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The End of "Administration"?

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Territory of Papua
& New Guinea
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Dear Mr. Nolte,

Colonial government has traditionally been regarded as an administrative rather than a political problem. The first task of the colonial administration in tribal societies, such as Papua and New Guinea, was not to undertake political or diplomatic negotiation, but simply to establish the basic requirements of law and order throughout the entire area administered, and to supersede the power and authority of traditional law-enforcing agencies within the territory concerned. Partly this was done simply to ensure the safety of the citizens of the colonising country when abroad, and partly to protect the more backward people of the colonies against the possible ravages of foreign adventurers, traders, and "blackbirders" in search of recruits for overseas, certainly foreign-owned, plantations. In fact, many of colonialism's most violent opponents during the late nineteenth century, especially those missionaries who in some way romanticised, and wished to preserve, the way of life of the literary "noble savage", were forced, largely through fear of the results of unchecked adventuring by Europeans in the Pacific islands, not only into recognising the necessity for government control, but even into pressuring otherwise unwilling European governments to annex, and therefore control the activities of their subjects in, the islands.

The Pax Britannica was first brought to Papua and New Guinea during the last fifteen or so years of the nineteenth century, although Papua was not fully explored until just before World War II, and the Highlands not even pacified until the late 1940s and the 1950s. Throughout the 1950s, very largely in response to pressure from the United Nations, the pacification process was carried on at an ever-increasing rate, while even today the officers of the Department of District Administration are bringing law and order, in the Western sense, to the people of the Territory, while in a great many areas the Department's officers are the sole representatives of "the Government" that the local people have ever seen.

The task of pacification has proceeded in many different ways, which have, in part at least, varied in response to the changing

nature of public attitudes towards colonialism generally. In the early days of colonial administration in this country, it seems clear, virtually, one must admit, despite official records, that the Western conception of law and order was enforced very largely through the use of force, or as a result of retaliatory raids against indigenous attackers. Today, now that this work is no more than an occasional highlight amidst the daily drudgery of administrative duties, the few "first contacts" that are made from time to time are made peacefully, through persuasion and proffered assistance, often communicated through up to 4 or even 5 interpreters before the patrol officer's instructions are translated from English into the dialect nearest to that spoken by the newly contacted people.

In the more desperate and exciting days of colonial administration in this country, when responses were more uncertain, and the white man not even heard of, contact was often established in a variety of ways. C.A.W. Monckton, for example, that rumbustious and ebullient inspiration to the wouldbe adventurer and desperado in British New Guinea, has described how, when he once found himself confronted by a particularly menacing group of indigenous warriors, he quickly lit upon the device of, first, flashing an extremely toothy smile at his potential foes, then mysteriously waving his handkerchief across his face, finally to emerge from behind his temporary curtain with a toothless glare upon his face. When this mysterious man then reversed the previous operation to emerge the second time from behind his handkerchief in the same guise as the earlier smiling hero, he assured his readers that peaceful contact had been attained, and his new charges suitably impressed with the mysterious powers of the man whom he felt they must surely have accepted as their new ruler, or, more correctly, Her Victorian Majesty's local representative.

Perhaps more reliably than Monckton, other authors have described first contact at a later time as resulting from the curiosity of people who had not so far seen the white man in their areas but had heard of him, and deliberately sought him out in order to lead him into their homelands. Thus, one of the present Members of the House of Assembly led an Administration patrol into his area, after first travelling to a nearby town to establish contact with the Government, while in some areas of the Southern Highlands during the 1950s Administration patrols were led in to find crude lengths of road and rest-houses awaiting them. The first patrol to contact the Dene of the Eastern Highlands during the early 1930s probably had an easier time than most in establishing contact, simply because the sound of the local greeting from which they derive their name, "Dene", bore such a close resemblance to the name of the brother of one of their discoverers. Allegedly, Mick Leahy called to his brother Danny sufficiently often, and in the appropriate places, for the local people to conclude, quite rationally, that these men were their ancestors returning to them in a new skin and calling the appropriate greeting to them. In many other areas, though the chain of coincidence was not as long, the immediate results were the same, though it did not take very long until the early patrols' successors had to face the more mundane problems of the mortal, and not always very popular, administrator.

The work of the officers of the present-day Department of District Administration has undergone many changes over the years, but, even now, they remain the physical and human manifestation of the only experience of "Government" ever seen or faced by many thousands of the Territory's indigenes. The word "Government", the message that "the Government" is coming may stir a variety of emotions in their indigenous hearers, varying from fear of the terrible consequences that the guilty may undergo if reported, to contentment at the security that the officer's presence may afford. In fact, the more usual reaction would be simply uncertainty as to the likely actions and reactions of the approaching administrator of the largely unknown, and certainly but rarely understood, laws of the Administration. In large part, however, the duties of the patrol officer as he was known on the New Guinea side, and is presently known throughout the Territory (kiap in Pidgin), or the resident magistrate as MacGregor labelled his officers, have remained largely unchanged since his duties were first outlined to the novice Monckton:

> "...everything was a Resident Magistrate's duty: in the absence of a surveyor, he had to survey any land purchased; in the absence of a doctor, he has to set and amputate limbs; he had also to drill his own police, act as gaoler and undertaker, sail the Siai (an Administration vessel), marry people, in fact do any job of any description, from a blacksmith's upwards, not expressly allotted to some one else. If a job were allotted to some one else, and that someone else failed to do it, the Resident Magistrate must do it; Sir William MacGregor, in fact, expected his Resident Magistrates to know everything and to do everything. It was no excuse ... to say that one did not know how to do it: that was all very well for a doctor, a surveyor, a ship's officer, or Custom's official, but not for the Resident Magistrate. Another of his duties was to make every shilling of Government money allotted to him go as far as half a crown; if he spent money in what the Governor or Treasurer considered an unnecessary manner, he had the pleasure and privilege of making it up out of his own pocket. His powers, however, were extensive: he could sentence summarily up to two years' imprisonment with hard labour, or fine up to two hundred pounds; and in the absence of the Governor, he could take administrative action in any matter of urgency or importance; finally, he occupied the enviable position of scapegoat, when such was needed."

The field officer, the "man on the spot", the backbone of colonial administration, has been termed by one writer on the subject an "omnicompetent generalist". In the remoter areas of the Territory especially, where one man may be responsible for several tens of thousands of indigenous people at several days' walk from his nearest counterpart, and even further from his superiors, one might with justice often add the word "omnipotent" to the foregoing epithet.

The day of the generalist field officer, however, is very rapidly passing, as communications improve and specialist officers, the police, judiciary and extension officers, for example,

can be used more effectively than before and over much wider areas, and as the general work of the Administration becomes increasingly complex as the Territory develops, and new demands are made of its officers by an ever more politicised and sophisticated community. The old style of patrol officer, assisted by his indigenous police, who, in the early days, tended very often to be former prisoners themselves, and therefore of use to the Administration in as much as they had learnt to speak either Pidgin or Police Motu in gaol, and by the village men who carried his cargo for but little pay (perhaps for a spoonful of salt in the Highlands, or a few shillings a day elsewhere) from their own village to the next, is rapidly disappearing, and in his place increasingly one finds now a veritable army of surveyors, medicoes, judges and police, albeit still not in sufficient numbers to satisfy the locals' requirements. The very future of D.D.A. as a Department is even in question now, for many patrol officers find themselves tied down now to the routine duties of outstation management and inter-Department coordination on a District or Sub-District basis, while the old techniques and personal styles of the days of direct rule are simply not appropriate, and may even be resented, now that just over 70% of the Territory's population is subject to at least a measure of local, Western-style self-government through the local government system (now, quite often, multi-racial in character) that has been set up since 1950. Negotiation, assistance and instruction are now required of the local government adviser, rather than the simple issuing of orders under a direct rule system, and some local government councils at least have started to assert themselves against overly assertive "advisers". The House of Assembly has also become increasingly critical of D.D.A., and it seems significant that the proposer and seconder of a successful motion in the House last year requesting the Minister for Territories to consider the establishment of a separate Department of Local Government, and hence reduce D.D.A.'s role even further, came from the long-contacted Rigo-Abau area of coastal Papua and from Wabag in the Western Highlands, which was only brought under "control" during the late 1940s, respectively. Even in some of the less sophisticated areas of the Territory, the sort of man whose omnicompetence, power and prestige were often summarised in the epithet "Papa bilong ol" ("Father of all") is being replaced or simply superseded by a growing body of narrower, but better-trained, specialist officers, and an increasing number of more competent and confident, indigenous local government councillors.

Before the establishment of Western-style local government councils in the Territory, i.e. when Direct Rule was the practice, though Indirect Rule often the claim, the arcana of "native administration" was handled by a succession of Departments of District Administration or, that all-encompassing title, Native Affairs, though it has been the title rather than the function of the same Department that has changed over the years. In both of the pre-War Territories, and even now, the patrol officer or resident magistrate, depending on the Territory, did not operate as but a single representative of the central Administration. In addition to the local European officer, there was set up in each Territory an army of indigenous officials, appointed by the Administration to assist its representatives in their local work.

Confused by the experience of other colonial administrations in Africa, both the former German and British Administrations seemed unable to perceive that leadership in traditional Papua and New Guinea was not of the chiefly kind, with but very few exceptions, and that a system of Indirect Rule was, therefore, almost entirely inappropriate, unless it was intended to provide a measure of local self-rule rather than "recognise" a non-existent type of allegedly traditional leadership. Partly, the establishment of indigenous Government representatives in every village simply reduced the costs of local administration and made frequent visits by the patrol officer less imperative if the local officials were in fact carrying out their duties as they were supposed and enforcing the law, and reporting to the Administration any offenders who came before their notice. It was also pointed out after World War II by Kenneth Read that any system of village administration in Papua and New Guinea, though based on the most respectable anthropological premises, simply served to institutionalise, in fact to rigidify, old animosities and rivalries within the modern system of local administration. Certainly, a system of village-based leadership could not help in the establishment of those inter-village dependencies and communal interests that alone would lead to the emergence of even regional sentiments, perhaps ultimately nationalism. Perhaps this system serves as a partial explanation of why the Territory has been so long in establishing any sort of national, and only very recently even a type of regional, feeling.

In British New Guinea, and later in Papua, the local representative of the Government in each village was known as the Village Constable, whose appointment was intended to obviate the need for the direct enforcement of British justice in the village by the resident magistrate and his armed police. The village constables were intended to provide the infrastructure for a Territory system of Indirect Rule, and were, according to their founder, Sir William MacGregor, the existing traditional chiefs and leaders in their home areas. In 1948, Lord Hailey rather sourly summed up the entire administrative history of Papua as amounting to "...no more than a well-regulated and benevolent type of police rule."

The village constable was expected by MacGregor, immediately on hearing of an offence being committed by one of his charges, to don his uniform, and, accompanied by the village elders, seize the offender and haul him forth for judgment by the local resident magistrate. The village constable was also expected to ensure that the local people kept their villages clean and hygianic, and to keep the Village Book in which the resident magistrate kept the census figures for the village, and recorded his impressions of its administration on his occasional visits to the area. Even Monckton admitted that the system might well have its drawbacks, but felt quite certain - almost certainly, wrongly so - that any too savage abuses of power by the village constables would be reported to the Administration and then put to a halt. In Monckton's view,

> "In weak villages, the village constable gave the villagers a sense of protection, for he was a constant reminder that a force existed able to protect them from their enemies, with which he was intimately connected (sic); whilst in strong and turbulent villages, his presence was a constant reminder

of a watching Government, and therefore a deterrent to crime."

After 1920, Sir Hubert Murray gradually increased the allegedly consultative elements in the system through the appointment of a number of non-statutory Village Councillors, who allegedly advised the Administration's officers in their areas.

The Germans, in New Guinea, set up a similar system of administration, in which they claimed to be doing no more than simply recognising already existing chiefs, as they had done in their African colonies. The post-World War I Australian Administration simply took over the old German system in toto and continued to administer the Territory in the same way until after World War II.

The New Guinea system depended for its efficient operation upon the work of two classes of indigenous official, whose titles derived from the Kuanua terms for two types of traditional leadership on the Gazelle Peninsula of New Britain. The luluai or village chief was, once again, chosen from among the older, more influential men of the village, although, even when this was really the case, he would gain a degree of power and official prestige that was simply unknown in traditional society. Very often, of course, especially once the system had become relatively wellknown and understood, and the luluai's true powers and position known, the truly important men in a village would put someone quite unimportant forward to the kiap as being truly powerful, and exercised their powers behind the scenes, while their luckless nominee would, in turn, receive the blame when things did not go as the patrol officer would have liked.

The luluai, dressed in a peaked cap and with a silver cane, was supposed to arbitrate minor disputes in his village, provide men for the European labour-recruiters when they visited, supervise the maintenance of local roads, ensure the sanitation of his village, and collect the annual head-tax. In some areas, later on paramount luluais were appointed who were regarded as the senior men among a number of constituent luluais, though their appointment largely ceased after 1950, even in those areas where luluais were still appointed pending the introduction of local government councils.

The luluai, in turn, was assisted by another official, the tultul, who, especially in those villages where the luluai really had some traditional authority and was quite often too old, or had spent too much time in the village, to speak Pidgin, and was, in consequence, quite unable to communicate with the kiap. The tultul, then, dressed in a special type of hat again, acted largely as an interpreter for the luluai, and as his administrative assistant generally.

The third village official appointed by the Germans, and the only one of the three to be paid even a pittance by the Administration, was the medical tultul, who acted as the luluai's assistant in relation to things medical, and supervised the health and sanitation of his village generally.

As local government councils have been established throughout the Territory, both of the foregoing systems have been gradually replaced, while the patrol officer's authority has been increasingly eroded as the popularly-elected leaders have begun to assert themselves. In a very real sense too, the old system has established wider-ranging and more powerful leadership patterns than have existed before, and has, in fact, very often made real leaders of men with but little traditional authority, as the election of former village officials as local government councillors and presidents, even as Members of the House of Assembly, surely shows. Perhaps, however, even these modern institutions of government are perceived as being so much the Government's work too that the same men are elected simply because they already have experience in handling such matters.

The old system of colonial administration was, as surely the above would imply, very open to abuse. It was, for example, very easy for a luluai or village constable in a remote area to make claims for himself, to assert his personal power, in the name of the Government, without anyone being at all able to check the veracity of his claim, and many abuses by such "satraps" of the Administration have been reported, varying from quite simple cases of false charging with non-existent crimes and the collection of quite arbitrary and illegal fines for the official's personal use, to cases where entire villages lived in fear of the Government, and were exploited for the official's gain until he was finally removed by the Administration. The kiap too, alone and in virtual control of many thousands of people, for whom he was the only contact with the outside Government and with Western technology, was sometimes seduced by the temptations of his situation. It is all too easy to become overly authoritarian and self-confident when one has so many people politically, legally, even economically, and ultimately psychologically, dependent upon one, and not every field officer escaped the temptations of his position.

Now, of course, as the Territory approaches self-government, even the Department of District Administration is being localised, or indigenised, and the 18 Districts of the Territory now contain a number of indigenous patrol officers, and even some Assistant District Officers who will shortly be given charge of a Sub-District. Whether, now especially that the entire Department's future in matters other than purely inter-Departmental coordination is being brought into question, both by the indigenous and the European community, it remains to be seen to what extent the new local officers of D.D.A. continue to ape their predecessors, and to what extent they will be able to forge a quite different sort of relationship with "their" local people.

Yours sincerely,

Edward Wolfers.

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