

LAE : LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCILS

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

9 JULY 1970

..... Opening remarks not recorded. and one part of the Territory can help another. As roads go inland from a town like Lae, the town is helped by that road and the country opened up by that road is also helped. It is mutual assistance. So I hope the Territory will progress as a unit - the coastal areas, the highlands and the islands.

Clearly this Territory is on the road to self-government and at the end of the road which it is now travelling, self-government will be attained. There is no turning back on this road. It must be progressed step by step, but at the same time it is not for the Australian Government to dictate to the people of the Territory the speed at which they must travel along that road.

So I think it quite wrong to say that at a given year - 1972 or 3 or 4 or any given year, the Australian Government will impose on the people of the Territory self-government whether they want it or whether they don't. And as long as I am Prime Minister, we will not seek to impose our will on the people of the Territory in that way.

But at the same time, if and when the time comes, as ultimately it will, when the people of the Territory themselves, the majority of the people say they wish complete internal self-government, then at that time they will get it because we do not wish to help to administer and govern a country against the wishes of the majority of its people. And we wouldn't do it, any more than we would get out and stop helping to govern a country against the wishes of the majority of the people in it.

Having said that, I now want to refer to the new steps which have been taken along the road which I have described -- steps which were announced in Port Moresby a few days ago. There is going to be a transfer of power for decision-making from Canberra to the Administrator's Executive Council and with this transfer, the House of Assembly will achieve powers additional to those it now has. In future, money for the recurrent expenses of the services in the Territory and money for minor works will be negotiated as to amounts between the Australian Government and the Administration in the Territory. So there will be available for these purposes, the sums raised inside the Territory for which the House of Assembly will decide the taxation rates, the amounts raised inside the Territory together with that amount negotiated as a recurrent grant from Australia. It will then be for the Administrator's Executive Council to apportion between the Departments the sums of money to be spent for those purposes. And in carrying out this work, in carrying out this apportionment, the official members of the Administrator's Council will be present, will give their advice, will give the benefit of their experience, but will not vote on the decisions made by the rest of the Administrator's Executive Council.

And in those fields which are handed over to this area of decision by Ministerial Members, the Australian Government will not exercise its power of veto over ordinances passed by the House of Assembly - provided they fall within this area.

I think this represents a quite significant transfer of authority to the Ministerial Members and to the House of Assembly, and I believe it is essential that the House of Assembly, the Ministerial Members and the people of the Territory fully realise that as authority is transferred, so is responsibility transferred, and as authority is increased so does the need for self help and provision to carry out programmes from internal sources.

This does not mean that there will be a cessation in any way of Australian aid. I believe that in the future of this Territory for a long time ahead, there is going to be a need for that Australian advice, that Australian experience, that Australian help which has brought the Territory so far in the last twenty years. There will also be a need for Australian capital which will enable the Territory to develop as it has in that time.

And so to finish - because I would like to give some time for questions and for discussion - to sum it up.....the Territory is on the road to self-government. It will be best for all parts of the Territory if that road were travelled as a unit. Australian help in that travelling will continue, but there will be from time to time additional authority provided for the people of the Territory, yet no-one can say at what particular date complete self-government should come, because it should only come if the majority of the people in the Territory wish it.

There is very much to do for the future of this country and I express the strong hope that that will be done by a partnership of the coastal people, of the highlanders and the people from the islands, of people whether they come from New Guinea or Papua or from Australia, and that working in harmony to build and to achieve, we will be able to give this country the economic base which must be there for full political stability and that we can avoid any divisions which will hamper the task which together can be so well done.

That is all except for a wish I have to congratulate the Members of the Local Councils upon the work which they are doing which is so significant to the people of this Territory and to wish them well in the future. Thank you.

In answer to a question about investment, Mr. Gorton said:-

We think the Papua/New Guinea Territory needs investment for development just as Australia needs investment for development. We would like to see as much of the equity in the new development held by the local people, if it is possible.

At this stage it seems quite unlikely that a significant amount of such investment could be bought from the savings of the local people and that is one of the reasons why we are setting up an investment corporation which can buy equity in new enterprises or expanding enterprises and retain that equity for the good of the people of the Territory until the time comes when it can be sold to the individual people of the Territory.

So we believe investment is needed. We believe the Australian Government should retain control over the size and form of overseas investment because the country can be subjugated economically if we don't, but we impose it under that control and we would wish to see as much of it as possible either immediately, which is unlikely, or in future retained for ownership of the New Guinea people, the Territory people. I think that is about all I have to say on that subject but, as you know, 20 per cent of the new development in Bougainville was bought by the Administration for the good of the New Guinea people.
