

VISIT TO PAPUA /NEW GUINEA : FAREWELL BROADCAST

The Prime Minister, Mr. John Gorton
speaking over ABC Radio, Port Moresby



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Today I leave the Territory. My visit has, of necessity, been all too short. But it has included major announcements of new policy, and I have seen many different places, talked to many different people, and been able to come to some conclusions.

The major policy changes announced are, of course, that there would be a significant transfer of power, power to make decisions, from Canberra to elected representatives of Territory people.

The Administrator's Executive Council will now have authority to allocate money for recurrent expenses in many fields and for minor works - and the House of Assembly will have to be asked to appropriate such monies in the way recommended.

These proposals, which were announced in some detail last Monday, are significant steps along the road to ultimate self-government.

I also re-emphasised that the Australian Government believes the Territory is on the road which leads to full self-government. There can be no turning back from that road. It must be travelled to the end. But it is not for the Australian Government to dictate the speed at which the ultimate goal is reached.

It is not for us to set an arbitrary date and say that on that date we will force full self-government on the people of the Territory whether they want it or not. Instead our attitude is that the majority of the people of the Territory should decide when they wish full self-government - and when they do this they will get what they want.

In the meantime the possibility of different regional responsibilities for regions at different levels of development could well be examined.

It will come as no surprise to the people of the Territory that I found the Highland people, almost to a man, violently opposed to self-government in 1972 - or on any fixed date. They do not want this before they feel they are ready for it and of course, the Highlanders make up the majority of the whole population.

In the coastal areas, Wewak, Lae, Madang, opinion was more divided - but there was a strong majority opinion expressed at all the meetings which I attended, that the people did not want full self-government until a time of their own choosing. And in these areas there was for the most part, tolerance and a working together to build a strong edifice on the economic foundations which have been so well laid.

In Bougainville where there has been talk in some quarters of a desire to secede from the Territory I formed the strong impression that the people wished for much more time and thought and discussion on that suggestion before they came to any conclusion.

In the Gazelle Peninsula the sadly divided state of the people was evident. I asked for discussion between the two groups for a cessation of the violence used by the Mautaugans, and for an attempt to arrive at solutions of problems by majority opinion with discussion and without hate and anger. I renewed the offer of a referendum on the multi-racial council and asked the Mautaugans to discuss their problems with me - but they refused. I can only hope that the call for reasonable discussion will bear fruit but, in the meantime, the law must be enforced.

It is impossible for example, to permit land, which has been bought by the Administration for distribution to Tolais, to be illegally occupied by squatters. This illegal squatting is taking place at the very time when the Land Board is considering, from Tolai and Bainings people, applications for the 350 blocks available.

If permitted to continue it will retard the chances of orderly economic development in the Gazelle Peninsula, and, indeed, if squatting is permitted on Administration Land bought for distribution to Tolai, what will prevent squatting on land already held by Tolai. This matter is too important to be left undetermined. Illegal occupation of land must and will be stopped.

The future of the Territory as a whole is, at this stage, certain in some way, uncertain in others. It is certain that it will eventually attain self-government and independence. I hope it will remain unfragmented and that different parts of it will not secede. For if it is fragmented then each separate part will be economically and politically less strong than the whole.

And I believe the people in every part, if secession were to take place, would be worse off. But this question is one that will, no doubt, be settled by the local people themselves, perhaps at the time of independence, and the answer to this is not certain.

In the meantime as new roads are built from the Highlands to the Coast, as new districts are opened up, as more schools are built and staffed, as better agriculture is taught and new crops are tested, as mineral wealth is exploited and as industries arise, I think the Territory will, at an accelerated pace, go forward to that strong independent economic position, which alone can ensure continued economic progress and continued political stability.

There must and will be more local participation in, and ownership of, businesses and industries - and there should be a continuing partnership between those who live in the Territory and Australians.

I leave with great hope for the future of all the people of this land, and I leave with a feeling that we all owe a great debt of gratitude to those Australians who have selflessly taught in the missions, have selflessly brought law and order and honest administration to what was but yesterday a primitive country - and I think we all owe, too, an equal debt of gratitude to those local people in all regions who have helped in this task - are still helping in it - and are taking more and more responsibility to continue it, for in them lies the hope of the future of the Territory.