

NEW GUINEA TOUR 1970

NEW STEPS TOWARDS SELF-GOVERNMENT IN PAPUA AND NEW GUINEA

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton  
at Papua Hotel, Port Moresby

6 JULY 1970



Honour, Members of the Administrator's Executive Council,  
Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I think that the Territory of Papua and New Guinea and the other islands which at the moment make up the whole, faces a most difficult period in its evolution towards self-government in the future and towards independence. We have reached a stage of political development inside the Territory at which there are vocal demands for progress, or at least demands for changes in various fields. But such changes are probably more difficult in this Territory than in any other area of which I can think.

We have here in Papua and New Guinea and then across areas of sea other islands which, as I said, at the moment make up a whole. We have a Territory composed of what are virtually different races, with different languages, with different district loyalties and we have a Territory in which some areas are clamouring for quicker advancement towards self-government and independence and other areas are fearful that the advance is already too swift. And we have a Territory, and I look to the future, which of its very nature is liable to be subject to the dangers of fragmentation.

Those dangers stem partly from different languages, partly from different outlook, partly from different stages of development. They can be reinforced by fallacious argument that if some part of Territory is fortunate enough to discover, for example, a copper mine then it would be better off by itself. And if this fallacious argument, and I believe it is a fallacious argument, is accepted then at some stage there would be that fragmentation. If oil were discovered in Papua there could be a danger of fragmentation there, and so it would go on ultimately, I am sure, to the detriment of all the people of the Territory which we would like to see advance as a unit towards nationhood. Talking of advancing as a unit towards nationhood there have been, sir, as you have said I think, great advances made economically and politically in the Territory since the Second World War.

I think the time has come for further advances to be made along that road. I do not speak of self-government in 1972 or in any calendar year that you may care to mention, because you are on a road towards self-government. You have started on it. There will necessarily be progress along it step by step and anyone who seeks to say that at a given month at a given year a period will have been reached when that can be achieved is, I think, dangerously simplifying the problem and is acting to the detriment of the people for the future.

But there are further steps now short of self-government but towards self-government which I feel should be made and these I wish to outline to you tonight. We believe that the time has come when less should be referred to Canberra for decision and more should be retained for decision by the Administrator's Executive Council and by the Ministerial Members who for the most part make up that Council. What we suggest is this - that there should be negotiated between the Australian Government and the Government here, a sum of money for recurrent expenses and for minor works inside the Territory. And, speaking for the Australian Government, we would expect that there would be more effort on the part of the local peoples to raise revenue inside this Territory, as years go by for the purpose of this recurrent expenditure and these minor works. But once this sum of money had been negotiated, made up partly by local revenue, partly by what we will call a grant-in-aid for these purposes from the Commonwealth, then that sum of money, we believe, should be divided by the Administrator's Executive Council among the various Ministries up here which will put in claims in the way Ministers put in claims to the Cabinet in Canberra.

So there will be a claim from the Minister of Education, there will be a claim from the Minister of Health, there will be a claim from the Minister of Public Works, and the Administrator's Executive Council - within the sum of money available to it - will apportion to these various Ministers the sums that they can spend. When that has been done, when a Minister, let us say, of Education, has received a sum within the total limits then we believe that he should have authority as to how that money should be spent in the Territory, should be able to make decisions here which now require reference to Canberra before they can be made.

If he has a new programme, he will need to get the agreement of the Administrator's Executive Council. If, as is not unknown in political circles in Canberra, he wishes to get more money in the course of the year for his own portfolio at the expense of somebody else's portfolio - and that is the only way he will get it, he won't get it by additional grant from Australia - then the Administrator's Executive Council can listen to the pleas of the two Ministers concerned and, as a council, can decide what should be done.

This, I think, will be a great transference, not so much of power, but of administrative power to the elected Members who are Ministerial Members in this Territory and to the Administrator's Executive Council. As there is to be this transference of power and in future, no doubt, other transferees of power, so concomitant with it will there need to be an assumption of responsibility by the Ministerial Members and the House of Assembly in Papua and New Guinea. If there is a requirement for more money to be provided than has been provided by the existing level of local taxes, and what the Australian Government is prepared to provide by a grant-in-aid, then that's fine. It can be provided if the House of Assembly up here is prepared to impose the taxes required to raise it in the same way as the Government of Australia has to impose the taxes required to provide what it wants to do. I hope you won't read into what I have just said any suggestion that Australian aid will cease for Papua and New Guinea. Of course it won't, but I hope you will read into it a realisation that as power is transferred so also must responsibility be transferred and these two things go hand in hand.

That is the first proposition we will make. We will have in the Australian Budget a negotiated amount of money for the Territory called a

"grant-in-aid" added to the sum of money raised by the decision of the local House in the number of taxes they propose to impose, and the rate of taxes they propose to impose, and that will be left to division among the Ministries by the Administrator's Executive Council and for spending by the Ministerial Members concerned.

We will have also in the Australian Budget a development grant. That development grant for the general development of Papua and New Guinea Territories will remain with, and be negotiated, of course, by the Australian Government and the Government up here, but its expenditure, since it will be provided entirely by the Australian taxpayer, virtually entirely, will remain the responsibility of the Australian Government. In other words, we will want to see that a general development grant is expended on those projects for which it is voted, and we will want to oversee that it is properly expended on those projects.

We propose, this is just a matter I suppose of presentation too, that in future we would have on our Australian Budget an item which is to pay all the overseas allowances of expatriate and overseas officers so that everyone can see that this comes from the Australian taxpayer and from what is provided inside Australia, and not from what is provided in the Territory. The base rates of public servants from the Territory and from Australia can of course be the same, but I think it is essential that people should know that the additional allowances paid do come from the Australian taxpayer, are shown in the Australian Budget and are paid to expatriate officers.

We have had it brought to our attention that there is fear in the Territory amongst responsible people that key public servants may be lost to the future service of this Territory because, if they are expatriate officers, they have an insecurity of tenure. A man of 40 or 45 may reach a point where he has a family to educate, responsibilities to take on, and where he says to himself: "Should I remain in the Service of the Territory, either as a Member of the New Guinea/Papua service or as a contract officer? Should I continue in this or should I, because I do not know what the future holds for me in case self-government or independence comes, should I at this stage begin to carve some new career for myself". And it has been put to us that a number of key public servants, I mean district officers, professional officers, sub-professional officers and technical officers, either have resigned or may in the future resign because they do not know what would happen to them when self-government or independence comes.

It has been put to us that this poses a danger to the future development of Papua and New Guinea because these people and their accumulated experience are going to be required when self-government comes or independence comes. And so we have decided to do this. In order to encourage selected key overseas officers to remain in the service of Papua and New Guinea for the present and future good of the Territory, we propose that those who are permanent officers of the Papua and New Guinea Public Service, some of those who are permanent officers of the Papua and New Guinea Public Service, and some of those who are contract officers, will be offered enlistment in a new Australian-based service. Offers of engagements in this new service (and it will be a selective service), offers of engagement now and in the future will be made to the selected key Administrative officers of whom I have spoken, but acceptance of such an offer will be entirely voluntary on the part of any such officers and offers of selection will be decided by the Administration.

At the moment we believe the ceiling of this new Commonwealth based service should be approximately 1,000. It will be additional to the existing arrangements under which officers serve in the permanent service here or in which they serve as contract officers. That is to say permanent officers who are not appointed to the new service will continue as they are at present, losing nothing of what they have achieved. Contract officers who are not offered appointment will continue on their existing contracts. But appointments to the new Service will carry a guarantee by the Australian Government that a member appointed will be assured of continued employment in the Public Service of Papua and New Guinea or in the event that he is transferred from that, or displaced from that, in the future, there will be a guarantee that the Commonwealth Government will place him in permanent employment in a like field on a comparable salary. This, we hope, will enable many officers to resolve the dilemma in which perhaps they are at present placed, and will enable them to decide to make their accumulated experience available to the Government of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea while at the same time retaining full confidence in their own future and in their own future employment. Before the details of this approach are settled, overseas officers themselves will be consulted throughout the Territory, as will the Public Service Association. But that is another step which we propose to make which we think will be of assistance to the development of this country in the future and which so many people in this Territory have urged us in one way or another to do.

We propose that the Administrator's Executive Council, as a result of the new responsibilities which it assumes, will have a spokesman for that Council appointed in the House of Assembly to answer questions as to what the Administrator's Executive Council has done and why it has done it. And we also propose that the Parliament of Australia will not exercise its veto power in relation to ordinances if those ordinances affect the actual responsibilities handed over to Ministerial Members.

Now let me indicate to you the kinds of areas in which we feel responsibility should be taken by Ministerial Members here and the kinds of areas in which we feel the Commonwealth of Australia should continue to exercise its present authority. There will be delivered later by my colleague, the Minister for External Territories, in more detail but for the moment the subjects on which we think that authority to take decisions should reside in the Ministerial Members or the Administrator's Executive Council are educational - primary, secondary, technical, but not tertiary - public health, tourism, co-operatives, business advisory services, workers' compensation, industrial training, posts and telegraphs, Territory revenue including taxation (for inherent in what I have said is the need for the House of Assembly to take greater responsibility in the levying of revenue in this Territory), price control, coastal shipping, civil defence, corrective institutions (that's prisons in case anybody's wondering), registration of customary land, land use, leasing of land and town planning and urban development.

The areas in which we wish and must at this stage retain final authority are the judiciary, the enforcement of law and order, internal security, external affairs, external trade and large scale development projects in agriculture, in transport, forestry, . . . . in those things in the five-year development plan which we are now some half-way through and which will for the most part be financed by the Australian taxpayer and therefore overseen by the representatives of the Australian taxpayer rather than the representatives of the Territory.

I may say that other matters such as civil aviation and defence will, as they are at present, be paid for and controlled directly by the Commonwealth Departments concerned.

In the Administrator's Executive Council, when decisions are being arrived at as to proposals put forward by Ministerial Members for authority to spend on this or that, the official Members will sit in the Administrator's Council, as they sit at present, and they will offer advice to that Council and they will offer their experience to that Council. They will not take part in any vote that Council may have as to what it finally does. I suggest that these are very significant steps forward along the road to transferring power to the representative Members of the Territory and to transferring responsibility to the representative Members of the Territory.

But I emphasise again that the total sum available for recurrent and minor works will be a total sum, only able to be added to, if the House of Assembly wishes to find some new avenue of expenditure, by imposing taxation to raise the revenue for that new expenditure because as a Territory progresses towards the ability to exercise greater power, so it must accept the greater responsibility for financing the decisions which it makes.

Even when in the future self-government comes or independence comes, there will be continuing Australian assistance for this Territory, but the amount of recurrent assistance provided will, to a great extent, depend on the amount of self-help which the Territory is prepared to impose upon itself. The developmental sums made available for development here will continue, but if, as I hope, the Territory develops and has an increased taxable capacity because of such things as the Bougainville copper mining or oil, which may be found in Papua or elsewhere, the industrial development if that happens, then we would expect greater responsibility still to be accepted by the people of Papua and New Guinea, because when you boil it all down I believe that this is the position as far as the Australian people are concerned. We feel we have an obligation and a responsibility. I don't talk about a technical obligation at the moment under the trusteeship council. We feel we have an obligation and responsibility to help the development of this country to a stage where it could not only govern itself politically but govern itself economically, and we will accept that responsibility - and this may go on for years.

But I don't think we would want to accept the position where in years to come people from the Territory came to us and said: "These are our needs, these are our requirements, we don't want to accept the responsibility for taxing to meet them - you tax, you provide them". At some stage the Australians would say: "Sorry". But if we continue to provide the assistance we are providing and intend to provide in the future, then at some stage there would be no need for the people of the Territory to come to us because, by a joint effort, we would have been able to raise the economic capacity of this country to a stage where the companies that have come in would be taxed, where wealth that flows to individuals would be taxed, where developments that have already taken place would lead to developments still in the future, and where the Territory of Papua and New Guinea could probably look after itself.

But for the present and in the foreseeable future we intend to provide that assistance at least which we provide now. And for the present we propose this new step forward towards self-government and responsibility, which I know in some areas of the Territory will be thought to be going too far, which I know in other areas of the Territory will be thought to be going not far enough, but which looked at from either end are, I think, necessary steps towards a future which must, at some time, hold full internal self-government and full independence.

This is as far as we feel we should now go, and I finish as I began by saying that I believe it against all logic and all sense to put a timetable on this. We don't want to remain in the Territory one week against the wishes of the majority of its people. We don't think we ought to get out of the Territory against the wish of the majority of its people. We don't want to rule any peoples without their consent. We don't think it proper to move out and possibly help a vocal minority rule a majority without that majority's consent, and one can't put a timetable on this but one can say these are steps towards the time when this Territory will be self-governing and when its people will express their views. And we will take account of those views instead of imposing our views on them as to a date for self-government and independence.

Your Honour and Members of the Administrator's Executive Council, I hope you will agree that these are significant steps and I hope with all my heart that the people of the Territory and the Members of the House of Assembly and the Members of the Administrator's Executive Council will make the fullest possible use of the opportunities now offered for the advancement of this Territory and the assumption of the responsibilities which must go with them.

Thank you.

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