

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

EPW-6
Politics in a Primitive Area

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Port Moresby,
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Territory of Papua
& New Guinea

August 16, 1967

Mr. Richard H. Nolte, Executive Director
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Dear Mr. Nolte:

Most Papuans and New Guineans are now used to the formal apparatus of Australian election procedure. They have voted at least once in a House of Assembly election, and in local government elections too. Nonetheless, Western electoral procedures remain an essentially alien institution in the Territory. The local people are able to play their formal role in the system, even while they remain uncertain of its inner workings. The Henganofi by-election, then, provided an excellent opportunity for me to observe for the first time the manner in which our system fits into its new environment. "Our" system because very few modifications at all have been made to the Australian electoral system in the Territory environment, and there seem to be no plans for concessions to be made.

This by-election was certainly the despair of one social scientist. Perhaps the institutions and procedures of Western social science are as alien here as the institutions they often seek to study. In the event, the usefulness of social survey techniques seemed marginal at best after the first day's study. A simple research design ended in disaster, though, in retrospect, it seems to have revealed more through this disaster than it might have done if successfully employed as originally intended.

A simple problem of some interest seemed to be that of examining the electorate's knowledge of the candidates who sought its votes, and its understanding of the previous member's work. Thus, I decided to ask a sample of electors what the name of their previous member had been, what they thought he had done for their area, and whom of the present candidates they could name.

The first member of my sample, an old lady, was unable to answer any of my interpreter's questions, but, intending no doubt to be helpful, assured me that the men would be able to answer my questions. Politics, after all, is men's work.

The man I next spoke to was, of course, only too willing to help, but pointed out that knowledge about this new sort of political work was really possessed only by the younger men. Perhaps if I consulted one of the young men I should be able to obtain the information I sought.

My third candidate, a slightly younger woman than before, finally shattered what illusions still remained in the young wouldbe social scientist. The obvious people to ask as to the local member's name, she felt, would be the other members of the House of Assembly. Anyway, why ask her? The local patrol officers or some other white men should be able to answer all of my questions at once. I thanked her for her pains, and, still wondering as to reason for the prevalence of the belief that Australian electoral procedure has been successfully transplanted, I retired to the seemingly greener pastures of interviewing the candidates.

The candidates' behaviour during the 1964 election seems to have provided ample demonstration of the strangeness of our electoral procedures in the Territory. It was their first electoral experience for most of the people of the Henganofi electorate. Only a very small minority of them had even participated in local government elections. Of the 5 candidates, 4 came from the Lufa administrative area and one from Henganofi. Lufa contained 55% of the electorate's population, and Henganofi 45%. At the Henganofi end of this dumbbell-shaped electorate, most of the people spoke one language, Kafe, but were cut off from their wantoks in the Kainantu and Okapa electorates so as to deny the Kafe people any national legislative representation of their own. At Lufa, the Gono people were cut off from their Gimi wantoks in the Okapa electorate, and linguistically from the Yagaria-speaking majority in their own area. Thus, not only were a number of relatively large language groups cut by the new electoral boundaries, but even the Administration's own administrative subdistricts were cut too. In the end, however, it was the rivalries of the Lufa and Henganofi administrative areas that subsumed all other divisions within the total area of the electorate.

The concept of an election was still strange in 1964. Few even of the candidates knew what was required of them either during the the campaign period or in the event of their election. Unfortunately, one candidate spent the last month before polling day in gaol for adultery, which is still a crime under the Native Regulations. Another candidate was forced to abandon his campaign and to retire to his home area when the traditional aggressiveness of Highlands 'big men' led to the seduction of some local girls by members of his party. The latter candidate retired home very quickly, and has seldom ventured into the other part of his electorate again, even though the necessities of electoral campaigning often seem to supersede the importance of traditional rivalries in candidates' eyes.

The remaining 3 candidates travelled together to introduce themselves to the local people. None of them had any real policy, nor any firm conception of what they would be able to do if elected. In their view, the people would vote simply according to whom they liked best, and there was, therefore, no point in making vain promises. The member's role, they felt, would be to tell the government what the people wanted, and to instruct the people in what the government had decided. The people must choose the man best capable of working with the government in this way. The House of Assembly was not so much a law-making body as a place to confide one's problems in a benevolent government with even more power than the local kiap, but not

altogether unlike him in political style. The member's second job would be to return home and to tell the people too what the government wanted from them. Small wonder, then, that so many of the less sophisticated members became discontented in time with their role in the House of Assembly. The loneliness of individual speechmaking, which often went unanswered by the Official Members, the lack of a real kiap or papa to talk to and from whom to receive meaningful messages for the people back home, deprived the House of any personal relevance for many of the Highlands members. Just talking in a hall of only half-listening people, and voting on issues of little immediate relevance to the local people were an insufficient substitute for the hoped for warmth of personal contact with the seat of government. The candidates for Henganofi, like those in so many Highlands electorates, based their claims for election upon their personal prestige as prominent individuals in their area, and their record of cooperation with the government in development. Such men, it seemed to the local people, would obtain the best hearing when they brought their people's requests for more roads, schools and aid-posts to the big government in Port Moresby.

The voting system used in the Territory is the same as that used in Australia except in one respect. Each voter is entitled to vote for as many candidates as he likes, numbering them in order on his ballot-paper 1,2,3 etc., in the order he prefers them. In Australia each voter must number every square for his vote to be valid. In the Territory one need state one's preferences only as far as one chooses.

In the event that no candidate obtains an absolute majority on the first count, the candidate with the least number of primary votes is eliminated and his second preferences are distributed among the remaining candidates, and so on until one candidate gains an absolute majority of the ballots still remaining in the count. In Henganofi this system was so employed in 1964 that, although most of the voters gave their first preferences to the candidate from their own language-group, the people of the Lufa area were able to ensure that if their own particular first choice did not win at least Bono from Henganofi could not win either. Any of the candidates from the Lufa area seemed preferable to the Henganofi candidate, especially in terms of what he could do for his administrative area if elected. Thus, this primitive area, which was brought under Administration control only during the 1950s, not only recorded the highest voter turnout in the Territory (86%), but was responsible also for probably the most sophisticated use in the Territory of the preferential system. Perhaps the system was so effectively employed because the polling officials insisted on a completed ballot-paper when assisting the illiterate (i.e. the vast majority) voters. to record their choices. The answer to this question is no longer discoverable, though the actual allocation of votes, of course, is. Certainly, the final result completely mystified the vast majority of the voters at Henganofi, some of whom still feel that somehow they were robbed :

Allocation of Preferences in Henganofi Open Electorate
in 1964

<u>Candidates</u>	<u>First Count</u>	<u>Second Count</u>	<u>Third Count</u>	<u>Fourth Count</u>	<u>Final Count</u>
+Forapi Maunori	787	-	-	-	(787)
+Posi Latara'oi	1758	12	-	-	(1770)
+Pupuna Aruno	3708	73	41	-	(3822)
-Bono Azanifa	8028	12	35	224	8299
+Ugi Biritu	3925	667	1362	3274	9228
Exhausted	-	23	334	324	681

+ : from the Lufa area
- : from the Henganofi area

The recent by-election following Ugi's death attracted 7 candidates even though the winner would serve only for the remaining 6 months of Ugi's term before having to resubmit himself to the polls within quite drastically altered electoral boundaries. There were obviously prestige and money to be derived from membership in the House of Assembly, and the trips to Port Moresby, and even to Australia, seemed an interesting enough adventure.

5 of the candidates came from Lufa. One was an age-mate or poroman of Ugi, and another a liklik barata, i.e. he and Ugi had one parent in common. Perhaps both were attempting to assert a family right of succession to Ugi, or perhaps, as was the case with 2 of the potential candidates at Henganofi, their candidature reflected some intense intra-family rivalries which they were now projecting on to the national legislative scene. In several other areas brothers and brothers-in-law seem to be competing very intensely for power. This phenomenon may simply reflect a common set of socialization experiences, although it does seem likely that very intense traditional rivalries may be projected on to the national scene in just this way. More distant enmities can probably be contained within local society.

Of the foregoing 2, one was a hospital orderly at Lufa, and the other a bosboi or senior native employee at a Goroka hotel. The latter was to all intents Ugi's heir and had inherited Ugi's truck. He was also currently looking after Ugi's wife and 3 children. Ugi's liklik barata had intended to stand for the House in 1968 whether or not Ugi had survived. A true brother of Ugi whom I met was rather less concerned with politics than his other relatives. He was still in mourning for Ugi, and his hair was, therefore, thickly plaited still with animal fat. He intended to spend polling day at Goroka market in order to sell a fowl he had bred and raised.

The 3 remaining Lufa candidates were a tractor-driver for the Lufa Local Government Council, an English-speaking clerk employed by the Yagarua Rural Progress Society who had been dismissed as a mission-worker a few years earlier for gambling, and one man whose qualifications for office seem obscure.

Again, 3 of the Lufa candidates campaigned together, but this time over only a very restricted area. Another candidate did not campaign outside the immediate vicinity of his home because the other people, he felt, would not vote for him anyway. All candidates seemed rather fatalistic as to the results of the election - or was it merely realistic? - and seemed content to wait out the campaign period at home or at one of the 2 government stations. One candidate clearly felt the pinch at being on leave from his job between nomination day and the election, and he worked as a coffee-buyer, while one of those engaged in private enterprise simply kept at his job. The hospital orderly was rather short of money and was frankly looking forward to his re-employment upon defeat. He seemed at best a reluctant candidate.

The conception of the member as messenger between the people and the government was uppermost in all of the Lufa candidates' minds. None of them had any policy beyond advocating the extension of more roads, bridges, schools and patrol posts to their area. One candidate admittedly had something of an advantage over his rivals. He was promised that if he changed his mission affiliation on the Sunday after the election, then God would help him to win. Just in case, but unfortunately to no avail, the mission that allegedly made this promise to him lent him a motorcycle to help him move around on his campaign. Although at least 2 of them visited Henganofi on business during the campaign period, none of the Lufa candidates campaigned at Henganofi, and the Henganofi Subdistrict candidates likewise did not stray very far from home.

The candidates at Henganofi were of a rather different kind. They were both somewhat older than their counterparts at Lufa. Their area had been pacified some years before the Lufa area, and local government was already a well-established institution at Henganofi. The preselection process here was a model of sophisticated politics, though perhaps not in the manner that the Australian electoral designers had hoped for.

Originally, there were to be 6 candidates from this part of the electorate. A Papuan schoolteacher who wished to stand was assured of the support of a number of local leaders, or so he thought. Unfortunately for him, 2 of his principal supporters also wished to stand, although only one of them finally did. The prospect of making himself known in the bush where the vast majority of the electorate lives caused this candidate to leave it till next time. His feeling for "my people", as he called them, was impressive in a country where there is as yet no organised nationalist movement.

Local government councils are playing an increasingly important role in the political life of the Territory. They are certainly the most important modern political institutions in the eyes of the local people, and the Kafe Council's role during the Henganofi by-election seems to be of some significance for the future.

The Kafe Council embraces all of the people in the

Henganofi Subdistrict. Shortly before the election, the Council was visited by a spokesman (a Sepik) for the Christian Democratic Party whose speech and exhortations to join the party were met with almost total non-comprehension. Most of the councillors expressed some interest in the idea of a party, but felt that they were not yet ready for the introduction of such an institution. They felt that their area was still too underdeveloped for parties and that the people would not understand their role fully, but perhaps one day in the future... The councillors' reticence about parties was, however, scarcely congruent with their sophistication in council procedure.

Some weeks before, the very same council had been so manipulated by its president and his supporters that 3 potential candidates were forced to withdraw from the election. 2 of them were council employees, of whom one, an ex-councillor, was from the same village as Kimi, the president. This time, the council was able to prevent intra-village rivalries from entering the election by the simple expedient of passing a resolution to restrict the number of candidates from within the council area to 2, the president and the vice-president of the council. While the resolution had no force in law, it had behind it the moral and political force of the entire council.

The second candidate, Bono, was the same man who had led Ugi until the final count in 1964. He is an ex-luluai, and a keen supporter of the Administration and Europeans generally in his area. One of the European settlers whom he had helped to obtain land in his area had rewarded him with a trip to Australia. The Administration had also recognised his authority when it too had chosen him to go on a political education tour to Australia in 1962-3. His village, Kesavaka, is a model of cleanliness and good planning, and both coffee and European vegetables grow there in abundance. He is a member of the Territory's coffee board, an assistant magistrate and has a good reputation for tough, modernising leadership in many parts of the Eastern Highlands. He alone had had a campaign poster in 1964, which read "Oli makim Bono long big guvmen" (Pidgin for "Everyone is going to vote for Bono to go to the big government"), and which still adorns his trade-store at Kesavaka. He alone campaigned widely this time too, although he still did not move outside his own subdistrict. He seized the opportunity offered by the local patrol officer and travelled with him, following the kiap's political education talks with his own campaign speeches. Kimi claimed that he was too busy to campaign anywhere but in Bono's own village, where gained not a vote.

Bono was the eventual victor. The voter turnout was lower than it had been in 1964, and the number of preferences that needed to be marked in order to ensure victory too great for the Lufas to vote as systematically as they had done in 1964. Few votes at Henganofi indicated any preferences at all, and only a minute number went beyond the 2 local candidates. The preference system had robbed Henganofi of victory in 1964, and, with a split vote this time, there seemed to be a common resolve not to indicate any preferences at all.

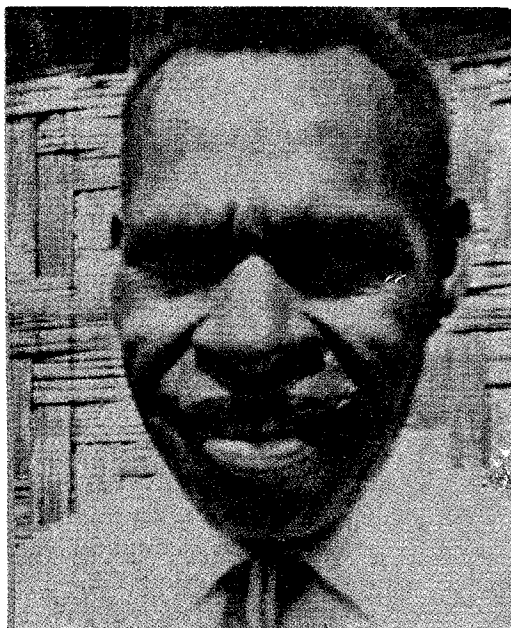
The final result was :

<u>Candidates / Count</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>Final</u>
-Kimi Anozapme	770	-	-	-	-	-	(770)
+Sunavi Otiyo	1121	8	-	-	-	-	(1129)
/+Dogeba Aigoba (Moses)	1373	1	19	-	-	-	(1393)
+Lovana Yaneipa (James)	1416	-	634	141	-	-	(2191)
/+Wanumei Dimigura	2375	1	124	161	837	-	(3498)
+Pupuna Aruno	3565	2	101	798	763	748	5977
-Bono Azanifa	5954	408	15	7	27	94	6505
Exhausted		350	236	286	564	2656	4092

+ : from Lufa

- : from Henganofi

/ : a relative of Ugi Biritu



The winner, Bono Azanifa

undergone had weakened him too seriously to undertake the work of a member of the House of Assembly.

Kimi was the surprise. As president of the Kafe Local Government Council and an Administration interpreter who had accompanied patrols throughout the Kafe area since 1952, he had been expected to do much better. His failure to campaign was not the sole reason for the low level of his support, for it had been he who had been able to engineer the council's support to limit the number of candidates in the first place. A number of prominent political leaders had died in the Eastern Highlands in the months preceding the election, and suspicions of sorcery and of the dangers of politics itself were rife. Indeed, in the House of Assembly itself Simogen Pita had expressed the fear that perhaps Ugi's death had been caused by the sorcery of some Papuan members. Kimi's dismal showing, then, is directly traceable to the widely held fear that the two operations he had recently

Election day, July 15, shone bright and sunny. The Henganofi poll was the first one-day election for the House of Assembly. Instead of the polling teams patrolling the area, the people were brought to the various polling-centres by their councillors. Although voting is not compulsory, the people were instructed to arrive early - some even camped overnight to await the opening of the polls on the morrow - and to save time their names were called out from their village list. Many people have a number of alternative names that may be spelt in many different ways by various European officials so that it is quicker for the people to recognise their own name when called than for the polling clerk to search the roll for one of many possible alternative versions. Unfortunately, this procedure

gave the election an unduly compulsory and administrative appearance.



A group of voters waiting for their names to be called

When their names were called, the voters stepped forward and received their ballot-papers, which they then took into the voting booth which had usually been constructed with the local people's assistance.



Having received their ballot-papers, they queue to vote

Most of the people made use of the "whispering ballot", i.e. as they were illiterate they whispered their "nambawan laik" etc. to a polling-clerk who recorded their votes for them. For those who could not speak Pidgin the clerks simply raised their fingers and waited for a response. There were pictures of all of the candidates prominently exhibited to jog the voters' memories.



The vote is whispered to the clerk



An opportunity exploited : a stall to minister to the needs of waiting voters

Clearly voting was a serious business. Most villages arrived to vote in groups, and came early. Very few votes indeed were cast after lunch. Some polling officials experienced difficulty in restraining the throngs of people who pressed in upon them so eager to cast their votes.

At least one voter was cuffed by a fellow-villager for attempting to vote out of turn, while others were physically encouraged to answer their names more promptly. None of the candidates, however, attempted to sway the voters at the last minute, although a potential European candidate for the Eastern Highlands Regional seat in 1968 was out meeting local leaders and being seen.

At Hageri one local businessman turned election day to a profit by selling bread and butter sandwiches and cigarettes to the waiting voters. By midnight, the vote count had made it clear that only Bono had shown a greater profit on the day.

Yours sincerely,

Edward P. Wolfers,

Received in New York August 22, 1967.