



VISIT TO NEW GUINEA 1970

KIETA, BOUGAINVILLE : LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCILS

Speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton

10 JULY 1970

I would like to thank the Member, Mr. Paul Lapun, for the kind things which he has said about what Australia has done in general and about the small part which I was able to play in the time of the troubles, so that between us we were able to overcome those troubles.

I really cannot give an answer on whether a road to a particular locality will be built - yes or no - I cannot do that at this stage. All I can say is if the suggestions for this road, and possibly for other roads, is put to the Administration - and I am sure you would be the man to put them to the Administration - then they can be fully considered along with other development proposals which would have to be decided on the basis of economics and developing priorities.

On the second question which you raised, that of trying to see that local businessmen would have their own businesses in the town of Arawa, I understand that it has already been agreed by the Administration that the Development Bank will make loans to local people for businesses in that town subject only to a decision as to whether they are likely to be a good businessman. That, of course, applies to whoever loans are made, but we want to see as many local businessmen as possible with their own businesses in this new town which is being properly planned and properly built.

Also we want to ensure that the greatest possible equity is held by local people in developments at Arawa. I have seen a list of a number of projects in which the Administration want to see at least 49 per cent equity owned by the local people, whether it is a garage, an hotel - a variety of businesses of that kind - where we will certainly offer and seek to provide at least a 49 per cent equity.

I know that there are some people - how many I don't know - but there are some people who wish to secede from the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. I think that it would be bad for the people of Bougainville if this should now happen. I think that as a part of a much bigger unit, the future of the people of Bougainville will be better. There will be bigger markets for the produce of Bougainville, there will be the advantages that the people of Bougainville can go to other parts of the Territory and get work there, join the Administration there. There are all the advantages which a large unit gives to the people as distinct from a smaller unit. Also as the industry of the other part of the Territory grows and develops, as perhaps oil is discovered on the mainland, then while Bougainville remains in the Territory, she will share in all those advantages. And that means her individual people will share in those advantages.

Australia itself is a Federation of six different states, and Australia is strong and each state is the stronger because it is a part of that Federation. If the State were out by itself, it would be weak in all ways, or weaker in all ways,

and it would be to the detriment of the people of that state in Australia. And I think the people of Bougainville should think of this and see whether it does not apply to the people of Bougainville as well.

In any case, I suggest that it is much too early to try and reach any decision on this subject now. I think there should be much more thought given to it by the people of Bougainville, much more discussion, meditation on the advantages of secession, recognition of the disadvantages of secession, talk amongst the older men and the younger people. And that should go on for some long time. Time enough to make significant decisions on something of this kind when the time of independence of the Territory comes. In the meantime, let there be proper discussion among the people of Bougainville.

Meanwhile, Members elected to the House of Assembly from Bougainville will now have much more opportunity to influence decisions, and the Ministerial Members and Assistant Ministerial Members will have much more opportunity to influence decisions. And they can get up when they are elected by their people here, they can get up in the House of Assembly and speak for the people here and they can say "We want this road" or "We want that harbour" or "We want that wharf", and they can put the views of their people in the same way as Members of Parliament from the different States do in Australia.

That does not mean, of course, that every time one of these requests is raised, it will be met. But it does mean that the wishes of the people of Bougainville will be able to be known all throughout the Territory. I know the Members you have elected and they are pretty good Members and they speak out strongly for the people of Bougainville.

So I think it is too soon yet to talk about referendums for secession. I think, as I said before, there should be much more time for discussion amongst the people here. And I say this and you know it is true. It is nothing to me if Bougainville is independent. It is nothing to Australia if Bougainville is independent. I don't say what I say because it is of some advantage to me or to Australia but because I believe it is of advantage to the people of Bougainville, and I want them to have a lot more time to make up their own minds about it.

I think that is all I have to say on those subjects except to express the hope that now that much more authority has been given to Ministerial Members, the Administrator's Executive Council and to the House of Assembly, and decisions that were formerly made in Canberra will now be made in the Territory, that this will help to develop the capacity for running the Territory amongst all the peoples of the Territory and that they will all go forward together, helping each other, and with Australia giving help as long as it's wanted, to build up a better life, a better economic life for all the people.

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