

Ian Howie-Willis, *A Thousand Graduates: Conflict in University Development in Papua New Guinea, 1961-1976*. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1980. Pp. xix, 362, Paperback \$12.95.

Many professional men and women who gained their educations at public schools now send their children to private institutions. This fact has taught some of us about the systemic nature of formal education, particularly those of us who teach at elite, private colleges. We are aware that our progeny could neither attend nor succeed at the colleges in which we teach if they had spent their formative years studying at the same schools we attended some twenty years before they were born. We could find it

difficult to pay tuition at these private colleges and would probably find assistance in the form of scholarships difficult to come by. Moreover, our children might find themselves underprepared since elementary and secondary public schools have become less adequate than they were when we were young. Now that President Reagan has promised tax credits to those of us who send our children to private or parochial schools, it seems inevitable that the quality of public education will decline even further, allowing fewer and fewer poorer children entry into the educational elite, a process that can only eventuate, as I see it, in the rich getting progressively richer.

The systemic relationship between money, political processes, social values and education is even more complex in countries like Papua New Guinea, where an industrialized nation--in this case Australia--has been empowered to create an educational system for the colonized. In America, access to education indicates periods of socioeconomic fluidity, as the marketplace incorporates individuals into, or rejects them from, middle and upper management positions. In Papua New Guinea, the educational system imposed by Australian administrators has been responsible for creating class distinctions within a system that has been characterized by essentially impermanent differences in status and power: A big man's son did not generally follow in his father's footsteps; an educated bureaucrat's son probably will.

Ian Howie-Willis' *A Thousand Graduates* describes the formation of an indigenous elite in Papua New Guinea. He says:

Black's economic value to white business enterprise, with prejudice, government paternalism and acquiescence, and particularistic mission attitudes--all served to inhibit the creation of a comprehensive system of education. Given the combined weight of such pressures, it is perhaps surprising that any Papua New Guineans should have received post-primary, let alone higher education. Yet a considerable number did, and with them a new social element had clearly emerged by the end of the 1930s. . . . Education, training, and general acculturation were clearly opening horizontal cleavages within the Papua New Guinean community . . . [and] many Papua New Guineans were becoming "upper class" through post-primary training (1980: 15).

Although Howie-Willis is convinced that the formation of this "upper class" was necessary for Papua New Guinea to become a self-determining and independent nation, his book, a descriptive history of university de-

velopment in Papua New Guinea between 1961 and 1976, does not sufficiently deal with the systemic implications of the process of class formation. In other words, Howie-Willis tells us everything we might ever want to know about the history of Papua New Guinea's universities, but fails to provide us with a convincing interpretation of that history.

This is not to suggest that the book is valueless. On the contrary Howie-Willis presents his data in a clear and readable manner, making it possible for us to use this information easily in creating the social analysis that is missing from the book. He describes, for example, two periods in the history of Papua New Guinean universities, the first preceding their establishment as institutions, and the second following upon their incorporation within the indigenous bureaucratic organization that they helped to create. In doing so, he provides us with a wealth of information about the personalities, programs, and policies that affected educational development. But what is more interesting to me, as someone who is not an historian of educational institutions, but who is interested in historical processes, is the difference between the consequences and the causes of change. The founders of Papua New Guinea's universities, responding to complex economic, political and social pressures, never anticipated that their successes in developing an indigenous elite would come to threaten the autonomy and independence of the universities that had made this elite possible. Says Howie-Willis:

Cabinet Ministers and senior bureaucrats were dissatisfied with the performance of the universities. Student strikes, staff trade unionism, free-wheeling criticisms of government leaders, and periodic on-campus ructions which gained media notoriety for the universities, all helped foster a "relationship of antagonism" between them and the government. . . . These were ominous portents for the universities: increasing government surveillance of their educational effort plus a hard financial policy added up to a loss of the independence their founders had sought to guarantee and which their successive heads had struggled to retain (1980:308).

Howie-Willis documents this disjunction between consequence and cause but adopts what might best be called the theoretical equivalent of *laissez-faire* economics. He concludes his book by predicting that:

Conflict would probably continue to be a part of the university system in Papua New Guinea. . . . In all probability the univer-

sities in Papua New Guinea seemed certain to remain, like those in Africa, "a hotbed of conflicts wrapped in the deceptively serene-looking shell of a palm-shaded Oxbridge." And so, short of closing them down, government would probably never find them much less difficult to live with (1980:344).

This abdication of theoretical responsibility strikes me as having significant social implications. If an historian of educational institutions as new as those found in Papua New Guinea cannot adequately explain why conflicts plague the universities there, how can we hope to resolve similar problems of educational opportunity, faced as we are with budget cuts and an entrenched elite?

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