UNBOUNDED POLITICS IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS: LEADERSHIP AND PARTY ALIGNMENTS

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The Melanesian countries of the Southwest Pacific--Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and the Republic of Vanuatu--have remained committed to an open, competitive democratic political process since achieving independence. Unlike former colonies in Africa that preceded them in decolonization, these states have held regular national elections that have seen the defeat of governments and the turnover of national leaders. In addition, the use of no-confidence motions has added another dynamic element to the political process. However, the Melanesian cultural setting has modified the inherited Westminster model of government. The political process has featured a weak party system, a central role for independent MPs, and shifting coalitions to construct new governments. This Melanesian variant can be termed an "unbounded model" of politics. The Solomon Islands is utilized here as an example of this important Melanesian adaptation.

AN INTENSE DEBATE HAS EMERGED among scholars over the potential for democratic transition among Third World countries. The movement for democracy that began in the Philippines with "people power" has become a second revolution. In Asia, Latin America, and Africa, regime change is under way in the wake of external and popular pressures for reform. The transition to democracy has in some cases been complete, with the introduction of a fully competitive political process, while in other countries only partial success has been achieved. Within the scholarly literature, attention has been directed to the preconditions for democracy, the requisites for a successful transition, the configurations of competing societal interests and forces, and the processes of resolving conflict between pro- and antidemoc-

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racy forces.[1] Little attention however, has been given to the pattern of politics likely to emerge following the introduction of democracy into Third World settings. As Robert Pinkney has suggested recently:

> If a country can negotiate the hazards of transition to democracy, what are the prospects of this democracy surviving? And might it even evolve from a crude system which is distinguished from authoritarianism mainly by the existence of competitive elections, into one in which civil liberties, toleration, citizen participation, stability based on respect for democratic values and social justice all flourish?. . . Why should we expect the current wave of democratizations to be any longer lasting? Our task would be easier if we could parade a collection of case studies of viable democracies that have followed recent transitions, or even studies of recently established democracies that reverted to authoritarianism, but it is still early days, and so far we have few cases of anything as dramatic as either the evolution of model democracies or democratic collapse.[2]

In this article, the focus is on examining the pattern of democratic politics that has emerged in the Melanesian countries of the Southwest Pacific.[3] Papua New Guinea, the Republic of Vanuatu, and the Solomon Islands have managed to remain committed to a democratic process from the moment of independence to the present. I suggest that a particular form of politics has taken hold that exhibits some of the characteristics of Western liberal democracies but that has unique features stimulated by elements found in Melanesian culture. In this initial formulation, the Solomon Islands will be examined, focusing in particular on the 1989 elections and the period up to the present. Leadership patterns do not follow the neopatrimonial model found in many Third World countries[4] nor has clientage-based politics formed fully.[5] From the Solomons case, it is possible to suggest one potential pattern of accommodation that democratic forms may be forced to take within the Third World context.

Background

The island states of Melanesia have thrown up a different pattern of post-independence politics than their African predecessors in decolonization. Instead of a quick dismantling of colonially bequeathed representative political structures, which characterized African politics,[6] the Westminster model continues to have relevance more than a decade after independence. National elections have been held at constitutionally prescribed intervals and have

featured vigorous campaigns organized largely around competition among political parties. In the case of the inherited public-service structures, which were highly centralized instruments of colonial rule, the Melanesian experience also presents a contrast to the African pattern. In Africa the new political leaders used the state to buttress central control to the point of cementing their authoritarian patterns of rule, including the neopatrimonial form. In Melanesia central institutions have been targets of decentralization movements, often seen to go hand in hand with decolonization itself.[7] New provincial levels of government have been created to move government closer to the people and to more accurately reflect the diverse and dispersed island character of these new states. The political leadership has not engaged in repressive authoritarian practices.

However, bedeviling the Melanesian political system has been a lack of stability in political alignments following national elections.[8] It is especially at the moment when new governments are formed that the party system has been most problematic. Rarely has one party captured a majority of seats through the electoral process. Hence, government formation has been driven by coalition arrangements that include combinations of multiple parties as well as a range of independents who owe no allegiance to party. These coalitions find it difficult to stand the heat of political battle on the floor of Parliament. Thus, they tend to be highly unstable, continually in flux, and open to persistent challenge through the mechanism of votes of no-confidence, which feature throughout the term of an elected government. This pattern of political uncertainty can be called an "unbounded" political process, in the sense that political parties are not sufficiently strong in binding the loyalty of elected members to ensure that the party controls their legislative behavior. MPs defect from the party if it is to their political advantage or to the advantage of their regional base of support. In political societies divided deeply by ethnonational sympathies and regional identities, unbounded politics thrives with each new political crisis.

This article examines the evolution of the postindependence Solomon Islands to assess the extent to which unbounded politics has become entrenched in political life.[9] The 1989 election results presented a unique opportunity for a decisive break with the past pattern of a highly unstable, fragmented political competition between elected MPs. For the first time, one political party, the People's Alliance Party (PAP), won a majority of seats in the National Parliament. Solomon Islands voters opted for dramatic change, selecting the PAP partly on the basis of its emphasis on economic renewal and constitutional reforms and partly on the basis of its established leadership, including former Prime Minister Solomon Mamaloni. Given the popular mandate for the PAP and the experience of its leadership, Solomon

Islands politics had the potential to move beyond the unbounded politics model. However, barely a year into its term of office, the party's hold on governing ministers had collapsed for all to see. What can account for this unraveling of the PAP's predominance? Let us begin by introducing the unbounded nature of the Solomon Islands' politics.

Unbounded Politics in the Solomon Islands

At the outset, one can identify several key elements of an unbounded politics model. Although political parties are formed around a group of individuals who share common interests and aspirations, the party is essentially an electoral phenomenon.[10] Political parties in the Solomon Islands formulate party platforms and endorse party candidates. The party seeks to arouse within the electorate an identification with party labels and very general party positions with clear prodevelopment messages. Parties are weakly organized with little permanent staff and no strong branch structures. They do not espouse clear ideological positions grounded in a consistent set of political principles. Usually identified with a dominant personality, the party encompasses those political aspirants who have a degree of affinity with the leader.

National elections serve to determine those who will participate in the political competition in Honiara to construct a new government, that is, the elected MPs. At the first session of a newly elected Parliament, MPs vote for a new prime minister. Where no one party captures a majority of seats, nominated candidates stand for election by secret ballot. The candidates are put forward by alliances of MPs crafted in the days between the announcement of the general election results and the first session of Parliament. A successful coalition depends on a calculated allocation of ministerial portfolios to reflect the balance of forces in a just manner. Potential alliance MPs attempt to bargain for prestigious and powerful portfolios to advance their interests and those of their islands and constituencies.

The dominant political actors who can contest for the post of prime minister are those who are able to translate constituency support into a solid political base over a number of elections. The "big men" of politics are not unlike the big-men within localized, clan-based Melanesian society. Their claim to power rests on continuity in the political arena and their ability to garner and maintain strong regional or island support. They act as magnets around which newly elected politicans gravitate in loose alliances to bargain for power. If a leader falters in the competition, new aspirants are likely to seek out alternative leaders who can prove more successful in the parliamentary struggle for government and ministerial positions.

To be in government, particularly in the post of a minister, is highly prestigious and coveted prize. To be in opposition is to be lost in the wilderness. Indeed, to be an opposition MP is a recognition of failure. It is a purely temporary condition for the truly ambitious individual, who will act in his or her best interest by shifting alignments to overcome the isolation from power. Party affiliation, then, can be useful if the leadership is skilled but an impediment if it is not. Mixed in with those MPs who identify with a party are usually a group of independents, who provide the fluidity to the bargaining process for constructing a governing coalition. The independent MPs' allegiance is a crucial resource subject to intense lobbying from the political big-men of Solomon Islands national politics.

Given that independents are part of the governing coalition, the opposition will immediately begin an active campaign to woo MPs away from the government benches, in the early stages focusing on those who have not been able to capture a coveted ministerial assignment. Once the opposition feels that the governing group has developed significant fissures within its ranks, a motion of no-confidence will be moved to test and hopefully overthrow the incumbent power holders. No-confidence motions threaten a government over the course of its electoral mandate. The unbounded politics model, then, assumes a highly fluid and deeply competitive parliamentary system. Allegiances mean nothing beyond the narrowly short term. Given this fluidity, it is difficult to hold party loyalty, to give the political party meaning beyond its role in influencing voter behavior.

Contributing to the unbounded politics model is the political culture of national politics. The Solomon Islands is a ministate with a population of some 340,000 people scattered over a dispersed number of islands. The majority of Solomon Islanders live in rural societies in highly fragmented, small-village settings with strong clan identifications. Politicians who are elected to the National Parliament are those who can successfully build interclan support or divide the ethnic base of their leading competitors by promoting rival candidates. Once elected, the MP travels to Honiara to join with thirty-seven other parliamentarians (expanded to forty-seven seats for the 1993 national elections).[11] As a modern center and the site of the national government with a substantial public service, Honiara, with a population of only 30,000, remains an intensely localized urban setting. MPs are in continual contact with each other both in their official lives and in their social activities. This tends to lead to a hothouse effect in political discourse. Political ambitions and political grievances are constantly in view. The enclosed nature of the political circle and its intensive level of interaction encourage competition, bargaining, and shifting coalitions.

Postindependence Elections: 1980, 1984, 1989

The Solomon Islands gained independence from Great Britain on 7 July 1978. In the first elections after independence, held in August 1980,[12] three political parties competed for power along with many independent candidates.

The United Party (UP), formed in 1979 in the face of impending national elections, was led by Peter Kenilorea, an ardent member of the South Seas Evangelical Church who had his base in Malaita. The UP espoused a moderate platform advocating "Solomonization" of the government and economy and professing a strong commitment to democracy. The UP won sixteen seats in Parliament, including nine of the eleven Malaita seats.

The National Democratic Party (NADEPA) had been formed early in electoral history in 1975 by Bart Ulufa'alu and had won nine seats in the 1976 elections to form the official opposition during the 1976-1980 period. In the 1980 elections the NADEPA advocated a position it termed "indigenism," which represented a more advanced stage of Melanesian communalism. It disparaged both class structures in society and socialist philosophy, indicating a commitment to the free enterprise system. NADEPA had strong links to the trade union movement in the Solomon Islands. In the 1980 election NADEPA suffered a serious decline to only two seats.

The People's Alliance Party (PAP), formed in 1980 on the basis of two forerunners, the Rural Alliance Party and the People's Progress Party, campaigned on the need for rural development and a decentralization of powers to the provinces. It identified itself closely with villagers, criticizing the government for being dominated by a centralizing bureaucracy under the continuing influence of foreigners. The PAP won twelve seats in the elections but lost two members to the UP in bargaining for a coalition government following the elections. Its most prominent members were David Kausimae, a veteran politician who lost in his campaign for a seat, and Solomon Mamaloni, the party's campaign manager, who won decisively in his home island of Makira.

A broad range of independents coalesced to form the Independent Parliamentary Group and distributed a limited-circulation manifesto that mirrored the policies advocated by the United Party. The Independent Group won ten seats in the elections. In the postelection bargaining, Kenilorea's United Party joined with the Independent Group to form a governing coalition with Kenilorea as prime minister. The new government had the support of twenty-six of the thirty-eight MPs. However, the newly formed government rested on shaky ground. Less than a year later, Solomon Mamaloni orchestrated a successful no-confidence motion resulting in a new coalition

government under the leadership of Mamaloni's PAP This coalition ruled until the 1984 national elections.

In the October 1984 elections, Mamaloni's PAP entered the fray positioned as the governing party having to defend its record. Once again the PAP faced its formidable foe, the United Party led by Peter Kenilorea, and the NADEPA, led by Bart Ulufa'alu, which fielded a higher number of candidates than in 1980. The NADEPA presented a simplified and straightforward "Ten Point Improvement Plan" to counter the detailed and broad-based platforms advanced by the PAP and the United Party. The UP not surprisingly, laid heavy emphasis on the need for a government that was elected democratically, not constructed by parliamentary maneuvering. Joining the fray was a new political formation, the Solomen Agu Fenua (SAS), created by young, well-educated, but disenchanted public servants. Of the 251 candidates for the 38 seats, approximately 130 were listed as independents. Voting was postponed in the East Kwaio electorate, because threats were made against returning officers (appointed by the Electoral Commission to supervise voting). In the results, Mamaloni's PAP held twelve seats, the United Party under Kenilorea won thirteen seats, SAS attained four seats, and NADEPA held one seat; the remaining seven seats went to independents. Kenilorea and the UP managed to build a governing coalition with the support of the independents and the SAS. In 1987 Kenilorea was forced to resign as prime minister in the throes of a scandal; power passed to Ezekiel Alebua, his deputy prime minister and the UP member from East Guadalcanal. Alebua headed the UP-led coalition and remained in power up to the 1989 national elections.

In the period leading to the 1989 elections, the Alebua government was shaken by a precipitous decline in the Solomon Islands economy.[13] Weakening commodity prices for key export crops and the devastating effects of Cyclone Namu, which pummeled the Guadalcanal plain and productive islands nearby, undermined economic performance and caused Alebua to be seen as a poor economic manager. The PAP was also weakened by the defection of Andrew Nori after a leadership struggle against Mamaloni. Nori formed the National Front for Progress Party (NFP), which sought to abolish the system of provincial government. The NADEPA, which had only minimal success in the 1980 and 1984 elections, also split, dividing into a Liberal Party led by Bart Ulufa'alu and a Labour Party led by the young and vigorous unionist Joses Tuhanuku. SAS was not a factor in the 1989 campaign.

The 1989 electoral contest featured five parties--PAP, UP, NFP, Liberal, and Labour--and, once again, a large number of independents. A total of 257 candidates stood for the 38 seats.[14] Of the 128,830 Solomon Islanders

officially registered to vote, 80,930 actually voted, a national turnout of 63 percent. Two candidates were declared elected unopposed, PAP leader Solomon Mamaloni in West Makira and Nathaniel Waena in Ulawa/Ugi. The party standings following the 1989 election, by number of seats won, were: PAP twenty-three; NFP, three; UP, four; Liberal Party, two; Labour Party, two; and independents, four.

The magnitude of the PAP victory was startling given the past history of party performance in the Solomon Islands. Of the twenty-three PAP seats, fifteen were won by committed PAP members and eight were won by independent candidates who were aligned with the party but more weakly than the core adherents. Mamaloni's cabinet was selected to include both types (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. Mamaloni's 1989 Cabinet

Name	Strength of Party Tie[a]	Portfolio	Island
S. Mamaloni	M	Prime Minister	Makira
D. Philip	I	Home Affairs & Deputy Prime Minister	Vonavona/Rendova
C. Abe	M	Finance	Marovo
Sir B. Devesi	M	Foreign Affairs	Guadalcanal
E. Andresen	I	Commerce	Isabel
N. Waena	I	Prov. Govt.	Ulawa/Ugi
A. Kemakeza	M	Police/ Justice	Savo/Russell
M. Maina	M	Transport	Temotu Pele
A. Laore	M	Education	Shortlands
B. Gale	M	Post	Guadalcanal
N. Supa	M	Health	Isabel
A. Paul	I	Natural Resources	Vella Lavella
A. Kapei	I	Agriculture	Malaita
A. Qurusu	M	Housing	Choiseul
V. Ngele	M	Tourism	Guadalcanal

Source: Field interviews, Honiara.

[a] M = strong; I = independent.

Mamaloni, Party Fractures, and a New Coalition: 1989-1993

PAP's strategy of party development emerged in July 1989 as a phased "Programme of Action" for the years 1989 to 1993, that is, coinciding with the governing party's electoral mandate. The action program laid bare the failures of the previous Alebua government to provide sound economic management. Beyond the highly partisan tone of the critique, the state of the Solomon Islands economy was portrayed in dismal terms:

> On leaving office in 1984 my Government had left behind a vibrant economy, a cohesive social and political system. However, the ensuing years [have] seen a deterioration in the affairs of our nation. . . . Whilst policies have been espoused for developing the agricultural and manufacturing sectors and diversifying the economy, the transformation of the Solomon Islands economy into a dynamic modern economy, on the threshold of the 21st century has not been realised. Inflation soared from 7 percent in 1984 to about 22 percent in 1988 with no signs of abatement. The increase in budget deficit from $12m in 1984 to over $70m in 1988, was staggering, to say the least. The foreign reserves declined from about four months of imports in 1984 to about two months in 1988. Foreign debt was $79m in 1984 but increased to about $280m in 1988, while debt servicing increased from $10.3m in 1984 to $18.7m in 1988. . . . [W]e have also inherited a defunct public service and a demoralised private sector. The situation is both fragile and potentially explosive and requires major surgery to put the country back on its feet.[15]

It was clear that the new Mamaloni government viewed its strong electoral victory in 1989 as the basis for a major restructuring of the nation's economy Indeed, the electoral mandate was seen to provide the springboard for economic reform: "The People of this country elected a new Government in March 1989. In so doing history has been created since it is this Nation's first one party government. The Peoples Alliance Party Government has provided you, the local and overseas business community[,] with unprecedented political stability."[16] The two core reforms sought by the PAP focused on economic renewal and a stronger commitment to decentralization along the lines of a federal system of government. With both the political mandate and an expressed political will to act, the next four years heralded major policy reforms.

However, by October 1990, the People's Alliance Party was in disarray with a no-confidence motion before the party's national executive, seeking Mamaloni's removal as PAP's parliamentary leader. Mamaloni was being challenged from within his own party rather than on the floor of Parliament. The bonds of party unity, loyalty, and discipline were fractured for all to see. In a dramatic and bold stroke, Mamaloni headed off the challenge by resigning from the party and, using his power as prime minister, forming a "Government of National Unity and Reconciliation."[17] Mamaloni displaced five members from his cabinet including the deputy prime minister, Danny Philip, to make room in the ministerial ranks to build a new governing coalition.

For political analysts, the central question that arises is what variables

help to explain the erosion of party consensus both in terms of policy commitments and party leadership. Is it possible to isolate the factors that worked to undermine party unity and discipline? Five key variables help to explain the erosion of support for Mamaloni's leadership of the PAP They are: (1) Mamaloni's failure to implement PAP policies owing to the entrenched power of the central public service, in particular the determined opposition to key elements of the reform program by the permanent secretaries (civil-service department heads); (2) the slow recovery of the Solomon Islands economy, a touchstone of the PAP's election promise of sound economic management in contrast to the Alebua years; (3) the tentative nature of Mamaloni's actual realization of structural adjustment measures advocated both by the PAP and the International Monetary Fund; (4) Mamaloni's aloof style of leadership whereby he relied on a small circle of influential Chinese advisers to the exclusion of party leaders, coupled with his tendency to intervene directly in areas of ministerial responsibility through the secretary of the Prime Minister's Office; and (5) two financial scandals, one over a foreign loan of US$250 million and the other over Arab financing estimated at SI$1 billion, both of which fell at the feet of the prime minister.

The Entrenched Power of the Public Service

The public-service establishment based in Honiara had grown from 6,564 posts at independence in 1978 to 8,605 positions by June 1992.[18] In a major public-service review conducted in 1987, public-service employment was found to constitute 34 percent of total employment, compared with 22 percent for Asian nations and 20 percent for industrial countries.[19] Even more significant, however, was the drain of the wages and salaries drawn by the public service on the government's recurrent budget. As the 1987 review commented:

> The proportion of the Government's budget consumed by salaries and wages is a matter of great concern. It has risen sharply in recent years and is currently at a level beyond 60%. This trend is unacceptable as too many resources are increasingly being tied up in maintaining existing establishments, leaving little scope for improving the priority health and education sectors, or for facilitating the development of the revenue generating areas of the economy Also, the increasing "pull" effect of high recurrent expenditures, as a result of the high staff costs element, is leading to a situation in the economy where the tax burden may inhibit the development of the industrial and commercial sectors.[20]

In 1989 the Alebua government faced a determined Solomon Islands Public Employees Union, which held the government to ransom for a wage increase of 17.5 percent. Despite pressures from the governor of the Solomon Islands Central Bank and from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Mamaloni government also found it exceedingly difficult to hold the line on wage increases. In 1991 the public service was awarded another substantial salary rise of 16.5 percent.[21]

The public service further exacted a toll on the Mamaloni government by resisting attempts to implement a full package of structural adjustment measures designed by the IMF to revitalize the economy. Permanent secretaries delayed and obfuscated on reform measures, reinforced in their position by the extended tenure they enjoyed as a result of a colonial inheritance. Only in August 1990 did Mamaloni move to overcome this bureaucratic resistance by retiring all permanent secretaries as of 25 September.[22] Moreover, ministers tended to defer to their senior public servants in the hopes of having development projects targeted for their island bases of political support.

The Slow Economic Recovery

In the 1970s the Solomon Islands economy benefited from relatively high prices for its primary exports. The 1980s however, saw these prices plummet and the economy slow accordingly. Copra, cocoa, and palm oil all experienced major declines in price returns.

The poor performance of the primary sector was replicated in formal wage employment. What is striking has been the slow rate of growth: from June 1982 to June 1992, employment increased from 20,811 to 26,842, a rise of little more than 6,000 jobs over a ten-year period.[23] Considering that there are more than 5,000 school-leavers each year, employment creation is a major political issue. Over the same ten-year period, wage employment became increasingly concentrated geographically: the number of jobs declined in all provinces save for Central (where the total increased by 184 positions) and Malaita (up by 319 positions) while employment in Honiara almost doubled, from 7,048 to 13,355 jobs. Such growth explains the rapid rates of urban drift to Honiara by young job seekers. The Central Bank characterized the general economic performance during the Mamaloni period as unchanged from previous administrations, essentially, a "running on the spot feeling."[24]

To be fair, though, projections on the likely prospects for major export commodities over the 1990s suggested a strong recovery both in terms of demand and price.[25] Unfortunately for the Mamaloni government, the Solomon Islands would not benefit substantially from the economic turnaround until after the 1993 national election.

Policy Reform in Government Restructuring and Reduction

A cornerstone of the PAP's action program was major economic restructuring to move government out of the economy and instead foster a resurgence of the private sector. The substance of these reforms and the arguments sustaining them appeared in a 1989 IMF report.[26] The IMF concerns included restraining fiscal expenditure, promoting the private sector and foreign investment, privatizing public-sector commercial activity, seeking economic diversification, emphasizing rural development and the role of provincial government, and restructuring financial institutions.

Mamaloni himself was cautious in embracing the full package of reforms. However, in 1991 he announced plans to eliminate some 900 positions from the total complement of 5,241 central-payroll staff.[27] For 1992 the public service and police were reduced by 17 percent to 4,313 posts, and in 1993 the public-service establishment was reduced another 7 percent. However, this trimming did not generate financial savings as the posts had been unfilled for some time.[28]

With respect to public corporations, the statutory bodies were expensive creatures: in 1989 they consumed 4 percent of GDP in resource transfers and in 1990, 5 percent. Their financial performance was weak, with aggregated net losses of between 2 and 4 percent of GDP between 1985 and 1990.[29] In light of this, the Mamaloni government moved to divest public holdings in several major companies. In 1990 the government withdrew from Solomons Rice Company, Limited, in which it had a 100 percent share and it sold its 100 percent share in National Fisheries Developments, Limited, to a Canadian firm, B.C. Packers. It also promoted the sale of the Mendana Hotel in Honiara to Japanese interests and liquidated its 20 percent share, and it privatized the Solomon Islands Philatelic Bureau. Near the end of its term, the Mamaloni government offered, although without success, Solomon Airlines for sale to private interests.

In terms of stimulating the rise of a vigorous private sector, high public-sector wage increases forced high wage settlements in the private sector. The average private-sector increases were 9.0 percent for 1989, 10.5 percent for 1990, and 9.5 percent for 1991. This escalating labor cost undermined competitiveness. In addition, interest rates averaged 16 to 20 percent during the 1990-1993 period. In part, the effect of high wage increases was to blame. So too, however, was Mamaloni's public borrowing from local rather than foreign sources. The Mamaloni government financed its deficits through a high rate of domestic borrowing--in 1990 the government borrowed SI$19.9 million; in 1991, SI$72.0 million; and, in 1992, SI$25.2 million.[30] This had the effect of the government's preempting of domestic credit for the private sector.[31]

Yet, despite an atmosphere of precarious economic stability, a large number of foreign-financed investment projects were under way in 1991, in plantation forestry, logging, fisheries, minerals, tourism, and manufacturing. The government moved to encourage foreign investment by easing the bureaucratic stages for approving foreign investment projects and simplifying the review process.[32] As the government's term went on, Mamaloni turned to the rapid escalation of the foreign-dominated and primarily Asian-controlled logging industry to provide much-needed government revenue. The export of uncut round logs to Japan and Taiwan became so expansive that Central Bank Governor Tony Hughes cautioned that the resource would be totally depleted by the year 2000 if the current rate of cutting continued unabated.[33]

The most dramatic endeavor was Mamaloni's commitment to strengthening provincial governments. Decentralization of power had been an integral part of the Solomon Islands decolonization process from the inherited pattern of overcentralized colonial rule.[34] Under Mamaloni's government provinces were given the power to negotiate directly with foreign governments for aid, subject to central government ratification, and the power to recruit directly their public-service staffs. Efforts were made to assure a sounder revenue base for the provinces to finance the wide range of powers that had devolved to them.[35] The expansion of provincial government can be seen in budget-data (Table 2).

This promotion of provincial government was carried a step further with the 1991 decision to create a separate province for Choiseul to take effect in 1992. A similar commitment was given to Rennell and Bellona, which together became a separate province in 1993. In a crucial sense, this represented a clear recognition that island identities remain central to the culture and values of Solomon Islanders.

TABLE 2. Provincial Government Budgets (000s of SI$)

	1988	1989	1990	1991
Revenue				
Central Govt. Grant	6,887	7,680	11,556	10,128
Other Revenue	2,130	3,185	26,528	10,296
Total Revenue	9,017	10,865	38,084	20,424
Expenditure				
Recurrent	8,352	11,221	19,962	19,140
Capital	340	796	15,464	4,828
Total	8,692	12,017	35,426	23,968
Surplus/(Deficit)	325	(1,152)	2,658	(3,543)

Source: Central Bank of Solomon Islands, *Annual Report 1991* (Honiara: Government Printing Works, 1992), 35.

Mamaloni's Leadership Style

Solomon Mamaloni has been a potent force in Solomon Islands politics for more than two decades as the acknowledged leader of the Makira people and as prime minister and opposition leader. In 1989 he agreed to be parliamentary leader of the PAP and its candidate for prime minister. His election was assured given the PAP's majority victory. Once in power Mamaloni quickly became distant from the party executive and its manifesto, preferring to rely on a close circle of local Chinese interests and advisers. Mamaloni let ministers indulge in their business and representational interests but frequently intervened in departmental assignments to direct both the ministers and their public officials. In the process, some ministers felt frustrated by being given the familiar instruction, ***"Boss i'm tok"*** (the boss has spoken), and held to account if they did not respect the prime minister's directives.[36] In his relations with cabinet ministers, Mamaloni was not "first among equals" so much as "first, period." The party executive rankled under Mamaloni's firm hand and became eager to call him to account.

The Loans Scandals

In May 1990 documents leaked to Leader of the Opposition Andrew Nori and the ***Solomon Star*** implicated the prime minister, the minister of finance, and an expatriate consultant in a questionable series of moves to secure private loans overseas without cabinet or parliamentary approval.[37] Nori led a no-confidence motion in Parliament after presenting a detailed number of charges against the prime minister and his minister of finance. The motion lost by twenty-three votes to thirteen with two abstentions. The integrity of the prime minister and the credibility of the government came under continued challenge during August and September 1990.[38] Edward Kingmele, PAP secretary-general, and several cabinet ministers felt that the scandal had permanently undermined PAP's credibility and support among Solomon Islanders. Mamaloni caught wind of a plot by the dissident ministers to challenge his leadership at a national party convention to be held in October 1990. It also became known that the party president, David Kausimae, had authorized a review of Mamaloni government actions since coming to power to demonstrate that the PAP manifesto had not been actively implemented.[39]

On October 17, just a day before the PAP convention, Mamaloni called on the governor-general at Government House to present contingency plans to recast his governing coalition. Mamaloni quit the party and resigned from being its parliamentary leader. He declared himself to be an independent MP and a nonpartisan prime minister. In his proposal to the governor-

general, he expressed an intent to form a new government based on principles of national unity, political reconciliation, national reconstruction, and policy redirection. To implement this premptive strike he revoked the appointments of five ministers and appointed replacements.

The new Solomon Islands Government of National Unity and Reconciliation (SIGNUR) coalition was composed of fifteen PAP MPs, three United Party MPs, one National Front for Progress MP, and three Liberal Party MPs, for a total of twenty-two. Mamaloni's calculations in constructing his new cabinet represented a masterpiece. To see this, we have to examine the ministers who were displaced by the prime minister in light of the affiliations outlined in Table 1, Mamaloni's 1989 cabinet. All five ousted ministers were PAP independents--D. Philip, E. Andresen, N. Waena, A. Paul, and A. Kapei--who were not deeply committed to the PAP or to Mamaloni. Mamaloni sought to build his new cabinet with his staunchest supporters and as broad a base of other-party participation as possible. On the first consideration, ten of the fifteen PAP-committed (M) elected MPs landed in the new cabinet. Mamaloni tried to incorporate the support of the United Party MPs by offering three cabinet portfolios. However, former Prime Minister Ezekiel Alebua refused a post and remained as an opposition UP member.") But Mamaloni was successful in garnering the support of three United Party MPs by bringing two into the new cabinet: former Prime Minister Sir Peter Kenilorea and Alfred Maetia, both MPs from Malaita Province. Mamaloni appointed Sam Alasia, an MP from Andrew Nori's National Front for Progress party, to his cabinet as well as George Luilamo, a member of the Liberal Party, who became minister of agriculture and lands. Thus Mamaloni was able to forge a four-party coalition with only the small Labour Party left out of the new government. More significant still, the new cabinet more carefully balanced regional representation--Malaita Province acquired four ministers, Guadalcanal three, Western three, and Isabel, Central, Makira, Temotu, and Honiara one each. The remaining sixteen MPs formed the opposition, composed of eight PAP adherents, one Labour Party MP, four independents, two NFP MPs, and one United Party MP. In essence, Mamaloni survived as prime minister but at the head of a weakened government until the May 1993 national elections.

1993 National Elections and 1994 Constitutional Crisis

In the 1993 national elections, Mamaloni's SIGNUR grouping was challenged by the PAP led by Edward Kingmele and David Kausimae, the United Party led by Ezekiel Alebua, the National Front for Progress led by Andrew Nori, a new party--the National Action Party of the Solomon

Islands (NAPSI)--led by Francis Saemala, the Labour Party led by Joses Tuhanuku, the small Liberal Party led by Bart Ulufa'alu, the Christian Action Party of Solomon Islands-- a new grouping of Christian candidates, and a range of independents, including Francis Billy Hilly of Western Province. This time the electoral battle was waged for forty-seven seats in a newly expanded Parliament. No party was able to capture a majority, as the following result by seats won shows: SIGNUR, twenty; PAP, nine; NAPSI, three; NFP, three; UP three; Labour Party, three; Christian Action Party, four; independents, five.

Although SIGNUR won twenty seats, it fell short of being able to command a majority to assure its continuance in office. Francis Saemala, supported by leaders of five other parties, managed to construct a coalition to challenge Mamaloni for power. The challengers formed the National Coalition Partnership (NCP), which selected its parliamentary leader, and candidate for the post of prime minister, through a series of run-off ballots among party leaders. Ezekiel Alebua, leader of the United Party, chaired the balloting process after deciding to abstain from the contest. On the fifth and final ballot, Francis Billy Hilly, the leader of the independent members of the coalition, defeated Francis Saemala, the NAPSI leader, by sixteen votes to ten. When the elected MPs met in Parliament to vote for a new prime minister, Solomon Mamaloni stood as the SIGNUR nominee against Hilly for the NCP. The bargaining for support between SIGNUR and the NCP continued right up to the moment when MPs entered the parliamentary chamber. Offers and counteroffers of ministerial assignments flew back and forth, and vigorous efforts were made by both camps to poach MPs from the other side. In a vote reminiscent of the 1992 Papua New Guinean contest where Paias Wingti defeated Rabbie Namaliu by fifty-five votes to fifty-four, Francis Billy Hilly edged out Mamaloni twenty-four to twenty-three.

The new Hilly government faced a difficult challenge, having won power by the slimmest of majorities. Sitting opposite the government was the SIGNUR grouping led by the shrewd tactician, Solomon Mamaloni. Although emphasizing its unified strength, the NCP was inherently fragile as the coalition represented a mosaic of parties and ambitious leaders. Saemala became deputy prime minister even though his NAPSI had won only three seats. Saemala's claim to the deputy prime minister's position was based on his initiative in forming the NCP and on his having survived to the last ballot for its leadership. Dennis Lulei, the parliamentary leader of the PAP who saw himself as the strongest candidate for prime minister before the NCP selection process began, was appointed the new minister for education in the NCP government. His portfolio could not be viewed as a senior cabinet appointment. In the result, Lulei was the first MP to depart from the NCP,

renouncing his party affiliation after criticism of his leadership from within the PAP Having left the party and indicating he would join the opposition forces, Lulei was dismissed from his ministerial post by Hilly.[41] Lulei claimed that his voice within the NCP coalition was ineffectual despite his having the largest bloc of MPs behind him.[42] Lulei's defection to the opposition was followed quickly by that of two other NCP ministers, Minister of Provincial Government Eric Seri and Minister of Culture, Sports, and Tourism Allan Paul, who in a stunning move crossed the floor to join Mamaloni's forces. This gave the opposition the support of twenty-six MPs to the government's twenty-one according to opposition calculations.[43]

As late as September 1994 the NCP still claimed to have its slim majority of twenty-four to twenty-three MPs.[44] Yet on September 7 the NCP government was shaken further by the resignation of its minister of finance and leader of the NFP, Andrew Nori, over allegations of financial misdealings.[45] His resignation was precipitated by the threat of MP Walter Folotalu, a government backbencher and member of the Christian Action Party, to leave the NCP if Nor-i did not do the right thing and resign.[46] Under stinging opposition attack, Hilly refused to call a meeting of Parliament, knowing that his government would face and fall in a vote of no-confidence.[47] This eventuality became ever more likely with a succession of devastating resignations from the NCP at the end of the month.[48]

The NCP's weakened position and its refusal to call a meeting of Parliament led the governor-general, Moses Pitakaka, to intervene; he called upon Hilly to either convene Parliament into session or resign as prime minister.[49] Hilly resisted both alternatives, stating that he would meet with Parliament on 18 November 1994 when his government's budget would be presented to the House. In the meantime, Hilly intended to function as prime minister and the NCP would govern. Pitakaka furthered the constitutional crisis by setting deadlines that Hilly had to meet to recall Parliament and failing that to resign as prime minister. Finally, as the standoff continued, Pitakaka, citing his constitutional powers as head of the executive, appointed Solomon Mamaloni as a caretaker prime minister.[50] Hilly and the NCP vociferously criticized the governor-general, with Hilly determinedly remaining as prime minister until the High Court could rule as to the constitutionality of the governor-general's actions. The High Court ruled on October 26 that Hilly remained the legal prime minister.[51] Hilly finally resigned as prime minister on October 31, remaining to head an interim government until a new prime minister could be chosen.

Nomination of candidates for a new prime minister was set for the next day, November 1, with Parliament scheduled to meet on November 7 to vote in a secret ballot. Hilly refused to stand as a candidate.[52] Sir Bad-

deley Devesi, a former governor-general and the former deputy prime minister under the SIGNUR government, agreed to stand as the NCP nominee against his former boss, Mamaloni. Mamaloni won the secret ballot among reassembled MPs by a vote of twenty-nine to eighteen.[53] In the shifting world of Solomon Islands politics, Mamaloni had overcome the campaign of his former opposition colleague, Devesi. Once again, Mamaloni faced the challenge of holding together his new party alignment, now called the Solomon Islands Reconciliation and Progressive Party (SIRPP), until the next election. The NCP has vowed that it will be back in power once again.[54]

Melanesian Leadership and Democratic Adaptation

The Solomon Islands model of unbounded politics illustrates how Melanesian political culture exacts a toll on the liberal-democratic parliamentary system of government. The inherited Westminster model assumes as a core precondition that MPs and aspirants will pursue their careers within the framework of commitment to a party. Party loyalty and party discipline are to structure political competition and debate. Selected cases of MPs switching parties can be accommodated, but generally the majority of politicians are to remain party adherents. The crossing-the-floor phenomenon is to be rare indeed. However, in Melanesia, represented here by the Solomon Islands, the political party is simply an electoral and strategic tool to be discarded at convenience. A number of big-men, all potential prime ministers, vie for power. They act like magnets, pulling into their circles other successful MPs, who themselves continually calculate their advantage in affiliating with a particular big-man. The lesser stars will shift allegiance quickly if a better bargain can be struck elsewhere. The Third World neopatrimonial model of individual dominance does not--indeed cannot--form, as leadership changes too quickly. Similarly, the patron-client model is not salient either, as allegiances shift too rapidly to sustain a fully integrated network of dependency, Yet the political process is highly competitive and sustains a democratic form that persists over time.

What, then, are the implications of the unbounded politics model? First, elected MPs have to cultivate their community bases of support very carefully, for longevity in Parliament is crucial to one's bargaining strength. Otherwise, an MP will face a rapid rise to prominence and an equally rapid fall. The turnover rate for incumbent MPs in national elections is usually very high. To aspire to leadership as a cabinet minister or potential prime ministerial candidate, an MP must adopt a leadership pattern close to that of the people of one's tribe, and become elevated and respected by influentials

in the community. Once elected, the MP who adopts an arrogant and self-serving posture will quickly come to grief. Having a firm community base of support, over time the MP will be required to advance constituency and island interests at the government center. This perspective is reinforced by the electoral system in which islands define constituency clusters. The parliamentarian will have to be able to work in a highly competitive political world where the focus is on evaluating individual behavior.

Second, long-term commitments are irrational for aspiring leaders unless limits are set by the individual on his/her ambition. Thus, this sustains calculations of short-term advantage. Like Devesi, one must be able to walk away from past allegiances.

Third, once one becomes a minister, the successful leader must seize all opportunities to advance one's interests: open businesses, dispense funds, control departmental decisions on development project allocations, and dispense patronage wisely to assure appointments of key associates ***(wantoks)*** and relatives. There is tremendous pressure on a minister to embrace the short-term perspective, to achieve results, to build and to distribute.

Fourth, and finally, inevitably a tension exists between the interests of ministers and the prime minister as against those of the permanent public servants. Tenured, anonymous, and loyal officials seek to protect their departments and the public interest and to remain true to their expertise and professional standards. On the other side, ministers and the prime minister seek to control and direct the public servants towards their own distributional, policy, and program objectives. Public servants attempt to resist ministerial dominance to assure policy and program continuity and control. Ministers complain that the public service is too conservative, too recalcitrant, blocking the democratic will. Public servants see ministers as too aggressive, too involved in departmental affairs, and lacking in policy expertise. The unbounded politics model promotes a continual struggle between political leaders and public officials. In a political arena where instability and strife are endemic, medium- and long-term policy and program planning become early victims to calculations of political advantage.

In sum, although the Melanesian cultural adaptation of the Westminster model remains committed to a highly competitive democratic process, unbounded politics fosters political instability.

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