

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

EPW-8  
Goroka Market

P. O. Box 628,  
Port Moresby,  
Papua,  
Territory of Papua  
& New Guinea  
October 16, 1967

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

Dear Mr. Nolte,

Goroka lies on the main Highlands Highway roughly midway between Mount Hagen and Lae. It is the end of the road for many of the hundreds of trucks that travel each week between the Highlands and the coast, for beyond Goroka the road is often closed because of landslips, and it is marginal whether it is cheaper to transport goods by road, or by air to and from Madang. Beyond Goroka one's chances of a backload to the coast grow dimmer as one progresses inland, for even in the Highlands, presently the area with the highest economic potential in the Territory, more goods are still transported in than are exported to other centres.

As was until recently the case in Mount Hagen, and is still quite glaringly so in Kainantu, Goroka is effectively cut in two by its airstrip. Aeroplanes were landing regularly in the Highlands up to 20 years before the first trucks came up the Kassam Pass in the early 1950s.

Throughout most of the week Goroka has a rather quiet air. Indeed, unless one is part of the various indigenous, public service, academic, commercial or planting components of the local scene, it can be a very boring town.

Coming from the coast, the Highlands Highway enters the commercial part of town, where the hotel, motel and guesthouse, and the few main general stores are located. Close by are the Eastern Highlands District and Goroka Subdistrict Offices. Only a few seconds' walk away are the oldest and best of the town's European houses, with their smooth lawns and carefully tended gardens marred only by an occasional TAMBU (Pidgin for "forbidden") sign. There is a settled atmosphere to the neatly painted houses, and the long, imposing driveway that sweeps up to the entrance of the District Commissioner's house on either side of a flagpole bearing the Australian flag. It is Australian suburbia at its wellkempt dullest transplanted to the Highlands.

On the other side of the airstrip, in West Goroka, lie the newer, cheaper European houses, the schools, the showground, and the

industrial area of Goroka. Hidden away, towards the western edge of town, are the box-like, concrete structures that pass for indigenous public service housing now that local officers' conditions are geared to the Territory's alleged "capacity to pay". Clearly, there are few cars here, for the roads are boggy, and the vacant allotments and potential footpaths are overgrown with well-watered grass.

Up on a hill, across a valley of green and shady lanes, not far from the centre of town, a brand new concrete and steel teachers' college, built with money from U.N.E.S.C.O., looks down upon the town from its high, cold perch. Few of its students as yet are indigenous Highlanders.

Quite close to the airport is the redbrick council house of the multiracial Goroka Local Government Council, the Territory's first urban multiracial council. In this part of the Highlands, partnership is more than a forgotten ideal, for the local indigenous leaders, individually and collectively, owe their newfound wealth and prestige to some European who, for no apparent reason, chose them from all the other thousands to become his hausboi, and later helped to set them up in business.

Once a week, the character of Goroka changes. For the first time in a week, one becomes conscious of the thousands of people who live on the fringe of the town's boundaries and beyond. During the week, the town is almost eerily empty of its neighbours. But on Saturdays the few local men slowly strolling around the town in hope, rather than search, of work are suddenly supplemented by **hundreds** of people with a sense of urgency about them that one rarely detects in the Highlands.



Each Saturday morning, people for many miles around Goroka, and from as far away as Lufa (about 45 miles) converge on a small patch of ground beside the council house. The town's usual population of around 800 Europeans and 1,500 indigenes swells to a much larger size, as people troop into town to play their various parts in what



is the social and economic highlight of the local week.

Many of the local people come early, for they have produce to sell. For an entry fee of 20 cents they are entitled to display their goods on the few rude tables set up by the local council, or to let their pigs loose in a small pen to one side of the market. Those who come

late must squat on the ground beside their wares. Some Europeans come to buy, but increasingly the market serves as a centre for the purchase and exchange of locally produced and consumed goods rather than of vegetables and fruit intended for the European palate.

For many of the vendors the trip to town can scarcely be economically worthwhile. Some of them must walk for several days to get to market, as did one man we met from Lufa, simply to sell a fowl for  $\text{₡}2 - 3$ . Others may spend up to  $\text{₡}3$  on the truck fare to town simply to buy or sell goods not worth half the value of their fares.

Market day is, above all, a social occasion. Gossip is exchanged, old friends are met. Young public servants in their neatly pressed white shirts and shorts and long white socks buy their week's supplies at prices that allow them still to dress, if not to eat, like Europeans.



Grubbily dressed old men and women come to sell a few shillings worth of sweet potato, cabbage, or tomatoes, while young girls from Bena Bena parade proudly in the traditional finery of their area, supplemented by large quantities of brightly-coloured beads. These cultural conservatives as they are often called seem scarcely aware of their difference from their more progressive - warmer, if grubbier - neighbours.

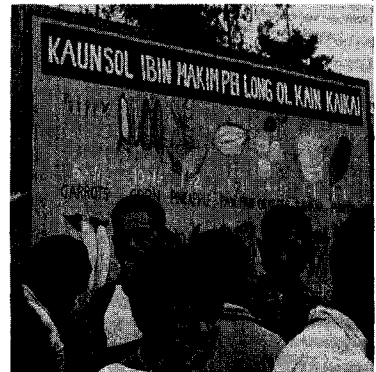


Market day is a day of envy for the visitor accustomed to the high prices, and low quality, of the scarce goods on display in Port Moresby's Koki Market. It is also a day of small surprises, as when one signals to an elderly gentleman who clearly understands not a word of Pidgin, and who is among the few men there in feathers, that one wants a photo. After much finger-pointing, smiling and nodding, the photo is taken, and a grubby hand is thrust forward as a hoarse throat croaks : "one shilling".

A few enterprising local entrepreneurs with coastal experience make a small fortune taking photographs with a polaroid camera that develops the negatives on the spot. Their pride is all too evident as they charge the ignorant but fascinated onlookers 60 cents for a product that costs them not 10 cents to produce.

"one shilling" standards, although the cold battered frankfurts and scone are rather expensive, and considerably less appetising. Prices are controlled by the local council, so that the nearest thing to profiteering or exploitation is represented by the local schoolboys who surround one's car imploring to be allowed to carry one's bag - for a consideration.

By midday, the market is almost finished, and the vendors and sellers begin the long trek home, or perhaps repair to the hotel. Only one thing disturbs me a little : when I last went to the market, I was one of a number of people counted by a research team anxious to discover how many people come to the market, and why they come. Could it really be that 1% of a sample group of marketeers each Saturday really are research-workers?



Yours sincerely,

*Edward Wolfers.*

Received in New York October 26, 1967.