

## THE WESTERN BREAKAWAY MOVEMENT IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

by Ralph Premdas, Jeff Steeves, and Peter Larmour

For many Third World countries independence is an occasion marked by united, nationwide jubilation: the colonial master is at last evicted, and the people now control their own political destiny. But for the Solomon Islands, as much uncertainty as joy attended the independence celebrations on 7 July 1978. The country's Western Province, with about 20 percent of the total population and 30 percent of the land area, boycotted the official festivities. On Independence Day, an attempt to raise the Solomon Islands national flag at the police station in the provincial headquarters of Gizo led to a confrontation between Western people and migrants from Malaita, the home island of the prime minister. Three plane-loads of police were flown in to reinforce the police station. The next day, members of the British royal family arrived, fresh from the independence celebrations in Honiara. In welcoming them, the president of the Western Council was careful to limit the symbolism:

Your visit here is being acknowledged by our people as strictly a case of the British royal family visiting the Western people.  
(*News Drum*, 21 July 1978 [hereafter *ND*])

Union Jacks still flew in Gizo. A Western flag had been produced, but it was not flown in place of the new national flag: Western Province was boycotting the Solomon Islands' independence, not declaring its own.

Western Council leaders were unhappy with the failure of the Independence Constitution to guarantee the devolution of powers to the provinces. The Western Council wanted a more federal political structure; it feared "internal colonialism" since its population constituted a minority in the country's multiethnic setting. Similar arguments were advanced by secessionists on Bougainville (renamed the North Solomons Province in 1976) which is adjacent to the Western Province but legally part of Papua New Guinea (Hannett 1975:286-93). The North Solomons, like the Western Province in the Solomon Islands, is in many ways the richest region of the state of which it is a part. Secessionist claims by leaders of the North

Solomons movement at times pointed to the ethnic unity between residents of North Solomons and the Western Province, alleging that indiscriminate juggling of colonial boundaries had separated the two parts (Hannett 1975).

The so-called breakaway movement of the West did not display the same overt passions, articulate arguments, and mass mobilization of the Bougainville secessionist movement (Premdas 1978). While some consultation occurred between leaders in the two movements (Hastings 1976), the activities of the Western movement were almost always undertaken by legal means. Some Westerners wanted more powers within the larger Solomon Islands state. Some, particularly New Georgia MPs, called for separation up until early 1978.

In this study we examine first “the West,” as a unit. Second, we identify and analyze the factors that led to the emergence of the breakaway struggle, and third, describe the organization of that movement. Finally, we set forth the government’s response to the demands and tactics of the movement. As far as possible, we will approach the materials by using guidelines derived from the patterns displayed by other breakaway movements around the world.

### **The West**

The West is one of seven provinces in the Solomon Islands. It comprises the island groups of Choiseul, Shortlands, and New Georgia, and has a land area of 8,660 square kilometers, making it the largest in the Solomon Islands. The islands are widely dispersed, making communications difficult. While the most western group, the Shortlands, is only a few kilometers from the North Solomons province of Papua New Guinea, it is 150 kilometers from Gizo and over 500 kilometers from Honiara, the national capital. The population of the West is about 40,000. Its economy is the most monetized in the Solomon Islands, providing a large number of employment opportunities in timber extraction, fishing, and plantation agriculture.<sup>1</sup>

The western extent of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate was not settled until 1899, when claims over the Shortland Islands, Choiseul, Santa Isabel, and Ontong Java were transferred from Germany to Britain (Scarr 1967). The physical presence of colonial government was limited beyond the establishment of district offices in Gizo by 1899, and at Faisi in the Shortland Islands in 1906.

The sense of “the west” as a unit, linked to Bougainville, and frequently contending with its own distant central government, has many of its

roots in missionary activity. The Methodists were the first mission in the Western Solomons in 1902. Apart from an excursion to Guadalcanal, they had little influence elsewhere in the protectorate. From their base on New Georgia, at Kokengolo near what is now Munda at the western end of the Roviana Lagoon, they evangelized the Shortland Islands, Choiseul, and then Bougainville.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1976 census half the population of the Western Province was reported to be Methodist: 19,500 were members of the United Church, which also has congregations in PNG, and 4,600 belonged to the Christian Fellowship Church, which had broken away from the Methodist mission in 1959-1961, and is now centered on northwest New Georgia.<sup>3</sup>

The spread of Methodism may account for some of the Western breakaway movement's separatism and identification with Bougainville. The movement's style of challenge to central authority also follows precedents set by the Reverend Goldie, who led the mission from 1902 until 1951, and became a member of the government's Advisory Council. Goldie was a political and commercial entrepreneur on behalf of the mission, and a relentless advocate of what he felt were the interests of Westerners against the arbitrary exercise of authority by central government officials (who called him, ironically, "King" Goldie).

Before 1972 the Western district was administered as a whole, but was divided into subunits for local court and local council purposes. British colonial policy, according to Healey (1966), was to create subdistrict courts and councils that "were regarded as preparatory to larger councils which were to be introduced when social change had broken down 'excessive parochialism'."

Events in Malaita related to Maasina Ruru in the late 1940s and early 1950s were to overtake this gradual approach (Keesing 1978). The leaders of Maasina Ruru established a federal council that extended its government throughout the island of Malaita. As a result, British administrators in 1953 used the Malaitan case as a precedent to integrate smaller local subdistrict units into larger operational entities throughout the protectorate.

By 1963 the Western district included five local councils: Shortlands, Roviana (covering southern New Georgia), Marovo (northern New Georgia), Choiseul, and Vella (at the western end of the New Georgia group). In 1972 these five councils agreed to amalgamate into a single Western Council (see Campbell 1974). The political significance of this voluntary unification has perhaps been overshadowed by the subsequent integration of the other island councils under the *Local Government Plan of Operations*, between 1973 and 1977.

The test for Western unity was Choiseul, for it had earlier had its own local council. As a large separate island, Choiseul could have expected its council to survive the amalgamations of 1974-1977, emerging as a separate province--an expectation that Shortlands could not have had. Early in 1978 the Western Council successfully asserted its claim to be sole representative of the West in its dealings with the Kausimae Committee which had been set up to make recommendations about the form of provincial government. Thus Choiseul's views could not be directly tested. The committee accepted this assertion of semi-sovereignty, and went to Gizo to meet the council in May 1978. Choiseul, however, wavered as its two MPs (Zoleveke and Dorovolomo) came out more or less equivocally for separate provincial status for Choiseul. The Kausimae Committee recommended no change in provincial boundaries, but gave the central government the right of review if there were "serious demands" for separation within a province.<sup>4</sup>

### **Factors Related to the Emergence of the Western Movement**

The Western breakaway movement emerged from a complex inter-relationship of "fundamental" and "facilitating" factors. The fundamental factors<sup>5</sup> are relatively permanent characteristics such as common color, language, values, territory, and history, which support the underlying cohesiveness of the movement. They may not be altogether as factual as those who invoke them would have us believe. For example, although Western nationalists may claim that Roviana is the lingua franca for Westerners, in fact it is as much a divisive influence as a unifying one because of the diversity of languages spoken. However, the significant point is less the objective fact than the belief among a movement's participants that they share a characteristic in common. The sense of being a single family with a common identity is a psychological phenomenon (see Connor 1973:1-21). Claims to shared characteristics perform the critical role of suffusing a population with a collective spirit. We may refer to this collective psychological condition as "nationalism," "ethnonationalism," or "subnationalism" (Connor 1973). Myths may be created and shared to aid the development of a common identity.

The facilitating factors refer to complaints such as an economic injustice. While the facilitating causes may be solved, the fundamental ones usually persist and may be used in the establishment of new movements in the future. Further, the facilitating factors tend to be rational items while the fundamental factors tend to be irrational. When a government seeks

to solve the former, it cannot delude itself that the latter can be eliminated simultaneously.<sup>6</sup> In the following discussion, we examine first the fundamental factors, then the facilitating ones.

### **The Fundamental Factors**

The fundamental factors discussed here are as follows: territory; language, ethnicity, and values; color; and history.

*Territory.* The boundaries of the Western Province, as mentioned, were demarcated by colonial and missionary practice, and not every sub-unit or island unit is comfortable within this territorial unit. Choiseul leaders have from time to time expressed the desire for a separate province. Nevertheless, a discrete and separate territory associated with the Western Province has emerged in the consciousness of most Westerners. In a submission to the Kausimae Committee their spokesman argued:

This means that the way our islands have been arranged by the creator has been such that the geographical locations have in numerous ways determined how far and with which island groupings the majority of our people have identified themselves and have a growing emotional attachment. Geography tends also to have demarcated the territorial extent of such attachment.<sup>7</sup>

Once attachment is developed around a territorial unit, the inhabitants define themselves partly in relation to that entity (see Enloe 1975 and Barth 1969). Hence, a “Westerner” is associated with a specific block of land, with claims to it to the exclusion of other parcels of territory associated with other groups. “Territory” and “land” are interrelated concepts. Hence, any unpermitted intrusion or alienation is an assault on the entire West. We take up the issues and complaints related to land later. Suffice it to note here that territory and land are fundamental characteristics of all breakaway movements. Their pivotal place in the consciousness of Westerners united them against migrants, resettlement schemes; and government land allocated for large projects in their midst.

*Language, Common Ethnicity, and Values.* Language, common ethnicity, and values are fundamental traits that help forge a movement such as that in the West (see Emerson 1964). Although there are eighteen dialects and five main languages, Roviana, the vernacular used by the Methodist church, is claimed as the lingua franca among Westerners. Pidgin may be used to unify all Solomon Islanders, but Roviana is the language that separates Westerners from non-Westerners.

The Western Submission (1975:1) noted how a sense of common ethnicity arose from contact with other people:

When the people of the Solomons were still uneducated and restricted in travelling from place to place, the problems of ethnic pride, identity and different value systems were not as prized as they are today. The colonial government and the national government think that people from different islands are uniting, but the people are not the same people; they are not homogeneous. . . . This is a dynamic reality because it involves human feeling, wantok system, ethnic pride and values.

Arguments may be advanced to show that Westerners are either divided into cultural and linguistic subunits or united by a common Melanesian value system despite their regional variations. In either case, this does not negate the *belief* among Westerners that they are different.

*Color.* The color of the typical Westerner is jet black. Most other Solomon Islanders are of a lighter pigmentation. This fact unites Westerners as a separate group, in part because their blackness may be a source of ridicule from other Solomon Islanders. In turn, Westerners may regard other Solomon Islanders with similar racist ridicule. The color factor contributes to a process of in.-group solidarity and out-group stereotyping. The black pigmentation is a ready symbolic instigator of real and imagined interests separate from those of other groups. For example, in a speech in August 1977 calling for Western separation, MP Geoffrey Beti asked rhetorically:

Is it because we are black as compared to other people in Solomon Islands that the government does not want to meet our wishes?  
(ND, 28 August 1977)

It took the publication of the infamous "Ode to the West Wind" poem in 1978 to bring dramatically to the surface the anti-Western prejudices imputed to non-Westerners. Parts of this poem refer directly to color in a racist and offensive way:

Ode to the West wind, you carry in  
Your bowels the Westerners  
Black and ugly, proud and lazy  
Manpower they have none.  
(ND, 9 June 1978)

The poem was translated into Roviana and other Western languages by the leaders of the movement and was widely distributed throughout the West. The incident created a national scandal, but underscored the point that color prejudice was harbored by other Solomon Islanders and helped to justify the separatist claims of the West.

*History.* The Solomon Islands, as a country and a state in the international system, is a European artifact created by the needs of colonialism and decolonization. The 'West, as a separate and distinct political subunit, is also a creation of colonial and mission history. It benefitted first and most from the introduction of European educational, health, and economic facilities. The West is now one of the more thoroughly monetized and economically developed regions in the Solomon Islands. Westerners take pride in their preeminence, whether strictly factual or not. However, in an independent Solomon Islands, they would be a minority with only eight of the thirty-eight seats in Parliament. A central government dominated by non-Westerners, especially Malaitans, could direct revenue from the West to develop less advantaged parts of the nation.

The threatened loss of status in the economic sphere was a fundamental cause of the West's demand for autonomy:

Without a form of government which could create a united nation through respecting the regional differences, the effects of the present government structures, powers, functions could only lead to the overrunning of the numerically weaker regions by the numerically stronger regions.

(Western Submission 1975:3)

The Submission called for "proper constitutional guarantees for the numerically weak" (1975:2). The fear of "internal colonialism," the domination of one group by another, was interwoven with the fear that the West would be eclipsed as the most economically developed region.

### **The Facilitating Factors**

The facilitating factors will be discussed in the following order: political-administrative demands, land, migration, and revenue. A fifth item, "a foreign factor," is termed facilitating since it might have encouraged, the claims of Westerners.

*Political and Administrative Demands.* The Western Council did not demand a separate sovereign nation although particular Western MPs expressed such a desire.<sup>8</sup> Certainly if the council's demands had met a com-

pletely negative response, then the road to nationhood would have been open. The timing of their demands was also important. Constitutional changes were being proposed for a new independent country and pressures for independence were coming as much from the British as from local leaders. Lest internal colonialism be institutionalized in the fundamental laws, the threatened units had to agitate without delay for special protection. It would have been futile for the West to try to change the constitution after independence. In the words of the Western Council, "the establishment of a state government for the West should not be allowed to come after independence" (Western Submission 1975:2), but should be set up before independence. Unable to gain the votes needed to change the constitution after independence, the West could always try to secede. But it could do this more legitimately before independence, particularly if it could persuade Britain to accept its claims, as Tuvalu did in 1974-1975. The West's bargaining power with Britain was increased by the fact that the pressure for independence was more a push from Britain, than a pull from the Solomon Islands. There was certainly a fear within the Solomon Islands' government that Britain might do anything to get out. The Western movement therefore was caught in a triangular relationship with the Kenilorea government and the retiring colonial government.

The West stated that it wanted a politico-administrative arrangement that would extend to it maximum autonomy and permanent safeguards for its interests. It pointed to the diversity of the land, the people, and their customs as a basis for its claims. It argued that a single centralized apparatus would not adequately recognize the diversity:

The Solomon Islands' structure and principles of government should, where possible, reflect the different cultures, respect the ethnic divergencies, take into account the geo-political factors, and above all, answer the wishes of the people.

(Western Submission 1975:3)

The West argued that centralizing forces were stifling local initiative. Local governments were merely carrying out decisions made at the center:

The present [i.e., 1975] local government councils act only as local coordinators, overseers and agents of the central government's plans and policies.

(Western Submission 1975:2)



The Westerners wanted a system of government that returned initiative to them for local development. They wanted a division of powers entrenched in a constitution. They were aware of their minority status in relation to the rest of the nation. When maximum local powers were assigned to them, they wanted to ensure that the concession could not easily be revoked at the convenience of the central government. In effect, they demanded a federal arrangement in which separate spheres of exclusive powers would be created. The coordinate units in this arrangement would not be permitted to overstep their powers, while simultaneously each would be in no doubt about its realm of responsibility. The national or federal government would relate not to subordinate regional units, but to coequal units called provinces and sometimes states:

It is envisaged that the desired structure of provincial government for the West would be one which follows, with drastic modifications, Federal principles and system of government. . . . It is required that when the provincial government system is established, the national constitution should define the areas of responsibilities, functions and powers which would regulate and justify the existence and activities of the central and provincial governments,, and in so doing, the central government and the provincial governments should be self-ruling coordinate bodies rather than subordinate to each other as is the case under the present system of government.

(Western Submission 1975:4)

The allocation of such sweeping spheres of protected powers free from interference by the national government was bound to create suspicions about the ultimate intentions of the Westerners. Such powers, if extended, might be but one short step to full autonomy and independence. What was equally alarming was the encouragement such proposals might give to other groups in the Solomon Islands. The accommodation of diversity in a federal arrangement could drive the various linguistic and island groups further apart. The Western movement, however, posited that a system of government that accommodated legitimate regional differences would no doubt cultivate provincial or state subnationalism, but that this was a first indispensable step in nurturing a sense of nationalism for the larger federal unit:

Unity is indeed desirable, but mutual unity and respect can only be grown, not imposed. There are cases where the organic

growth of unity has emerged. Take the formation of the Western Council. The move of the different local government councils in the Western District to form the Western Council was initiated by local leaders with government encouragement. These leaders, through the increased awareness of their people in knowing that the Western district is in fact for them all and not for the Choiseul man or Morovo man only, came to realize that having one council would be better than having several. So the process of unity gradually grew. Many other factors also contributed to the Western Council, but *the process of unity and identity has spread from a tribe to a village, to a locality, to a whole island, to a district. A further process of growth should bring us state and national unity.*

(Western Submission 1975:3; emphasis added)

This theory of the development of unity was, of course, that proposed by the colonial government in the 1940s and overtaken by Maasina Ruru, as pointed out earlier. In summary, then, the politico-administrative system that the West prescribed sought to solve problems relating to regional diversity, majority domination, and the stifling of local initiative. By having full control over the legislative, executive, and judicial arms of government related to all internal issues, they hoped to give their loyalty to the larger nation.

*Land.* Land in subsistence societies is an integral part of a community's social system. The identity of a people is as much linked to the land as to the language. Land as a concept may include resources on and under it, such as timber and minerals. In the Western Province, complaints had for many years been raised about the arbitrary alienation of land and its resources for plantations, resettlement schemes, timber, and other projects. The sea and seabed as an extension of land also raised controversy. The Western Provincial Assembly was already involved in licensing bait fishing and mangrove timber extraction (used for smoking fish) with Solomon Taiyo, the Japanese joint-venture fishing company based in Noro, New Georgia.

There are two kinds of land tenure systems in the Solomon Islands--customary and statutory (Larmour 1979). There are many different customary systems in the Western Province, and about 15 percent of the land is held under the statutory system, that is, "alienated." This has occurred in various ways, particularly by (a) sales to Europeans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, (b) government declarations of

“wasteland” between 1902 and 1914, and (c) sales and leases to the government, particularly for forestry purposes in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

During the early 1970s plantation land alienated by sale to Europeans was gradually being returned to customary ownership through a plantation purchase program which involved government loans and technical assistance to groups buying back their land. This took the pressure off several severely affected areas, particularly Vella. However, the category referred to as “wasteland” remained an issue. The area of land alienated under the wasteland declarations had been reduced in the 1920s but the problem remained highly contentious, particularly on Kolombangara where two thirds of the island was alienated in this way.

In 1977 the Parliament passed an act converting the remaining 60,000 hectares (ha) of land owned by non-Solomon Islanders into leases from the national government. While asserting national sovereignty, this act undermined provincial autonomy. Government by then owned 1,073 ha of land in the Western Province, including land alienated under wasteland declarations, or about 12 percent of all land in the province. This was a higher percentage than in any other province except Central and Eastern Islands (and Honiara). In terms of area, it was three times larger than the next province, Isabel. Of the 1,073 ha of government land in Western Province, 828 ha were held for forestry use and another 43 ha for mining purposes. The Western provincial government itself owned hardly any land. The capital, Gizo, was on central government land, and the province only had title to land for some public services like airports. Acquisition of land remained a central government responsibility until a 1979 private member’s bill in Parliament provided for provinces to acquire land.

Particular areas of conflict between the central and Western provincial governments on land issues included:

(a) Kolombangara, a problem area since the early part of the century, when Western people had been successful in rolling back at least some of the area declared as wasteland. Opposition to the wasteland declarations, expressed to the Phillips Land Commission in the 1920s, was an important precedent for Western political consciousness as the different landowner groups presented themselves as “one people” against the government (Heath 1979:202-7). Kolombangara re-emerged as an issue in the late 1960s when Levers began to cut timber on land they had never used before, and from the mid-1970s on when government timber replanting began.<sup>8</sup>

(b) North New Georgia, where the government had been trying unsuccessfully since the early 1970s to lease land for timber cutting. Then, in-

cidentally, the Christian Fellowship Church was opposed to the government.<sup>9</sup>

(c) The Shortlands, where timber leases and sales of land were successfully negotiated in the late 1960s, but where pressure had since emerged for renegotiation.

(d) Resettlement schemes, where government land was subdivided on lease for settlement by individual Solomon Islanders. By the mid-1970s the Western provincial government had the power to recommend allocation of this land and could give preference to Westerners.

(e) The Gilbertese settlements at Wagina and in Gizo where the government granted freehold rights to Gilbertese resettled between 1955 and 1971 (Bobai 1979). While saying they were not hostile to the Gilbertese as such, Western leaders resented the fact that their province took all the burden of Gilbertese resettlement.

(f) Land still owned by expatriates or mixed-race planters, a declining number since the establishment of the plantation purchase program, but an issue when the government continued to protect the rights of Solomon Islanders who had bought alienated land (especially if they were not the true customary owners), or of the mixed-race descendants of planters.

(g) Management of urban land in Gizo that was owned by the central government but allocated by the province. This divided responsibility led to confusion and delay as cases were referred back to Honiara.

*Migration.* Twelve percent of the population of the Western Province was not born there, the largest non-Western grouping being 1,686 people from Malaita. Guadalcanal and Central Islands both had higher percentages of inward migration (19 percent and 23 percent). Nineteen percent of the total employment in the country was in the Western Province, the largest percentage after Honiara (34 percent). Yet in spite of the migration toward the West, 69 percent of the men employed in the Western Province were born there, a higher proportion than in any other province.<sup>11</sup>

Linked with the land issue is the question of free movement. The Constitution protects the right of movement in s.14. Yet migration was felt to have led to a dramatic rise in crime in many communities: to illegal occupation of traditional land and the creation of squatter settlements around the towns; to competition for scarce local jobs; and to ugly rivalries for women. It was argued that the social and cultural impact of uncontrolled migration could offset the abstract or economic gains attached to the fundamental right of freedom of movement. That, implicitly, was the case submitted by the Western and Guadalcanal Provinces.

More people migrated into the Western Province than left it. But the issue was complicated by the fact that a particular regional group, Malaitans, was the target of attempts to limit or control migration. To them were attributed the propensity to crime, arrogance, squatting, job rivalry, and fights for women and, through marriage, land acquisition. Malaita Province is more densely populated than other provinces, and parts of the province have never accepted the Christian church, thereby providing a religious rationalization for hostility toward their alleged antisocial behavior. At the same time, Malaitans are reputed to be dynamic and hard workers. They have tended to displace local residents in the competition for jobs, not least because they do not have access to land.

Western fears and prejudices were expressed particularly toward Malaitans for perhaps two related reasons. Malaitans were living within the West, and they also came from the largest province within the Solomon Islands. So the Malaitan presence in the Western Province both symbolized and aggravated Western fears of political and economic domination within the wider national unit.

*Revenue.* When in August 1977 the Honorable Geoffrey Beti, member for Roviana and North New Georgia, moved in the Legislative Assembly that the central government “amicably agree” to the West becoming a separate nation, he argued that Western development was being neglected, although the district contributed most to the national economy (*ND*, 28 Aug. 1977). The Finance Minister successfully appealed to him to withdraw the motion before it came to a vote.

Measuring the West’s contribution to the national economy depends on judgments about the relative importance of land, labor, and capital in production. These judgments are by no means settled in the Solomon Islands and are reflected in still unresolved debates about “benefit sharing” with landowners and investors in capital projects, expressed in arguments about appropriate rents. The Solomon Islands is moving away from colonial cheap land policies, but the new principles are still not settled and will, of course, depend much on bargaining with big companies. In relation to Western secession, the issue is to what extent the West’s “contribution” to national revenue is produced by Western land, or by migrant labor from other parts of the country, particularly Malaita. Similarly, even more difficult questions of principle arise over control of marine resources, another part of the West’s case.

Quantifying neglect and the contribution of particular units in a territorial economy is difficult both in practice and principle. Statistics may not be kept at district level and some items of revenue and expenditure may either be particularly “lumpy” or difficult to evaluate except on a per capita basis. Figures produced in the mid-1970s, when colonial “ne-

glect" (shared by all provinces) was to some extent being remedied, do not necessarily satisfy leaders articulating a more historical sense of injustice. Even if the relevant figures can be produced, it is unclear with what they should be compared. Western leaders consistently rejected population as a criterion for comparison, and a movement intent on separation is unlikely to be persuaded by arguments that some parts of the country are in the same position or, indeed, worse off.

Statistics never played a big part in Western arguments, no doubt because Western leaders felt that this was a style of argument that central bureaucrats would always win. There was never any Western attempt to calculate statistically their contribution to national production. The figures produced for the Kausimae Committee certainly do not show the West at any great disadvantage in relation to its population, though they show that it produced a disproportionate amount of some commodities (e.g., timber, but not palm oil or rice). It also did relatively well in terms of services, except perhaps roads.<sup>12</sup>

#### Production in the Western Province (as % of national)

Product	%	Date	Comment
Cattle	66%	1976	based on number of cattle
Copra	26%	1977	36% of small holder production
Cocoa	29%	1977	
Timber	33%	approx	all from Levers Pacific Timbers
Palm oil	0		Guadalcanal only
Rice	0		Guadalcanal only
Minerals	0		only large prospect was on Choiseul
Fish			difficult to attribute: one of two Taivo bases is in Western Province

#### Government Services in the Western Province (as % of national)

Service	%	Date	Comment
Primary schools	31%	1977	
Secondary schools	14%	1977	2 of 14
Clinics	25%	1976	
Hospitals	33%	1977	2 of 6
Public road mileage	14%	1979	but 44% if Levers logging roads are included

#### Attribution of Government Revenue and Expenditures (1979 estimates)

Revenue from West	%	Expenditures to West	%
Taxes and Duties		Transfers and Expenditures	
Income tax	23%	Direct recurrent transfer to Provincial Government	23%
Import and excise	17%	Other government recurrent expenditure	17%
Export duties	36%	Capital transfer to Provincial Government	34%
Other	14%	Other government capital expenditure	n a

The estimates of government revenue and expenditure come from the Finance submission to the Kausimae Committee which noted:

- The relative importance of Honiara to government revenue.
- The interdependence of provinces. For example, while Malaita yielded only 9.9 percent of revenues from a population of 30.5 percent, Malaita people in the rest of the Solomons were paying taxes elsewhere.
- The “lumpiness” of sources of revenue. Over half of Western’s contribution to export duties (36 percent) came from one company (Levers Pacific Timbers), employing people from all over the Solomons. If the company moved, the West would score only 22 percent.
- The figures for government expenditure other than through provincial government could only be computed on a per capita basis. Capital expenditures other than through provincial budgets were also particularly “lumpy.”

Western’s position in the national economy was similar to that of Guadalcanal and Central Islands provinces. Each produced a disproportionate amount of export revenue from a few big projects on alienated land, and each employed people largely from other provinces, particularly Malaita.

These figures provide only a snapshot image of the late 1970s; they do not indicate the rapid changes taking place in the economy, and the West’s position in it. The movement’s concerns originated in the early 1970s and reflect a sense of both the past and the future--looking backward to the loss of preeminence in the more static economy of the 1960s, and forward to concerns about the future, even if absolute prosperity increased. Thus rapid economic change, whatever its outcome, may be as important a source of unease as the province’s particular place in the economy at any one time. This unease might also be increased by the “lumpiness” of sources of revenue. The establishment or closure of one or two projects could greatly change a particular province’s relative and absolute position, but this may be outside provincial control.

Rapid changes took place around independence, the period of the Western movement’s greatest leverage. In the mid-1970s, the large projects set up at the start of the sixth development plan<sup>13</sup> were gearing up at the same time that independence had given the Solomon Islands access both to new sources of aid funds, and the provisions of the “financial settlement” with the United Kingdom.<sup>14</sup> Commodity prices (particularly copra following the first oil crisis) were also high in the mid-1970s. This

economic buoyancy gave the central government the capacity to buy off secessionist pressure, but simultaneously provided an economic incentive to secede for a copra-rich province such as the West. The Western movement might have been much more bitter in a stagnant economy. Economic growth tends to soften conflicts over redistribution.

*Population.* Rather than argue about figures, the Western movement took issue with the principle of comparison and attribution, particularly the use of population as a criterion. The West, in fact, was the second largest province in terms of population. The population argument was articulated particularly in relation to central grants to councils, later called provinces. For example, Jerry Buare's July 1978 radio interview listed the population principle with the West's "six points" (control of land, finance, internal migration, legislation, staff, and natural resources), and its claim for revenue sharing, as the sources of Western grievance (*ND*, 28 July 1978).

*Population in Allocating Grants.* Between 1975-1977, central government grants to councils for recurrent expenditure were allocated according to the cost of running services transferred to the councils, and the amount of revenue the councils had raised the year before.<sup>15</sup> The services grant caused friction between ministries and councils over whether the grant covered actual costs, particularly if the council wanted to improve on often poor central government performance.

The allocation of a relatively untied capital grant called General Development Assistance (GDA) provided the opportunity for discontent about distribution. The guidelines used to divide up the total available were a mixture of relative population and relative land area. These were objective variables and easily quantified, but having been made explicit, their appropriateness became a matter of political debate. Some of the heat was taken out of the argument with the increase of the absolute level of grants to each council as services were transferred, as the size of the national budget increased, and as a greater percentage of the budget was spent through councils. Growth made redistribution easier.

Population became such a contentious criterion that the formula proposed by the Kausimae Committee recommended that it be dropped as a criterion for the distribution of funds between provinces. However, it crept back in as "manpower" to appease Malaita representatives.<sup>16</sup> The committee's hostility to population was not simply an alliance against the most populous province, but an attempt to inject a dynamic and developmental principle into the allocation process. The principles it proposed were a mixture of rewards for enterprise, and compensation for its ill effects, or lack of resource endowment. Population as such was felt to be too static.



The preference of Western representatives for a “production” rather than “consumption” principle had two elements: a straightforward regional preference for a criterion that it felt would be to its advantage; and a more forward-looking attempt to stimulate production in the province, particularly by the release of land. Western’s representatives acknowledged that the province’s land resources were relatively underused (4.5 percent relative to other provinces, the lowest), and wanted to put pressure on landowners to release more. Suppression of population as a factor appealed also to other members of the committee on these self-reliant grounds. In any event, the central government moved ahead of the Kausimae Committee to meet Western Province’s argument about its contribution to national revenue. By 1977 the *Plan of Operations* was almost complete. The Minister of Finance announced in February 1978, in the midst of the Western crisis, that he was changing the principles on which grants were allocated to provinces, as well as increasing the amounts (*ND* 7 April 1980). The service grant remained but was frozen at its 1977 level. The grant that had been related to local revenue raised, and the additional funds made available were reorganized and reallocated according to principles of derivation—that is, from where the central government obtained the revenue that paid for the grants. By this device, 90 percent of vehicle licensing and drivers’ revenues, 5 percent of import and direct tax revenues, and 10 percent of estimated export duties would be returned to the provinces in which they were collected.

Population did not appear directly in these principles; it was brought into operation as a means for calculating the division of national revenues from fish exports that were to be divided between provinces. But population had not, in fact, previously appeared in the principles for recurrent grant allocation, and it remained in the formula for allocation of GDA. Nevertheless, the central government had now represented its principles of allocation in derivation terms much more thoroughly than, for example, Papua New Guinea produced to meet Bougainville’s demands. And it softened any consequent redistribution by general increases for all provinces.

The principles were decided by the Ministry of Home Affairs within global sums set by the Ministry of Finance. The Kausimae Committee recommended that allocation be taken out of the hands of officials and government ministers. Further, the principles must be fixed and be relatively permanent, a move in the direction of institutions like Papua New Guinea’s National Fiscal Commission, or the French Territories’ *Fonds Intercommunal de Perequation*.<sup>17</sup> The outcome of this reorganization, redescription, and increase in recurrent grants is shown in Table 14.1.<sup>18</sup>

**TABLE 14.1: Changes in Grants 1977-1978**

<b>Council</b>	<b>1977 grant (\$)</b>	<b>% total</b>	<b>1978 grant</b>	<b>% total</b>	<b>% increase 1977-1978</b>
Western	308	24	400	24	30
Eastern Islands	67	5	92	5	36
Guadalcanal	121	10	240	14	78
Honiara Town	90	7	157	9	74
Makira/Ulawa	141	11	173	10	22
Malaita	384	30	412	24	7
Isabel	70	6	103	6	46
Central Islands	86	7	124	7	44
Total					

The new derivation principles left the West with almost exactly the share it had before (in fact, a slight drop from 24.31 percent to 23.56 percent), though its grants increased 30 percent. Five other councils did better in percentage increase terms.

*Foreign Models.* By “the foreign factor” we mean the direct or indirect role that a foreign country or its citizens might have played in either instigating or sustaining the Western movement. Breakaway movements tend to be “inviting waters in which foreign powers fish” (Duchacek 1974:68). The proximity of Bougainville to the West has had at least a demonstration effect. Bougainville is geographically and culturally related to the West, particularly the Shortland Islands. Leo Hannett was the ideological guide of the Bougainville secessionist attempt (see Hannett 1975). In the late 1960s, when Hannett was a student at the University of Papua New Guinea, several Solomon Islands students were there also, and sympathized with Hannett’s position on Bougainville. Indeed, the Mungkas Society, consisting of Bougainville students, regarded the Western Solomon Islands students at UPNG as part of their group. One observer suggestively noted the frequent visits of Father John Momis to Honiara in 1975 (Hastings 1976).

In the early 1970s both Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands were moving rapidly toward independence. Both countries encountered claims for greater regional or provincial autonomy, and the claimants enunciated similar arguments for their cause. Indeed, the similarities and connections between the two cases are striking. Papua New Guinea gained independence first. This was followed by the dissolution of the Bougainville provincial government, and a dramatic confrontation with the central government. The Solomon Islands was an observer to these events, although its interest was recognized in a minor provision of the Bougainville Agreement requiring consultation with the Solomon Islands’ chief minister about the new name for the North Solomons Province.<sup>19</sup>

The Bougainville secessionist leaders clearly stated that following their independence, should they succeed, they expected to amalgamate with part of the Western Province. Hannett was insistent on rectifying what he regarded as an arbitrary separation of the geographical and cultural unity of the Solomon Islands.

In a slip of the tongue, Australia's Prime Minister Whitlam had publicly suggested that Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands unite as a single independent country (Griffin 1973:319). Further, the departing British government seems to have wanted to regard the Solomon Islands as part of Australia's regional responsibility. While these visions differ from Hannett's, the idea that new entities might be created at independence was an obvious encouragement to the secessionists, as was demonstrated by British acquiescence in Tuvalu's separation from the Gilbert and Ellice Islands by referendum in 1974.

### **Organization of the Movement**

The movement was centered at the Western Council headquarters in Gizo. The Western Submission, discussed above and presented to the Kenilorea government and the Kausimae Committee in May 1980, was originally circulated under the signature of the president of the Western Council in August 1975. Again in 1978, it was the council that provided the movement's focus and minimum "six-point" program. After a long discussion, with six of the West's eight members of the Legislative Assembly present, the council agreed on a motion in early 1978.

The Solomon Islands Government should give serious consideration in the forthcoming Legislative Assembly meeting to granting State Government to the Western Solomons with full control over finance, natural resources, internal migration, land, legislation and administration *before Independence*, and if this is not granted, the Western Solomons will not be participating in the national Independence celebrations, and may possibly declare eventual unilateral independence.

(Western Council minutes 20/78; emphasis added)

The infrastructure of the council--offices, vehicles, stationery, and staff--provided a means through which the movement could be articulated and organized. The Western Council also provided the major source of direction and leadership. Early in 1978 a political committee was established to coordinate council, national, parliamentary, and agitational

activities. While no Western political party was formed at the national level, one of the movement's leaders, John Talasasa, identified with the parliamentary opposition, while the six Western MPs outside the cabinet acted together to walk out of the Legislative Assembly in April 1978 (*ND*, 14 April 1978). A showdown with the central government would probably have led to the official dissolution or suspension of the council, as had occurred on Bougainville.

Support for the movement is hard to prove but seems not to be in doubt. Western MPs called for a referendum on separation, but the Western Council would not allow the Kausimae Committee to tour the region. The Western people seemed to support the drive to have their list of grievances met before independence. No serious official charge was ever made that the movement had only minority support. An effort was made to raise funds among the village people, but the main resources in support of the movement were the council facilities.

The leadership of the movement was collective, if sometimes divided. No single leader stood above the others for any length of time. For example, John Talasasa was influential during late 1977 and early 1978, particularly with an inflammatory speech made at Munda on 26 January 1978. Talasasa had become Member of the Legislative Assembly for Vonavona, Rendova, and Tetepari in a by-election following the death of his brother, Francis Aqoroau, late in 1978. Talasasa called for "break-away," but by February 1978 he was reported to have moved behind the Western Council in its demand for state government "because it would be unwise to go against each other for the sake of personality and politics" (*ND*, 17 Feb. 1978).

The collective nature of the leadership was partly dictated by the internal diversity of the Western Province. Different islands and communities had their own recognized leaders and there were clear differences of style and emphasis between Choiseul, New Georgia, and the Shortlands. Even the Western Council president, Jerry Buare, lacked grassroots support outside his own constituency. He was elected by the councillors who, in turn, were individually elected from separate council electorates. National parliamentarians from the West were also similarly elected from wider constituencies with loyalty to specific leaders. No leader commanded the loyalty of the West as a whole. Collective leadership included not only national parliamentarians and council leaders, but chiefs and various community and opinion leaders throughout the Western Province. In this dispersion of leadership, the grassroots strength of the movement was affirmed. But a collective leadership with so many centers--national, council, island, village, community, etc.--had the inherent problem of main-

taining unity and coordination. Activist leadership tended to come from the Shortlands, particularly from Peter Salaka with his experience of street politics. But not all parts of the leadership were similarly activist or highly committed. There were also so-called moderates and alleged fence-sitters. It was felt that the West's parliamentary representatives failed to utilize that forum effectively. Overall, one of the weaker aspects of the movement was its leadership.

A number of voluntary associations supported the demands of the West. These included the Christian Fellowship Church (which financed an Australian lawyer to draft the West's proposed constitutional amendments) and the Kolombangara Association. The Christian Fellowship Church, in particular, as an indigenous social and religious movement that had broken with the Methodist church in 1961, provided a model for successful separatist activities as well as a source of funds. The opposition party, NADEPA, supported the movement, at least to the extent of criticizing the government's handling of it. NADEPA's platform called for a federal system of government. In addition, other local governments such as Guadalcanal Council supported the movement's demands for substantial devolution of powers.

The Prunsvick Association became a focus for the movement during 1978. It originated in a football club, and its name was formed by taking the first letters of the names of Western island groups. Prunsvick opened an office in Gizo early in 1978 and published one issue of a newsletter before its closure in October. The association also had a branch on the University of Papua New Guinea campus (*ND*, 20 Oct. 1978).

The movement's methods of communicating its demands to the central government were mainly nonviolent and legal. They ranged from resolutions and submissions issued from the Western Council to speeches and veiled threats by Western national parliamentarians. Record of only one demonstration in Gizo exists.<sup>20</sup> When the movement became organized in 1974, certain leaders talked of seceding and utilizing force if necessary, but this aspect of the movement remained in the shadows.

Lively interest in the movement was sustained by certain outside events. Apart from the Bougainville secessionist struggle and Tuvalu's separation in 1975, the ongoing constitutional debates in the Solomons kept the demands of the West on the agenda. As steps towards self-government and independence were gradually taken, the issue of decentralization had to be resolved. Certain unplanned incidents accelerated the movement's drive to attain its goals. One such incident was the publication, already mentioned, of the "Ode to the West Wind" in the government newspaper, *News Drum* (9 June 1978). The poem ridiculed the

Westerner's aspirations for greater control of his destiny. At first, it was widely but erroneously believed that the poem was written by the prime minister's special political secretary.<sup>21</sup> Since both the prime minister and his political aide were Malaitans, the poem became a highly inflammatory issue. It provided further proof that the West needed special constitutional guarantees lest it become a victim of the prejudices of more powerful ethnic or regional groups. The minister of Home Affairs, Francis Billy Hilly, a Westerner, resigned from the cabinet and later became the president of the Western Council.

Up until independence, the West continued to press its demands. When the country's Constitution came into effect without specification of provincial powers, the West refused to celebrate independence. The issue of decentralization was still 'being discussed in the Kausimae Committee, which did not report until March 1979. The government responded only in October 1979 in the form of a White Paper.<sup>22</sup> In July 1979 the Western Province, however, did celebrate independence although the decentralization argument was now unlikely to be resolved until after the 1980 elections. But the mood was conciliatory. *News Drum* quoted Oliver Zapo as saying on behalf of the Provincial Assembly that "the recent compromise on the West Wind poem had reestablished a mutual trust and understanding between the central government and the Western Provincial Assembly" (*ND*, 20 Aug. 1979). According to the prime minister, "the celebrations marked the end of an era which really tested the patience, endurance and forbearance of both the government and the Western leaders . . . these celebrations are political achievements" (*ND*, 20 Aug. 1979). In December 1979 the Western Provincial Assembly elections were held despite the Kausimae Committee's draft recommendation for a delay. Peter Salaka defeated Jerry Buare for the Inner Shortlands, and Billy Hilly won in South Ranongga, going on to defeat Salaka for council president. *News Drum* quoted Billy Hilly saying that he "favoured a gradual approach to devolution, as more provincial power could not only be a blessing but also a curse" (*ND*, 1 Feb. 1980). In the July 1980 national elections, John Talasasa was defeated. Zoleveke did not stand, and Billy Hilly won and accepted the position of deputy prime minister in a new coalition government led by Malaitan, Peter Kenilorea.

### **The Central Government Response**

The central government's response to the demands of the Western movement took the form of limited concessions and rational bargaining. Certainly there was bargaining over the payment of compensation for the

West Wind poem. The central government offered \$7,000, while the council demanded more but compromised on \$9,000. But it was a highly symbolic process, appropriate to the emotional appeals of "Westernism" and for redress of a wrong committed against ethnic dignity. By being prepared to discuss compensation, both sides indicated their willingness to transform a complex emotional issue into a single calculus of cash. Compensation for injury is a familiar part of Melanesian conflict resolution.

However, a rational bargaining model does not fit easily into the early stages of the conflict. To bargain, you need clear sides. Yet at least until early 1978, neither side was distinct or in control of its supporters. The West's council, MPs, and other leaders spoke with different voices. The central government cabinet and parliament lacked unanimity, partly because their numbers included Western leaders. The publication of the West Wind poem suggests also that the central government could not control its day-to-day response to the movement. Only with the formation of the Western political committee, the walkout of the six Legislative Assembly members, and the resignation of Billy Hilly, did the two sides begin to take shape. The polarization at least created the possibility of negotiation.

For a long time it seemed that the central government wanted to avoid direct negotiation. The idea of negotiation might have implied that both sides were of equal status. Simultaneously, the central government might have reasoned that negotiations themselves conceded a large part of the Western Council's claim to represent its supporters and the West generally. It was very important to the Solomon Island decision-makers to avoid the kind of substantive horsetrading, bargaining, and agreement that led to the resolution of Papua New Guinea's Bougainville crisis. The Bougainville Agreement resembled a process of treaty-making between sovereign states.

Several purposes can be deduced from the government pattern of response: to control the definition of the situation; to co-opt its potential leadership; to resolve the issue within the context of parliamentary institutions; to play for time; and to avoid crises.

*Definition of the Situation.* The Western movement was a complex mixture of rational and irrational demands, fears, and grievances. The Western leaders articulated these demands into a claim for Western uniqueness and a program for Western separation. The central government responded by treating it as a case (albeit a special case) of a problem between central and local government throughout the Solomons. If Westernism could be treated as a symptom of a national problem, then it became possible to conceive of solutions within a national context by reform

rather than separation or coerced unity. The risk in generalizing was that it might encourage separatist sentiments elsewhere, for example, in Guadalcanal or in the Eastern Islands. In that case, the general national solutions devised to deal with specific Western grievances would be counterproductive.

The switch to derivation principles for grants to councils in 1978 was a general response to Western claims that affected all provinces. The national government seems to have been fairly successful in broadening the Western issue to practical issues related to the diversity of the state. Hence, it indirectly extended claims of Western uniqueness to all provinces. By the same strategy, it persuaded the Western delegation to present its constitutional proposals to the Kausimae Committee where its demands were treated equally with other council submissions. It also avoided giving any directions to the committee to deal with them differently from those of the other provinces. The committee recommended a system of extensive decentralized powers to provinces short of a federal structure. However, each province had control over the pace of its application. It remains to be seen if a general system of decentralization stretched to fit Western demands could cause problems for other provinces. A similar generalizing effect took place in Papua New Guinea, where the "treaty" with Bougainville became the basis for an organic law applicable to all provinces, and after the McKinsey report, applied at the same time to all of them.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, the central government's purpose in treating the West province like the other was helped by the Western leadership's willingness to put its demands in a form that was, at least in principle, amenable to national political and legislative action, that is, the Western Submission.

*To Co-opt Its Leadership.* If a united nation was to be preserved, the Kenilorea government had to recruit prominent Western leaders to the highest national offices. The resignation of Francis Billy Hilly diminished Western representation at the cabinet level. The key positions of prime minister, leader of the opposition, and speaker were all held by Malaitans. If some of the prestigious new offices created by the advent of independence could be assigned to Westerners, it could diffuse the conflict. The cabinet proposed a Westerner for the position of governor-general, but failure to maintain cohesiveness among government supporters during the voting in Parliament frustrated this objective (*ND*, 28 April 1978). This failure was cited by Talasasa as a main factor in his motion in September 1978 for a vote of no-confidence in the prime minister (*ND*, 15 Sept. 1978). After that experience the cabinet was more successful in supporting the election of a Westerner, Maepeza Gina, as speaker of the House.



Within the public service, concessions were made to two prominent Westerners. In early 1978 Isaac Qoloni was appointed secretary to the prime minister and Milton Sibisopere became clerk of the Western provincial government. Together their appointments, as well as those of two cabinet ministers (Zoleveke and Ghemu), the speaker of Parliament, and other prominent posts in the public service, indicated a measure of success in co-opting Western leadership.

*Resolution of the Conflict Within Parliamentary Institutions.* Proponents of the Western movement may argue that its foundations as well as its first public expression preceded the rapid constitutional advances of the 1970s. But the movement reached its greatest prominence between the period 1974-1979. This is a most significant period since the constitution to be adopted would determine for a long time the relationship between regional units in the political system.

The lengthy process of constitutional discussion provided an opportunity for Western demands to be both raised and resolved in a national context. Throughout this period the language of decentralization changed, shifting from local governments to island councils, then “provincial assemblies.” The Kausimae Committee took this decentralizing tendency further by resurrecting the term “local government” to describe government below the provincial level.

The report of the Constitutional Committee recommended that the power to establish councils, and to devolve and transfer powers and functions, be transferred from the area of executive discretion to Parliament.<sup>24</sup> A two-thirds majority should be required to resume devolved powers. However, the committee did not include council autonomy among the entrenched clauses of the Constitution, requiring a three-quarters majority to change. The *Constitutional Conference, 1977 Principles*, the Solomon Islands’ position paper, elaborated on these recommendations, particularly in relation to suspension and dissolution, and reaffirmed the previous committee’s recommendation for a review committee.<sup>25</sup> The report of the constitutional conference provided for local governments to be renamed provincial assemblies and for the establishment of a review committee within a year of independence.<sup>26</sup> The final national Constitution, however, included only two paragraphs on provincial government (s. 114), leaving to Parliament the task of elaboration after it had considered the report of the Kausimae Committee:

Solomon Islands shall be divided into provinces, the number and boundaries of which shall be prescribed by Parliament after considering the advice of the Constituency Boundaries Commission.

Parliament shall make provision for the government of the provinces established under this section and consider the role of traditional chiefs therein.

The government moved quickly to set up the Kausimae Committee, but as independence drew closer, Western representatives pushed for its report before independence. The committee, meeting the Western Council in early June 1978, said it would be unable to report before Independence Day but would produce an interim report as soon as it could. This became the draft report issued in December 1978 and circulated to the provinces for comment. The committee's final report avoided the West's usage of "state" but recommended additions to the constitution. The government's White Paper, in response to the Kausimae Report, however, rejected further constitutional entrenchment of provincial government. It did so on grounds of principle as well as the practical difficulty of gaining endorsement by a two-thirds majority in the Parliament. Overall, the central government seems to have successfully contained Western demands within parliamentary institutions, the council, and ad hoc committees.

The Western issue was raised in several public demonstrations but in each case the government's response was that the issue could be, and was being, dealt with through "normal channels." Again, the existence of these channels suggested that the issue was a part of a general national problem, rather than one requiring a specific government commitment to Western aspirations. By the device of committee and parliamentary procedures, the government successfully channelled the contentious energies of the West to arenas where they could be handled rationally and procedurally.

*Playing for Time.* Dividing a country into two or more sovereign parts after independence tends to be more difficult than before. After independence, the new government has at its disposal the full use of its coercive machinery, while in the pre-independence period this apparatus is under the control of the colonial authorities. It is usually easier for a sub-national group to engage in a liberal use of threats and force than a departing colonial power that may want to avoid charges of racism attending an attempt to sort out an interethnic conflict. During the first wave of the Western movement, and until self-government on 2 January 1976, central authority was still divided between the Council of Ministers and the colonial governor. There is no evidence that the British government considered decolonization by partition. But to the extent that the British and Solomon Islands governments had different interests in the process of decolonization, Western leaders had an opportunity to play one off

against the other. For the Solomon Islands ministers, it was important to present the Western issue as an internal matter, solvable by an internal political process, rather than in terms of entrenched constitutional protections for a minority group imposed by a retiring colonial power.

Tuvalu's separation from the Gilbert and Ellice Islands colony by referendum in 1974 offered some Western leaders a model for peaceful partition (MacDonald 1982). It was achieved against British wishes, but with the agreement of the Tarawa government. Banaba's bid for autonomy and association was resisted by both Tarawa and London, though Kiribati's constitution contained specific protection of Banaban interests, unlike the general statutory protection for provincial autonomy in the Solomon Islands.<sup>27</sup> With independence, the Banaban opportunity was lost. Throughout the entire complex exercise involving the expressing and exchanging of views, the Solomon Islands government was successful in buying time.

*Avoiding Crises.* The West Wind poem published in June 1978, less than a month before independence, inadvertently created a crisis for the central government. Its appearance in a government newspaper necessitated an official response. The following week the paper published an apology directed specifically to the West and a police inquiry was appointed to establish authorship. This tactic brought the problem back to "normal channels" for resolution. The prime minister and his special secretary visited the West and apologized for the accidental misuse of the government press against Western dignity.

*Ad Hoc Responses.* Finally, the government made a series of ad hoc and specific responses to the West, particularly in relation to land early in 1978. These included the following:

- The return of 6,000 ha of government land in South Choiseul to customary ownership. This was a housekeeping operation since there were no immediate plans to use the land. The transfer was presented by the minister as "a gesture of good faith and goodwill towards the Western people" (Hon. Waita Ben, quoted in *ND*, 25 April 1978).
- Consultation with the Western Council before bringing to Parliament the bill protecting existing Gilbertese freehold land rights in the Western Province. The legal protection was linked to a policy change allowing original customary owners to obtain freehold rights in government land that had previously only been available as leasehold, thus meeting Western complaints about the inequity of Gilbertese freehold rights.
- Abandoning in 1977 the attempt to acquire registered title to land on New Georgia in order to lease timber rights to Levers Pacific Timbers. Later in 1978, negotiations (chaired by the province) began to establish a special purpose corporation to allow customary owners to deal di-

rectly with Levers Pacific Timbers. This was a clear case of legislative action specifically directed at Western problems, after attempts to deal with them in the context of general land and forestry legislation had failed (see Larmour 1980).

### Conclusion

A comprehensive history of the Western movement still has to be written; it is to be hoped that this will be undertaken by Western people themselves. In this study we have tried to outline ways in which the movement might be understood in relation to other separatist, autonomist, or breakaway movements. Certainly these comparisons were present in the minds of Western leaders, particularly around the time of the Bougainville secession attempt.

We have tried to outline some of the internal dynamics of the movement. This required indentifying the different interests and leadership in different parts of the West including the Shortlands, New Georgia, and Choiseul. We have pointed to the division between the Western Council and Western MPs, describing the way the council embodied and symbolized the movement. We have also noted the international dimension: the model of and links with Bougainville, the University of Papua New Guinea campus, and the use of legal consultants in Australia. Throughout much of the paper, we also discussed the fundamental and facilitating bases of the movement.

The impulse to secession may not be related to a rational assessment that a Western government would do things better and more responsively than a government based in Honiara. Rationally, Westernism called for a government in Gizo substantially like the one in Honiara. The differences would be in the composition of the government, its location, and its territorial jurisdiction. Behind the movement for autonomy was a deeper reaction against centralized government and in particular, the legal, bureaucratic, and career structures that were imposed by colonial rule. These anticentralist sentiments were, contrary to expectation, reinvigorated by independence. While an autonomous Western government, by its smaller scale and increased dependence on fewer big companies, might seem to provide greater opportunities for neocolonialism, it offered a chance to the West to create a government of its own making. However, as a separate country the Western government would probably follow policies similar to the government in Honiara.

There may be some similarities between Westernism and other resistance and cultist movements in relation to colonial rule. In this regard, the

Christian Fellowship Church's support for the movement is certainly relevant. The West mobilized its forces against the transition to an "independent" economy mapped out by the colonial administration and the British government in the early 1970s. From this perspective, it was a resistance movement with potential secessionist aspirations rather than an oppositionist group with a blueprint for an alternative government. Looked at in this way, NADEPA's support for Westernism becomes clearer. Objectively, a Malaita-led party representing the interests of wage-earners would have little in common with the Western breakaway movement, which derived much of its backing from fear of "Malaita domination" and the assertion of rights of landowners. But NADEPA certainly had good tactical reasons to support Westernism in order to embarrass the government. Both NADEPA and the West seemed to share the feeling that the transition to independence was being made just a bit too smoothly and quickly, and was thereby denying citizens the opportunity to discuss major issues such as the distribution of power in the state, the role of foreign investment, and so on. These were passed over too perfunctorily in the interests of stability, investor confidence, and the reduction of British aid. Neither group (NADEPA or the Western movement) provided very convincing alternatives, however. Impatience with the government could be explained from the fact that both NADEPA and the West found themselves in the paradoxical position of resisting the imposition of independence until matters were resolved. In particular, we are referring to NADEPA's demonstration against internal self-government in 1976, and the West's final demand that colonial rule continue in the West after independence. Apart from these points of similarity, NADEPA's aims must be seen as intrinsically different from those of the West. NADEPA was not in favor of dismembering the state if its objectives were not met. In its submission the Western movement gave veiled threats as to the course it would take if frustrated.

The sweeping nature of Western demands made it easier for the central government to reject them. The central government discovered that it could absorb the urgency of the demands by submitting them to committee work. Although the fundamental conditions for a breakaway movement remain, by achieving independence without dismantling the unitary nature of the state, the suggestion is conveyed that the central government has temporarily won. The issues remain albeit unresolved. Whether a national government could ever have satisfied the impulses behind Westernism remains unknown.

A rational argument for secession is that the unit asserting its rights to self-determination gets less out of unity than it would as an independent

entity, Government revenue and expenditure are not the only measure of the advantages and disadvantages of participation in a large unit. In terms of foreign aid, a separate government of a small country could probably expect more than it would get proportionately as part of a larger one. In small, open economies, the size of internal markets is likely to be a determining factor in attracting foreign investment in extractive industries, such as timber. In effect, small size may succeed in sponsoring externally stimulated economic development if resources are present and government policies are attractive. But, by the same token, the autonomy sought by the secessionists could be severely compromised by overdependence on multinational corporations.

A particular argument in favor of secession in small countries concerns "viability." To the extent that it is appropriate in an increasingly integrated world economy, the argument can equally be applied to the national as well as the secessionist unit. The West, with a population of 20,000 people, would have been larger than eight members of the South Pacific Commission and, in terms of its geographical dispersion and resources, a more viable unit than say Kiribati, or the Cooks (with 18,000 people). In any event, pragmatic concerns are only part of the reasons for seeking autonomy. Political sovereignty, ethnic solidarity, a vote in the United Nations, and so on, are probably the most valuable resources available to a small group of people in their dealings with the rest of the world (particularly for islands because of the recognition of their right over the seabed). The U.N. countries' acceptance of the principle that size should not be related to voting rights made secession a more practical option. The move, however, from the status of province or district to that of sovereign state is rarely without violence. Tuvalu's case was an exception.

Often the case for secession is put partly in terms of a calculus of economic cost/gain. This was part of the Western case. Arguments about "contribution" may overlook the overhead costs of running an independent state, particularly when, until independence, these costs have been met directly by the colonial government and have not appeared in the country's budget. Overheads for a new government would include not only foreign offices and salaries for the head of state, but also the budgets of central departments like a public service office, and functional ministries. The overhead costs of an independent government also tend to be overlooked because they do not fit easily into the framework of the regional development plans, which focus on rural development. Put differently, the cost of running a provincial government as part of a country is not the same as that of running a separate country.

Many of the conditions that led to the Western movement no longer prevail. Independence raised issues that happened only once. The constitutional planning process created possibilities of political change that would henceforth be considerably more limited. The presence of the British offered Western provincial leaders the possibility of an alternative source of redress for their grievances. After independence it would have been difficult for them to look abroad to countries that already recognized the Solomon Islands government as the legitimate representative of all the people. In addition, independence created new offices, money, and jobs, out of which some Western demands could be satisfied without the pain of redistributing resources from the rest of the country.

But many of the fundamental and secondary factors remain. The fundamental factors (race, history, etc.) are, by definition, unchangeable, and so continuous central government efforts will be required to ensure that they are not activated again. The question here is whether the central government will be able to accommodate the Western issue within a national framework of provincial government under the rubric of “unity in diversity.” It may be that a national system designed to cope with the West’s particular claims will impose too great a strain on other provinces and the central government may have to continue to deal with the West as a special case, a *de facto* “state” within a country of provinces.

Finally, a few general points need some attention. First, if the Western movement ever achieves full nationhood, it would be unlikely to occur without violence. The history of nearly all other *bona fide* breakaway movements attests to this general proposition. Second, as a matter of fairness to general theory, one is left to speculate about the prospect of a sub-unit such as Choiseul demanding full autonomy on the same grounds advanced by the West *vis-à-vis* Honiara. Would Gizo cooperate? Third, the issue of decentralization in relation to national unity remains to be addressed. Can decentralization be undertaken or conceded without fear that it may be the prelude to demands for full, separate independence? Perhaps the outcome of the ongoing dispute between the West and Honiara will provide a partial answer.

Ralph Premdas  
Jeff Steeves  
Peter Larmour

#### NOTES

1. See *The Solomon Islands: An Introductory Economic Report* (World Bank Report 2553-501, 18 December 1979); see also *Draft Solomon Islands National Development Plan 1980-1984*, Honiara, 1980.

2. For descriptive accounts of the Methodist mission see Luxton (1955) and Garrett (1982:300-1). For an analysis of the mission's style and the origins of the Christian Fellowship Church, see Tippett (1976: chaps. 5 and 15).
3. *Solomon Islands 1981 Statistical Yearbook*, Statistics Office, Ministry of Finance, Honiara, December 1981, Table 2.7, p. 24.
4. See *Report of Special Committee of Provincial Government* (Kausimae Report), Honiara, 1979, par. 2.15-2.17.
5. In the literature on the subject, these factors are described as "fundamental" or "primordial" (see Geertz 1963:105-57).
6. For a discussion of some of these categories in the study of breakaway movements, see Premdas (1977a and 1977b).
7. Submission of Western Council, August 1975, Special Committee on Provincial Government Background Paper No. 28, mimeo. (Hereafter referred to as Western Submission), p. 1.
8. See *Kolombangara Land Use Planning: Working Party Report*, Honiara, 1977.
9. See Rence in Larmour (1979) and Tippett (1976) for the Christian
10. Ministry of Finance Submission to Special Committee on Provincial Government, 1978, Special Committee on Provincial Government Background Paper No. 27, Honiara, June, p. 5 (hereafter referred to as The Finance Submission).
11. *Draft National Development Plan 1980-1984*, vol. 1, par. 398, Honiara, 1980.
12. Special Committee on Provincial Government Background Paper No. 31, Statistics Office, Ministry of Finance, Honiara, 1979.
13. *Solomon Islands Sixth Development Plan 1971 to 1973*, Honiara, 1971.
14. See *Report of Solomon Islands Constitutional Conference*, HMSO, London, 1978, Annex C, for details of the financial settlement.
15. See "Local Government in Solomon Islands," Ministry of Home Affairs, Honiara, 1975.
16. See Kausimae Report, 1979, par. 5.14.
17. See Kausimae Report, 1979, par. 5.12.
18. Ministry of Home Affairs, Mimeo, 1978.
19. Agreement between the National Government and the Province of Bougainville, dated 7 August 1976, Port Moresby, 1976, p. 3.
20. See *Iumi Nao*, the film celebrating Solomon Islands independence, produced by Film Australia, 1979.
21. The author was a government agriculture officer who was charged with sedition, see *News Drum*, 8 September 1978.
22. White Paper on Provincial Government, National Parliament Paper No. 4479.
23. *Making Decentralization Work*, 1977, McKinsey and Co., Port Moresby.
24. *Report of the Constitutional Committee*, March 1976, Honiara.



25. *Constitutional Conference, 1977 Principles* March 1977, Honiara.
26. Report of Solomon Islands Constitutional Conference, *op. cit.*
27. Kiribati *Constitution*, chap. 12.

## REFERENCES

- Barth, F. 1969. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. London.
- Bobai, T. 1979. "Gilbertese Resettlement." In *Land in Solomon Islands*. Ed. P. Larmour. Institute of Pacific Studies, USP, Suva.
- Campbell, M. 1974. "The Development of a New Local Government Image." Mimeo, UPNG, 22 Nov.
- Connor, W. 1973. "The Politics of Ethnonationalism." *Journal of International Affairs*, pp. 1-21.
- Duchacek, I. 1974. *Nations and Men*. Boston.
- Emerson, R. 1964. *From Empire to Nation*. Cambridge.
- Enloe, C. 1975. *Ethnicity and Political Development*. Boston.
- Garrett, J. 1982. *To Live among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania*. World Council of Churches in Association with University of the South Pacific, Suva.
- Geertz, C. 1963. "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civic Politics in the New States." In *New States and Old Societies*. Ed. C. Geertz. New York.
- Griffin, J. 1973. "Papua New Guinea and the British Solomon Islands Protectorate: Fusion or Transfusion." *Australian Outlook* 27(3):319.
- Hannett, L. 1975. "The Case for Bougainville Secession." *Meanjin Quarterly*. Spring, pp. 286-93.
- Hastings, P. 1976. "Bougainville and the Solomons: An Inevitable Union?" *New Guinea* (Jan.) 33-41.
- Healey, A.M. 1966. "Administration in the British Solomon Islands Protectorate." *Journal of Administration Overseas*. July.
- Heath, I. 1979. "Land Policy in Solomon Islands." Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Department of History, La Trobe University, Melbourne.
- Keesing, R. 1978. "Politico-Religious Movements and Anticolonialism on Malaita: Maasina Rule in Historical Perspective." *Oceania*. June.
- Larmour, P. 1979. *Land in Solomon Islands*. Institute of Pacific Studies, USP, Suva.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1980. "The North New Georgia Timber Corporation." In *Land, People, and Government: Public Lands Policy in the South Pacific*. Institute of Pacific Studies, USP, Suva.
- Local Government Plan of Operations*. 1973. Government Printery, Honiara. 55.

- Luxton, C.T.J. 1955. *Isles of Sobmon: A Tale of Missionary Adventure*. Methodist Foreign Missionary Society of New Zealand, Auckland.
- MacDonald, B. 1982. *Cinderellas of the Empire*. ANU Press, Canberra.
- Premdas, R. 1977a. "Secession and Political Change: The Case of Papua Besena." *Oceania* (June): 265-83.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1977b. "Secessionist Politics in Papua New Guinea." *Pacific Affairs*. Spring.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1978. "Ethnonationalism and Copper." *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*. Spring.
- Scarr, D. 1967. *Fragments of Empire: A History of the Western Pacific High Commission, 1877-1914*. ANU Press, Canberra.
- Tippett, A.R. 1976. *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*. Lutterworth.