "Toil to Reap", and its insignia makes much the same point; it shows an agricultural labourer employing a traditional digging stick. The party believes "that Party Politics can achieve what independent members will never achieve in becoming a stable government able to run its affairs and plan for the future." Thus, the party has issued a set of general policy points which stress the need for economic development through import replacement, the upgrading of teacher training, compulsory primary education, the desirability of a national development scheme and of initiating a scheme of low cost self help housing construction. Uniquely, it also advocates the introduction of social services to the aged, the sick, the blind and the crippled. NAPRO also advocates the introduction of

Territory-wide hospital and medical welfare schemes, a free infant medical welfare scheme, and a home ownership scheme. Perhaps most ambitious of all is NAPRO's intention that a highway link "be built connecting all rural areas with major outlets for produce." On the economic side, it "intends to complete and implement a scheme of Regional Planning on a National basis," and to create an atmosphere which will encourage overseas investors to come to Papua and New Guinea.

In the purely political sphere, NAPRO's principal aims are very similar to those of the Territory's other political parties. All of them are pledged to support the implementation of the final report of the House of Assembly's Select Committee on Constitutional Development. Thus, NAPRO too believes "that a form of Ministerial

government is essential as a means of stricter control and closer contact between the house and the departments. This will lead ultimately to a government well prepared for self government with its Ministers already trained in their fields."



On the other hand, Dihm himself seemed somewhat less clear than the foregoing would imply when the precise definition of his objectives was pursued by his interrogators and political opponents at question time. He admitted that of all the parties' platforms he had seen PANGU's alone and that he disagreed with it. He claimed that NAPRO was concerned with more immediate problems than PANGU, i.e. with problems that needed to be faced within the next 10 years. He hoped that NAPRO would, if successful at the 1968 elections, serve as an opposition party in the House of Assembly. At the same time, he felt that it was premature now to talk of self-government and independence as they were problems that need not be faced for quite some years yet. He also

expressed his firm conviction that Australia's policies concerning the Territory's political development were absolutely correct. When taxed with the vexed problem of the need or desirability of uniting Papua and New Guinea, he simply answered that the question of unity was one that should be left to Australia and the United Nations to resolve. "Our little minds," he felt, were inadequate to decide on such great international problems - surely an extreme form of colonial dependance.

In sum, the entire tenor of Dihm's explanations of his party's policies was one of gratitude for, and general agreement with, what Australia has done in Papua and New Guinea, and a steady belief that Australia still knows best. Thus, Kila Ono, vice-president of the

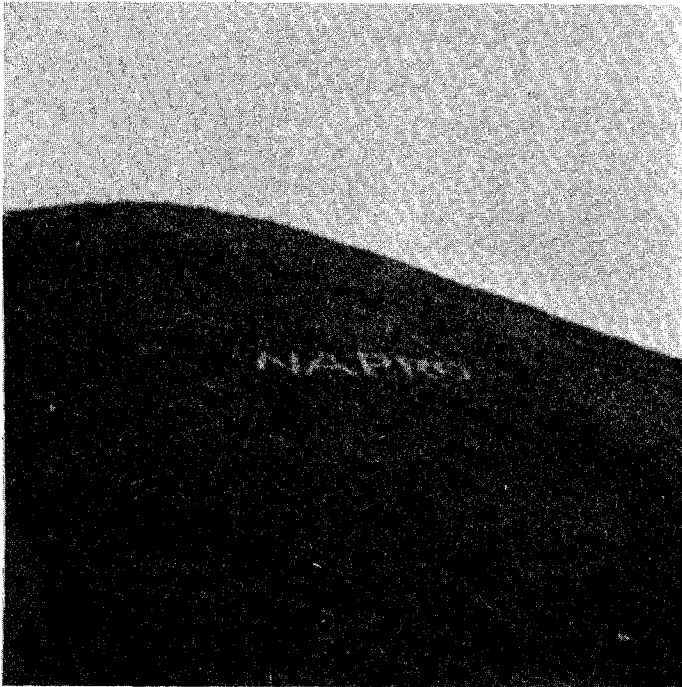
Local Teachers' Association, which was formed specifically to press indigenous teachers' wage claims against the Australian Administration, even admitted, albeit hesitantly, that the Territory's wage structure should be geared to the Australian Government's definition of Papua and New Guinea's future "capacity to pay".

NAPRO's history to date seems to reflect a number of strands in the Territory's current political complex. There is firstly the extreme dependance on Europeans felt by many coastal people after several generations of being treated as the Europeans' inferiors. In addition, many Papuans' psychological dependance is complicated by the feeling that as Australian citizens, albeit without the right to settle freely in Australia, they have a special claim on Australia that New Guineans do not share. Indeed, NAPRO's executive includes only one New Guinean. Hence, perhaps, Dihm's desire to unload the problem of the unity of the two territories on to Australia and the United Nations. In a sense, Dihm also represents that strand of mixed race thinking that seeks to exert a restraining influence on the Territory's political development so as to retain their status there if possible, and at least so as not to alienate Australia too much. Mixed race people are allowed to apply for full Australian citizenship, and therefore European pay in the public service, and most of them have now done so. They do not leave because Papua and New Guinea is their home, and most of them lack any skills that are readily saleable in Australia, so they seek to commit Australia to the Territory as much as possible. In part too, NAPRO reflects the comparative conservatism of the younger, better educated and less frustrated students and public servants, when compared with PANGU, and serves as a means of releasing the resentments that some of them feel simply at being left out of PANGU.

Although the party qua party appears to have done very little so far by way of recruiting more members and setting up branches, it does claim to have supporters in Goroka, Wewak, Madang, Samarai and Manus. It also claims to have the support of 4 members of the House of Assembly, all of whom are thought to be Papuans, who will not allow their names to be used publicly in association with the party. It is easy enough to guess that at least 3 of them are among the 4 Papuan members who have not so far joined a party, while one of them may be a member of another party already. Their behaviour has a history of its own.

Being all independents, and therefore equally entitled to be called leaders, most of the members of the first House of Assembly refused to acknowledge the leadership of other members. They all claimed the right to perfect freedom of action, while often attempting to assert a measure of personal leadership in the house. Thus, many would not join any party at all until PANGU was formed, as they would not accept another's leadership and feared anyway to lend their names to an organisation that might still fail. Hence many of them pledged their informal support from time to time to organisations that could come off, so that, if they did, they could claim foundation membership in them, and if they failed, the members would not lose thereby. Only PANGU has been really effective in breaking the cycle.

Thus, if NAPRO succeeds, it probably has 4 former members of the house who will claim at least some of the credit for its success. If it fails, we shall probably never know who they are. Once PANGU's first few parliamentary members had made the leap, its membership doubled very quickly indeed. Organisational success has its own momentum. NAPRO, however, seems unlikely to be successful unless some of its pledged parliamentary hopefuls manage to gain election in 1968, in which case they may discover that NAPRO offers them very little anyway and, if it is smaller than the other parties, it may be something of a liability to the ambitious.



What NAPRO lacks in organisation and clarity of purpose (other than the straightforward desire to be elected), however, it makes up in enthusiasm. Recently, Sevese Morea was the news announcer on duty when the A.B.C. announced that the Chief Electoral Officer for Papua and New Guinea had decided not to prosecute NAPRO for a sign (pictured) which its supporters had made out of lime on a hillside overlooking a large part of Port Moresby's indigenous housing area at Kaugere. The sign exceeded the limits set by the electoral regulations - 1200 square inches - as its letters were 10 feet in height. As the sign was wearing away rather rapidly and Bill Dihm had promised to curb the excess enthusiasm of its younger

supporters in future, prosecutions were not proceeded with.

Yours sincerely,

Edward Wolfers

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