

**MELANESIAN SOCIALISM:
VANUATU'S QUEST FOR SELF-DEFINITION
AND PROBLEMS OF IMPLEMENTATION**

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In the southwest Pacific, Vanuatu has emerged as one of the region's trouble spots along with New Caledonia. To Prime Minister Walter Lini, his country is doing nothing extraordinary. Yet in a region notable for its conservatism, Vanuatu has opened diplomatic relations with Cuba, Nicaragua, the Soviet Union, and Libya. In addition, Lini has granted fishing rights to the Soviets and at the United Nations he has called for the recognition of Arafat's PLO. Vanuatu's Middle Eastern links have caused much controversy. Libya has been courted assiduously. Many missions have been sent to Libya to seek training, to solicit aid, and on one occasion to attend a conference on world liberation movements. Libya has reciprocated, sending small groups to examine Lini's accomplishments. It was announced that "in a short time, Libya will establish a People's Bureau in Port Vila."¹

Lini has defiantly asserted Vanuatu's right to determine its foreign policy. As an active member of the Non-Alignment Movement, Vanuatu's actions are deemed only to represent "a policy of independence and diversification in its foreign relations and aid." Lini has described his government's philosophy that guides its strategy of development as Melanesian Socialism. With only about 130,000 people and an export-oriented, monocrop economy heavily dependent on Western

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aid, investment, and markets for survival, this choice of socialism has many ironies. In this paper, I look at Melanesian Socialism as adumbrated by Lini, pointing to its sources and the difficulties it may confront in implementation.

Unlike many progressive Third World leaders who are often ambiguous about their radicalism, Vanuatu's Walter Lini embraces socialist ideals. However, Lini is quick to note that his brand of socialism is indigenously derived and therefore should be appropriately described as "Melanesian Socialism." Lini affirms that in socialization and culture, he and his compatriots "remain products of Melanesian Socialism."² Equal in importance to the word "socialism" in the phrase "Melanesian Socialism" is the word "Melanesian," which seeks to anchor Lini's ideology in his own indigenous society. Lest he be charged with importing alien ideas, Lini has pointed out that the precepts and practices of Melanesian Socialism preceded Marx and Lenin. He gave the example of his government's land policy to illustrate the point: "Land exists to be used by the community for its needs. This is by definition a socialist principle, but one which we practised hundreds of years before Marx, Engels, or indeed Lenin were even born, let alone heard of."³ Lini has denounced colonialism and the role of foreign values in transforming Vanuatu society. Hence, to be consistent, he has found it necessary to emphasize that his socialism is Melanesian in nature and origins. Further, Lini separates his socialist beliefs from "communism," fearing that they may be mistaken for or identified with the Soviet variant. Cautious about the possible repercussions of such an association, Lini has noted that "we only have to give a side glance eastwards and we are immediately accused of courting the Communist world."⁴ In eschewing the term "communism," Lini has employed the alternative designation "communalism," calling his beliefs at times "Melanesian communalism" or, more often, "Melanesian Socialism."

What, then, is Melanesian Socialism? Lini has expounded on the underlying principles. Its most salient aspect is Melanesian values. These are the cultural beliefs of his people; they allegedly existed in their pristine form in precontact times, but were altered in many ways and varying degrees by colonial rule. The cardinal convictions of Melanesian Socialism can be poignantly depicted by juxtaposing them against their capitalist, antithetical counterparts: communalism versus individualism, sharing versus self-interest, humanism versus materialism. What do these terms mean to Lini? Communalism is "based on an awareness of the community where the individual was not to consider himself or his private interests taking precedence over the general inter-

ests of the community."⁵ Sharing is akin to practices of giving and receiving in Melanesian culture: "Giving was based on one's ability to do so. Receiving was based on one's need."⁶ This giving-receiving prescription is similar to the Marxist reward-work relationship: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs," but differs from that found in the Soviet constitution: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his work." Finally, in Lini's Melanesian socialist lexicon, humanism refers to the de-emphasis of materialism in human relations and stresses "compassion and mutuality."

The principles of Melanesian Socialism, then, are simple: communalism, sharing, and humanism. Nothing is said about a mode of analysis such as the historical or dialectical materialism so integral to Marxism, nor are familiar Marxist categories such as property relations, classes, or class conflict explicitly utilized. Even European socialist luminaries are eschewed. For instance, in relation to the role of conflict in the revolutionary transformation process, Lini has invoked not Marx but a black American visionary, Frederick Douglass: "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did, it never will. If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without ploughing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning, and want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters." Neither has Lini expounded on his preferred relationship between government and the economy, nor on nationalization. Many of his views bear striking similarity to the populist sentiments of other progressive Third World leaders without being colored by the concepts of a Marxist-Leninist vocabulary.

During the period of colonial control of Vanuatu, the original values of Melanesian Socialism were challenged and in part changed by European and Christian influences. Hence, the Lini regime sees as one of its first tasks the need for a cultural revival; he has called for a "Melanesian Renaissance," described as "a festival of the spirit."^{*} Melanesian Renaissance refers to "the rebirth of our identity and purpose, and to preserve without inhibition our God-given right to develop in our own way and in accordance with our own values and expectations."⁹ Melanesian Renaissance seeks, then, to eliminate alien ways and influences and in their place to forge institutions "geared and tuned to serving and nurturing the creation of a social, political, and economic order born of the environment of Vanuatu."¹⁰ Nothing is said about the difficulties that are likely to be encountered in the quest for a collective national identity. For instance, Vanuatu has more than one hundred languages; insti-

tutional cultural variations exist between the Melanesian and Polynesian populations, and even among the Melanesian groups distributed over islands and villages. Westernization has brought into existence a small but significant stratum of ni-Vanuatu who are urban-based, professionally trained, and increasingly individualistic in outlook. Further, the monetization of the economy and the dominance of cash cropping by private economic enterprises pose as much a hurdle to Melanesian cultural revival as the subtle but pervasive influence of Western cultural artifacts and tastes. The challenge to cultural renaissance stems also from the new state collectivity called Vanuatu, which never existed before colonialism and which, in scale and diversity, is strikingly in contrast to the ancient Melanesian village, small and subsistence-oriented. The discovery of the old, pristine Melanesian values may require as much skill in delving into the past as in recreating a mythical heritage to legitimize the proto-socialist intentions of the contemporary rulers.

Sources of Melanesian Socialism

The origins of Melanesian Socialism point to several sources. Christianity perhaps provided the most immediate and incisive inspiration. Walter Lini himself is a trained Anglican (Episcopalian) pastor; he attended Christian theological seminaries in the Solomon Islands as well as in New Zealand. In recounting the events that led to his vocation as a Christian priest, Lini said: "One evening while I was at prayer, I became completely overwhelmed with the challenge that God had given me. Try as hard as I could, I was not able to find any alternative to that of becoming a priest. So I dedicated myself to becoming a priest."¹¹ Lini's education, like that of nearly all ni-Vanuatu during the colonial period, was acquired in Christian denominational schools. He served as an altar boy when young and he frequently sought advice from priests about pursuing a career. It is, therefore, not accidental that so many of the doctrinal features of Melanesian Socialism bear close resemblance to basic Christian tenets. Lini, however, did not think that the European planters, administrators, and missionaries were sincere Christians: "While the Christian religion was widely compatible with the ethic and principles of Melanesian Socialism with its emphasis on mutuality, compassion, and caring for one another, it was a practice that very few Europeans appeared to follow."¹² He condemned many of the early Christian missionaries for failing to understand or accept Melanesian spiritual practices: "Practices which had very real social and spiritual value were outlawed by many of the early exponents of the

Christian religion."¹³ Lini, however, noted that in their ideal form, Christian ethical values bore great affinity to Melanesian values. It is not too farfetched, therefore, to assume that he sees Christianity as socialist as much as Melanesian culture. Like Lini, many of the founders and activists in his party, the Vanuaaku Pati (which spearheaded the struggle for independence), attended Christian denominational schools and theological colleges. Among the Vanuaaku Pati parliamentarians and cabinet ministers there is a large contingent of pastors and catechists.

Another major source of Melanesian Socialism emanated from Papua New Guinea (PNG), where in the early 1970s a radical challenge against the colonial authorities was mounted for independence.¹⁴ The ideology of the PNG nationalists was represented by the term "the Melanesian Way."¹⁵ Its chief proponents were Father John Momis and Bernard Narokobi, who advocated a radical restructuring of the PNG society and the polity after independence. Several ni-Vanuatu students who were subsequently to become executive members of the Vanuaaku Pati in Vanuatu attended the University of Papua New Guinea, which was then the hotbed of anticolonial radicalism in the southwest Pacific. Related to the PNG source is the Tanzanian connection.¹⁶ On the faculty of the University of Papua New Guinea, especially concentrated in the law school, was an influential contingent of expatriate lecturers with extensive experience in Tanzania and sympathy for Julius Nyerere's populist socialist beliefs. Several of these persons established intimate advisory relationships with Papua New Guinea's radical nationalists. After PNG's independence, several of these persons traveled to Vanuatu, where they served the ni-Vanuatu nationalists on constitutional and political matters. During the struggle for Vanuatu's independence, several ni-Vanuatu nationalists visited and sought training and advice in Tanzania." The cumulative effect of the Tanzanian factor has been obvious in shaping aspects of Vanuatu's policies. In his speeches Prime Minister Lini often refers to "the good thoughts of my comrade Nyerere."¹⁸ More substantively, like Tanzania and PNG, Vanuatu has promulgated an extensive leadership code bearing much resemblance to the Arusha Declaration and a system of decentralization to bring decision-making powers closer to the people.¹⁹ Further, the Tanzanian version of African socialism has had much impact in orienting Vanuatu's foreign policy to that of the nonaligned movement. It is no accident, then, to find an uncanny resemblance between the views of Melanesian Socialism and Tanzanian socialism in relation to nonalignment and the critique of international capitalism and imperialism.

Together, then, the external sources of Melanesian Socialism--Christianity, the nationalist ideology ("the Melanesian way"), and the Tanzanian factor--when added to the egalitarian aspects of Melanesian culture provided the ideological compass for the Vanuaaku Pati's policies. Clearly, Melanesian Socialism is not solely Melanesian. To be sure, Melanesian culture stresses traditional egalitarian and meritocratic principles in the assignment of power and collective decision making. But clearly the role of Christian, African socialist (Tanzanian), and "Melanesian way" (PNG) factors have affected institutional practices such as local government and decentralization, party organization, the leadership code, and foreign policy. To Lini and his party, however, it is crucial to underscore the distinctiveness of Melanesian Socialism, especially in relation to the legitimization of social change directed by government policy.

Melanesian Socialism: The Challenge of Implementation

Translating the principles of Melanesian Socialism into practical programs at the domestic level has been among the most difficult, if not the most ironic, aspects of the Lini administration. The ideals of communalism, sharing, and human sensitivity embedded in the doctrines of Melanesian Socialism do not constitute an operational blueprint for ready implementation. To apply the general ideas over uncharted policy terrain in the modern state, and in doing so to maintain the spirit of the doctrines, has been the critical challenge. The task has been made doubly difficult because Vanuatu under Melanesian Socialism bears little likeness to the postcolonial polity and economy bequeathed by the colonial powers after nearly a century of control. That was a society increasingly shaped by capitalist, individualist, and materialist motifs. If Melanesian Socialism were to entail radical alteration of social, economic, and political structures, then its task would be nothing short of revolutionary change. In this section I look briefly at each segment of Vanuatu-polity, economy, and society; describe what was inherited; and then evaluate the performance of the government in implementing its vision of the future, Melanesian socialist state.

Polity

With only about 135,000 people scattered over a dozen major and many more smaller islands, and speaking about 110 indigenous languages apart from French, English, and Bislama (local pidgin), the Republic of

Vanuatu became independent in 1980. The most significant political fact of the modern Vanuatu state in relation to Melanesian culture and history is its relatively recent administrative union. The traditional ni-Vanuatu polity typically consisted of small-scale units of fifty to three hundred persons, decentralized into numerous autonomous, democratic societies that practiced collective decision making through extended discussion and debate until a consensus was reached. Hence, when the colonial powers created a single political unit under their control, they simultaneously violated several indigenous practices, namely: (1) the operational size of the society, (2) the democratic consultative system of decision making, and (3) the meritocratic-equalitarian norms of social organization. To those who seek a Melanesian Renaissance, therefore, a daunting challenge beckons. Vanuatu was administered a particularly virulent form of colonial control. Instead of being burdened by only one colonial master, it was controlled by two, the French and the British, in what was called a "condominium." Over the course of nearly a century (1887-1980) little was done until the 1970s to engage ni-Vanuatu in collective decisions affecting their lives. To be sure, after seven decades of nonconsultative administration, local councils were introduced in 1957. But after a decade and a half, the councils remained substantially nominated bodies with limited powers and functions. Their form was imported and inappropriately adapted to ni-Vanuatu political culture. They were less intended as a preparatory school to foster democracy and advance the colony toward self-government than aimed at maintaining law and order in defense of expatriate interests.

If local grass-roots initiatives were ignored, the new national institutions that were created by the imperial powers were as alien as they were novel. From 1887, when England and France assumed control of the archipelago as a "sphere of joint influence" and agreed to establish a Joint Naval Commission "charged with the duty of maintaining order and protecting the lives and property of British subjects and French citizens in the New Hebrides," to 1980, when the condominium administrative structure was dismantled, the form of government was bifurcated. A dual-headed state structure emerged particularly after 1906, when the English and French appointed resident staffs in Vanuatu to oversee the interests of their citizens. When this arrangement proved inadequate for maintaining order in the midst of expatriate grabs for indigenous lands, the French and English negotiated a more comprehensive condominium "Protocol" in 1914, by which they governed jointly. While on the one hand, under the Protocol a common core of government activities such as customs, postal services, and public works

was carried out jointly by a combined Anglo-French administration, on the other, a larger set of services such as health and education was administered by separate French and English staffs.

Underlying Anglo--French cooperation were suspicion and rivalry between the two imperial powers for territory and resources. The Anglo--French administrative structure superimposed an artificial cleavage that came to pervade most aspects on ni-Vanuatu life. In daily interaction, the French and British administrators and their respective citizens, businesses, and churches were engaged in intense competition for the loyalty of ni-Vanuatu. While at one level this provided opportunities for some ni-Vanuatu, overall the impact was disastrous. After decades of such rivalry, some ni-Vanuatu spoke French, attended French schools, went to French-run Catholic churches, and availed themselves of French-administered services. Other ni-Vanuatu spoke English, attended English schools, went to Protestant (mainly Presbyterian) churches, and accepted English-run government services. The terms of the 1914 Protocol legalized and institutionalized this polarization. Because of the pervasiveness of the public bureaucracy in the life of the colonial state, this administrative division deepened the reliogolinguistic segmentation in the society. Further, it created a wasteful duplication in personnel and services; there were different laws, procedures, traditions, and even typewriters. In addition, Anglophone and Francophone ni-Vanuatu acquired the jealousies and distrust that the English and French held for one another.

Without indigenous concepts of large-scale government organization found in the modern state, such as a public bureaucracy, ni-Vanuatu accepted those introduced by their colonial masters. The ni-Vanuatu had no other choice, for the infrastructure of political institutions of the modern European state--derived from the peculiarities of European history and society--was superimposed, like a scaffold, on the indigenous system, creating a new if abhorrent political reality. As independence approached, the repressive colonial apparatus was challenged by a group of ni-Vanuatu leaders. But the institutions through which they mobilized public opinion, such as the political party, and the reforms that they demanded, such as an elected parliament, all reflected practices of the European liberal democratic state. The doctrines of liberation invoked for political change, such as sovereignty and popular representation, were also of European ancestry. Practices of precontact Melanesian culture would have to be brought later to bear on the structures of politics implanted by the Europeans.

Repercussions of the bifurcated administrative structure reverberated

in the area of party formation. The political parties that emerged in the early 1970s in anticipation of the condominium powers' conceding universal adult suffrage and establishing an elected representative assembly were almost exclusively based on either Anglophone or Francophone ni-Vanuatu support. The New Hebrides Culture Society, which was formed in July 1971 and became the New Hebrides National Party in August 1971, was constituted mainly of English-speaking ni-Vanuatu. The National Party agitated for an accelerated program toward the granting of independence. This in reaction triggered the launching of several Francophone parties (most importantly, the Union des Communautés des Nouvelles Hébrides and the Mouvement Autonomiste de Nouvelles Hébrides) that opposed early self-government. Organized all the way to rural villages and hamlets, these parties mobilized Francophone and Anglophone ni-Vanuatu into exclusive, antagonistic political groupings. In certain places the contest among the parties spilled over into violence, especially on Malekula and Efate islands. The parties not only defined the issues and debated them, but because of their exclusive religiolinguistic bases, they exacerbated the internal bifurcation of the society. Throughout the 1970s, demonstrations, boycotts, and political agitation by the parties were the order of the day. The contest crystallized over two main issues. The first concerned the date of self-government. The second dealt with the substance of the constitutional and political structures that were to prevail after independence. It was the latter issue that eventually emerged as the more salient area of controversy. Specifically, the Francophone ni-Vanuatu who constituted a minority of about 30 percent of the population feared domination by an Anglophone majority. The problem was to design a constitutional system that entrenched the protection of minority rights and identity. But many Francophone expatriates did not trust such a solution and preferred to dismantle the archipelago into separate independent states.²⁰ These persons cultivated and nurtured the Anglophone--Francophone cleavage among ni-Vanuatu, especially on Santo and Tanna islands. The objective was to prepare these islands for secession.²¹

Toward the end of the 1970s, the internal struggle reached a head. While a decentralized form of regional government was agreed upon by most parties, several disenchanted Francophone expatriates in collaboration with external interests planned the secession of Santo and Tanna islands. In mid-1980, when independence was conceded under the Protestant-oriented and predominantly English-speaking Vanuaaku Pati (formerly the National Party) government, civil war broke out. Santo

and Tanna declared unilateral independence, and without the intervention of Papua New Guinean troops, it was likely that Santo would have succeeded in separating.²² The government of Walter Lini suppressed the secessionists, jailed or deported their leaders, and enforced a regime that bore the unmistakable imprint of an English-speaking, Protestant government. The system of decentralized regional government intended to protect minorities was unceremoniously scrapped.²³

In the end, Vanuatu became an independent state, but with its political backbone crippled. A massive fissure dividing the victorious Anglophone population from the Francophone remained as the most distinct feature of the polity. The parliamentary system of government adopted was staffed mainly by Anglophone ni-Vanuatu. The governing Vanuaaku Pati made few concessions to its adversaries. It composed its first cabinet only of its own confessional and linguistic adherents. At independence, a disunited nation was launched into the international community. The country was not only severely divided and ravaged by civil strife, but it also inherited enemies in neighboring French-controlled New Caledonia who harbored designs to destabilize the new nation.²⁴

While the Republic of Vanuatu has survived its traumatic birth, severe internal political problems remain. The ruling Vanuaaku Pati is riven with dissension: during the first five years of independence, more than half of the cabinet had resigned and several votes of no confidence were introduced against Prime Minister Lini. Even though aid from both France and England has been restored, the Francophone opposition party (the "Moderates" under Vincent Boulekone) has charged that the English bias of the Vanuaaku Pati is making Vanuatu "a colony of Australia."²⁵ Many positive events have also occurred, however, and the Vanuaaku Pati government was returned to power in the 1983 elections, although its popular majority was reduced from 67 percent in 1979 to 55 percent in 1983.

Economy

The contemporary Vanuatu economy is based mainly on copra, although during the last decade tourism, offshore banking (a tax haven), and beef production have introduced some diversification. Until recently, copra provided about 75 percent of total export earnings and, notwithstanding low contemporary world prices, continues to generate most cash income for the population. With practically no industrial base, Vanuatu depends heavily on five primary export products for sur-

vival: copra, 75 percent of the total; beef, 11 percent; cocoa, 8 percent; timber, 2 percent; and coffee, 1 percent. The direction of export trade points to extraordinary dependence on Western products within EEC countries (Belgium and the Netherlands bought 94 percent of Vanuatu's copra in 1982), Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the United States. Imports by national source show Australia with 34 percent; New Zealand, 10 percent; France, 9 percent; Fiji, 9 percent; and socialist East Europe countries with very negligible amounts. The impact of this export-import dependency is in part offset by the fact that some 80 percent of the population is still rural-based with about 30 percent made up of almost completely subsistence farmers.²⁶

Despite copra's preeminent role in the economy, the original reason for commercial contact with the Vanuatu archipelago was another product, sandalwood.²⁷ Harvested primarily in the 1840s, the sandalwood exported by European traders to China in exchange for tea was in short supply. Sandalwood was soon exhausted within a few decades and other items emerged as the main commercial reason for continued external contact and colonization. During the third quarter of the nineteenth century, the recruitment of indigenous labor (called "blackbirding") for service on Australian plantations predominated. During the 1860s and 1870s, English (mainly Australian) and French settlers established cotton plantations in the islands to capitalize on the shortage of cotton caused by the American Civil War. When, like sandalwood, cotton production and blackbirding became unprofitable enterprises, the expatriate settlers resorted to coconut production, which then became the mainstay of the cash economy, a situation that continues to the present.

Rivalry between French and English settlers influenced colonial penetration of Vanuatu. While individual settlers acquired land and organized plantation cultivation of cash crops, other commercial activities such as shipping and trading were dominated by two large companies, one English (Australian) and the other French, with both receiving subsidies for their operations from their respective governments. The French firm, the *Compagnie Caledonienne des Nouvelles-Hebrides* (CCNH), initiated trading with the islands in 1882 and embarked on a massive drive to acquire local land. In response the Australian firm, *Australasia New Hebrides Company* (ANHS), was launched in 1889 and it, in turn, sought to acquire land and sponsor English commercial activities. These companies actively promoted settlement of the Vanuatu archipelago among their own nationals, who engaged in feverish competition to obtain land and win control over the islands. The two companies and their lineal successors would not only dominate trade in

the late nineteenth century but through the twentieth also. Their contemporary successors are Burns Philp of Australia and the *Compagnie Francaise Immobiliere des Nouvelles-Hebrides*.

Coconut production on a plantation scale entailed two far-reaching consequences. First, abundant cheap labor was required. This was supplied by indigenous labor on an indentureship system. Where local labor was inadequate, the French planters in particular imported Tonkinese migrants from Indochina to fill the gap. Indigenous labor recruitment would disrupt village life and initiate the alteration of the traditional needs of the indigenous population as the colonizing powers vied to capture the loyalty of the ni-Vanuatu. Second, plantations required large tracts of land. Through dubious methods, about 40 percent of all arable land was alienated to foreigners. Nearly all cash cropping was in expatriate hands. European-owned plantations produced ten to twelve thousand tons of copra annually, of which ni-Vanuatu owners produced about 15 percent prior to World War II. The legacy bequeathed for an independent Vanuatu was an agricultural economy that was erected around one major export crop; a land tenure system in which large tracts were under alien ownership; and a cash economy almost wholly under foreign control.

Following World War II, the condominium powers sought to diversify the coconut plantation-dependent economy. Foreign firms were invited to invest in other activities. In 1956, the Japanese Mitsui South Pacific Fishing Company was opened on Santo island. In 1962, a manganese company was erected on Efate island. In the late 1960s, an abortive attempt was embarked upon by a group of foreign land speculators to establish holiday resorts. Timber, cocoa, and beef production also received attention. Timber exports peaked at about \$1 million (U.S.) per year by 1972, but tapered off toward the end of the decade. Cocoa exports reached about \$175,000 (U.S.) by 1978.²⁸ Beef production and exports flourished and maintained a steady but small part of exports, about \$1.5 million by 1978. There were changes in the structure of copra production. In the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, agricultural cooperatives were extensively introduced as the means to organize indigenous coconut production and sale, as well as to serve as agencies to control retail trade of consumer products among rural ni-Vanuatu. In what was to become one of the most spectacular stories in the Pacific Islands, the cooperative movement in Vanuatu successfully turned over most of the country's coconut production to indigenous control and captured a significant part of the rural retail business in consumer products. To be sure, the two major English and French multinationals,

Burns Philp and Ballande respectively, continued to dominate most of the retail and wholesale business in Vanuatu. And while the co-op movement has indigenized aspects of local production and distribution, it has failed to move the country away from its excessive reliance on coconut production geared to an externally controlled market.

Other economic activities were also undertaken to diversify the Vanuatu economy. In 1971, the British administrators in the condominium introduced a tax haven to generate new income. Under the New Hebrides Companies Regulations, offshore companies were registered and permitted to operate free from the scrutiny of public tax inspectors. Several companies established offices in Vila, the capital of Vanuatu, and set off a boom in commercial activities, mainly in communications, accounting, and office buildings and other infrastructures associated with tax haven activities. By 1976, about 479 tax exempt companies were registered. In 1981, this had increased to 531. By 1985, about 1,107 companies were registered, of which 644 did business exclusively overseas. In addition, eighty-five banks were registered, of which only five engaged in local retailing. From the offshore tax haven and banking system, some three hundred local jobs have been directly created as well as about \$2 million (U.S.) annually generated in taxes for the government. Vanuatu has also opened an international shipping registry; in 1983, forty-eight ships were registered and in 1986, about sixty-eight ships.

Tourism also emerged as a major source of national income. Starting slowly in the early 1970s and accelerating, some thirty thousand tourists arrived by 1979. While the civil strife during 1980 temporarily curtailed this new source of economic activity, tourism picked up again so that by 1983 it surpassed copra as the country's chief foreign exchange earner. In 1986, about twenty-eight thousand tourists arrived; they generated about one thousand local jobs. But, like coconut and copra, tourism is dependent on external sources. Most tourists come from Western countries, mainly Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S. Hence, tourism further exacerbates the reliance of Vanuatu on external forces for its survival.

Finally, and adding even more to the country's dependence on Western sources for its well-being, is the role played by foreign aid, nearly all of it bilateral. Derived mainly from Britain, France, and Australia, aid constitutes about 50 percent of Vanuatu's total government revenues. In effect, foreign aid is essential not only to maintain and extend vital infrastructures, but also to defray the cost of recurring expenditure for salaries in the public service. Some of this aid is directly linked to yet

another area of dependence, namely the need for skilled professional people. Aid pays the salaries of skilled expatriate staff who provide a vital support to the public service.

In summary, then, copra, tourism, tax haven, and foreign aid provide the backbone of the economy. All the economic activities, in turn, are under the control of external actors, nearly all Western sources.

Society and Culture

The term "Melanesian Renaissance" has been used by the Lini government to suggest that, culturally and socially, Vanuatu is scheduled for a period of radical transformation, "a festival of the spirit."²⁹ Melanesian Renaissance has become a catchword in Lini's policy orientation. The promise is that the colonial past will be uprooted and jettisoned to launch an era of renewal. For more than a century, Vanuatu societies were altered by European penetration. Not merely was the structure of government implanted of European origin, but institutions closest to the people such as the schools and churches were English and French, each playing a deeply influential role in the lives of ni-Vanuatu. In effect, the impact of alien entry was not confined to extraction of resources so that, after the colonial powers were evicted, the traditional cultural heritage could be easily restored. What colonialism did was to architecturally recast indigenous social structure into a mold reflecting European ways and serving their interests. As Franz Fanon noted, "the forced occupation of one's land soon entails the occupation of one's psyche by the same oppressor. An oppressor who occupies another land sooner or later settles in the very center of the dominated. Oppression is thus neither piecemeal nor selective. In the end, the victim is totally victimized. . . ."30

In effect, Melanesian Renaissance confronts a formidable challenge in rejecting the present and returning to the past. From prolonged colonial penetration, fundamental social patterns were reshaped. The area of social equality and reciprocity serves as an example of such impact. Mainly through cash cropping, altered land tenure, wage labor, and large-scale plantation production of export crops, new forms of social inequality and class differentiation have emerged. Anthropologist Margaret Rodman has traced this process of incipient class formation on Longana:

A category of relatively rich peasants is emerging in Longana through inequalities of customary land distribution that allow a

few large landholders to earn incomes at least four times as large as the average copra producer. The production strategies large landholders follow, together with new kinds of entrepreneurial, middleman, and landlord relations, mark the beginnings of differentiation between categories of Longanan peasants. Wealthy peasants operate more and more as capitalists. They come to hold more land and control more wealth at the expense of smaller peasant farmers, who ultimately could be expected to fall back on their own labor power as wage workers.³¹

The manner in which inequality has evolved has ironically been through the legitimating cover of *kastom* (tradition). In the contemporary situation, where indigenous entrepreneurs seek expression of their individualist quest for power and wealth, this practice of accumulation has proceeded inexorably and seemingly consistent with the traditional behavior of big men. Thus, inequality has been progressively implanted in the countryside where most of the population including the peasantry reside, altering and undermining the bases of established social and power relations. Notes Rodman: "The course of differentiation is proceeding slowly. The fact that the process of incipient class formation is in such very early stage allows the illusion to persist that inequality between ordinary men and those who are wealthy landholders is fundamentally no different than past inequalities between men of rank and their followers."³²

Inequality and class distinctions are more evident in the urban sectors where ni-Vanuatu wage earners, professional persons, and civil servants obtain ready and lucrative employment that sets them distinctly apart from each other as well as their rural compatriots. In both the rural and urban areas, the Lini government, in the years it has been in power, has done practically nothing to divert or decelerate the forces that have stimulated disparities in wealth acquisition and its attendant social differentiation. Melanesian Socialism is yet to come to terms with this problem, which strikes at the very foundations of communalism, sharing, and nonmaterialistic humanism. In fact, the Lini government's well-deserved praise for bringing economic prosperity to Vanuatu, by promoting local capitalist initiatives and enterprises, is the very cause of continued acceleration of class formation and differentiation.

In another area of social change pertaining to *kastom* chiefs or traditional leaders, the Lini government has been going in two directions at the same time. At the rhetorical level, in accordance with the vision of

Melanesian Renaissance to recognize ancient practices, a National Council of Chiefs and similar regional councils were established to accommodate the views of traditional big men and elders, especially in the area of cultural affairs. But to accommodate the role of *kastom* chiefs is often to accept authoritarian acts that contravene the idea of accountability preached by the Vanuaaku Party itself. In practice, where conflict of this sort arises, the new democratic ideas are made to supersede old conventions. In one community study on the island of Aoba, it was demonstrated that sacrosanct traditional leadership was set aside under the behest of Melanesian Socialism for it was now the "obligation of *kastom* chiefs to be accountable to an electorate . . . or else be bypassed."³³ In one notable instance, on Lini's own home island of Pentecost, *kastom* chiefs who, in 1982, had imposed excessive fines on offenders were themselves jailed.³⁴

Apart from the areas related to class formation, inequality, and traditional leadership, similar social changes reflecting the forces of Westernization have taken their toll in creating among many of Vanuatu's predominantly youthful population a new popular culture with themes and practices radically divergent from the traditional ethos. Specifically, in the areas of intergenerational conflict, young ni-Vanuatu defy their elders and *kastom* in asserting their right to venture in chosen directions such as picking their own marriage partners. In the area of rural-urban migration (where a slow drift has stimulated new consumer tastes and created new occupational possibilities), in the critical sphere of dispute settlement (where new Western judicial processes have been introduced), in all these areas and many more, the forces of social transformation challenge the task of Melanesian Renaissance to return to the past. Tonkinson has pointed out that the program of returning to the past has stirred fears that

because the leaders of the independence movement were evoking a revival of *kastom* as a symbol of national identity and unity, they were obliged to keep its meaning as generalized as possible. The masses for whom this consciousness-raising was designed tended not to interpret the message ideologically; instead, they grappled with it in terms of practicality, and much confusion resulted. People in some rural areas took the message quite literally. They worried about a return to grass skirts and penis-wrappers, spears and bows and arrows, and wondered whether they would have to destroy non-*kastom* things such as hunting rifles, aluminum dinghies, outboards, and so on. If they were to return to the rule of *kastom* law, and

revive the graded society or male initiation, who among them still remembered enough to make such things feasible? And what of good and bad *kastom*? Surely they would not be asked to revive warfare or cannibalism or the practice of women walking on their knees in the presence of certain male kin, etc.?³⁵

In effect, Melanesian Socialism will have to fight not only against the new, accepted alien social practices that have been gradually embedded, but also will have to seek to implement its program by reinventing conventions to legitimize the novel practices.³⁶

In the area of land, where the indigenous inhabitants lost their resource to European settlers, the Lini government has acted to remedy the situation. Enshrined in the independence constitution is the provision that "all land in the Republic belongs to the indigenous custom owners and their descendants." However, the task of discovering the bona fide owners of the alienated land has triggered claims and counterclaims and revived old traditional conflicts among indigenous groupings, threatening to add another tier of internal dissension to the already severely divided state. The Lini government sees in the return of land to its original owners the possibility of restoring the foundations of an old traditional order. But such an objective in the land policy may have come too late, for other forces have entered Vanuatu society, challenging and undermining the old ethos. Specifically, the foreign-controlled capitalist economic structures--whose pattern of economic development under the Lini government continues to bestow on distant investors and markets the economic destiny of the new nation--have also radically altered the economic behavior of the most influential ni-Vanuatu. The new monetized economic system that the colonial powers introduced has stimulated the creation of private property, the profit motive, unbridled individualism, and exaggerated selfishness, and has gradually modified the communalistic motifs of traditional society. The modern monetized sector in particular has permeated all aspects of ni-Vanuatu life (in some places more so than others) and has created a growing indigenous minority class of propertied, educated, privileged, and salaried individuals. The ni-Vanuatu leadership elite come essentially from this group, whose habits and life-style imitate the Western materialist consumer model and, in turn, attract the ni-Vanuatu young to their fold. Lini's Melanesian Renaissance thus faces the growth of Western secularization and urbanization influences that have made major inroads in altering ni-Vanuatu traditional practices.

It is in this context fraught with contradictions that Lini announced

his policy of Melanesian Renaissance: "The great adventure of independence and the duty of presiding over the rebirth of our identity and purpose and to preserve without inhibition our God-given right to develop in our own way and in accordance with our own values and expectations essentially means casting aside many of the inherited attitudes that at present bolster natural practices that are alien to the Melanesian mind."³⁷ Despite major erosion of traditional culture, Lini, who paradoxically is a Christian priest, feels that indigenous culture possesses enough resilience to recapture and revitalize the past. He, however, does not believe that all things European should be replaced, saying that "we will take with us into the future those aspects of European practice which undoubtedly are beneficial."³⁸ Just exactly how he intends to tear the social structure apart to separate desirable from undesirable portions has been left unspecified.

Analysis, Comment, and Conclusion

A small, almost powerless Third World country that professes a variant of socialism but is hemmed in geopolitically by pro-Western and potentially hostile powers tends to attract sympathy. Vanuatu, in particular, has been unfortunate; it was burdened not by one, but by two colonial powers simultaneously. It was left with not one alien colonial imprint but with two, which further intensified the splits in the sociocultural personality of the country. Poor, small, dominated, remote, and endowed with few resources, but possessed of a strong desire to chart its own course to development, Vanuatu deserves sympathetic analysis. No evaluation of the new nation and its ideology of Melanesian Socialism can fail to consider the adverse historical background from which the country seeks to extricate itself to assert its independence and a dignified identity. It is with this in mind that these final comments will be made about Melanesian Socialism.

Is "Melanesian Socialism" a complete, comprehensive, and integrated ideology? Clearly, it focuses on certain aspects of life while omitting others. At one level, Melanesian Socialism is intended as reproof of European colonial practices in Vanuatu. It is much more than that, however. It is intended to serve as a broad policy map that guides the Vanuatu ship of state toward particular destinations. As a practical guide, however, it provides a poor portrait of the waters to be traversed. **I**t is erected on a paucity of principles: communalism, sensitivity, and sharing. It does not enunciate a theory or definition of the purpose of man and society, although it can be construed to embrace a collectivist

social structure with strong humanist motifs. But its sweep of prescriptions is too wide and abstract to serve as a map to instruct practical policy. More specifically, it needs to spell out those structures of Melanesian society and culture that it embraces and those it rejects. Obviously, many traditional ni-Vanuatu practices such as gender and role inequalities cannot be easily subsumed under the egalitarian doctrines of Melanesian Socialism. The fact that Lini is a Christian, and a Christian pastor at that, does not clarify the problem; rather, it confuses it immensely. Are we to assume that Christian values are coterminous with Melanesian socialist beliefs?

Even if fundamental assumptions are not articulated, at least a more comprehensive institutional exposition and analysis is required to give respectability and credibility to Melanesian Socialism. For instance, what sorts of economic and political structures are preferred? It cannot be inferred that because Lini condemns the capitalist market model that all nonmarket models are preferred. Can it be legitimately argued that because the Vanuatu state under Lini's control since 1980 has been overwhelmingly capitalist that Melanesian Socialism accepts capitalism in practice but abhors it in theory? During the years of Lini's stewardship of the Vanuatu state, the capitalist structures inherited from the colonial powers have been further entrenched rather than diminished. To be sure, there has been limited state intervention in the Vanuatu market economy and some public equity participation in businesses established by foreign firms. But none of these modifications has struck at the root of the profit-based free enterprise mode of production and distribution in Vanuatu. In the political arena, the inherited parliamentary model from the West continues to operate without significant structural alteration. No attempt has been made by Lini to share power with his Melanesian compatriots in the opposition parties. The consultative grass-roots mechanism of party organization embodied in the practices of the ruling Vanuaaku Pati points to a desire to inform state policy by popular participation. In this respect, the Vanuaaku Pati can claim that its practice of Melanesian Socialism points to grass-roots government through party organization. Yet nothing has yet been put forth about the party institution and its form (one-party versus multi-party) in relation to institutional polities of Melanesian Socialism. As it is set forth in the Vanuaaku Pati constitution, the party's decisions are the preeminent and paramount guide to government policy. There have been several crises and schismatic divisions in the Vanuaaku Pati about the obligation of the government to follow the directives of the party. Prime Minister Lini, himself, has been repeatedly accused of dictatorial leadership

because of his periodic refusal to follow party decisions and directives. In part, much of this problem stems from a failure of the Vanuaaku Pati to engage in a critical evaluation of the institutional structures that are congruent with the broad doctrines embodied in Melanesian Socialism.

How does Melanesian Socialism relate the polity to society? In Marxist socialism, the answer is expressed in a general theory; these relationships are set forth: property relations determine political structure and class relations. Like any ideological system, such as capitalism or Marxism, Melanesian Socialism must propound some theory about the connections between various aspects of social structure. In doing so, it also needs to state its theory of social change to indicate how it proposes to alter the social order to attain its objectives. Marxism, like capitalism, identifies certain underlying forces such as profit or class conflict as the features that catalyze historical change. How do things happen in the Melanesian Socialist cosmological order? What are the levers of change and how do they operate? If these vital missing components are not specified, it does not mean that the proponents have yet to develop these ideas. It is clear, however, that unless quick attention is paid to these questions, the detractors of Melanesian Socialism can easily draw their own conclusions about the ideological authenticity of Melanesian Socialism and even the sincerity and intellectual powers of its proponents. For instance, the five-year Development Plan released by the Vanuaaku Pati government has led one analyst to describe it as "common place capitalist development" belying the socialist claims of the Lini regime.³⁹

As an ideological structure, then, Melanesian Socialism is underdeveloped. At this point in its evolution, there is no reason to condemn it with finality. Conceivably, its adherents are still talking and thinking about it. No living ideology comes into the world fully developed and ready for delivery. On the anvil of challenge and experience its details can creatively evolve. A few simple ideas can offer a nucleus of beliefs, serving as takeoff points to further growth and progressive development over time into a more complete and comprehensive edifice of faith. It is in this sense that one can call Melanesian Socialism an ideology, albeit an incipient ideology. Clearly, fast action is needed lest the actions of the Vanuaaku-led government flounder without ideological direction.

Melanesian Socialism, even in its rudimentary doctrinal form and in its inconsistencies, serves many salutary purposes. Hurt by colonialism, diverted from ancient moorings, and humiliated by alien intrusion, the ni-Vanuatans need an assertive palliative to view the past, to restore their confidence, and to chart a new course. Melanesian Socialism explains

Vanuatu's poverty and dependence in terms of European colonial practices. It supplies a salve for a deep wound inflicted by alien domination and a convincing explanation of the current state of affairs. Further, an independent state needs unity and a common identity to attain its objectives of economic development. Traditional precolonial Melanesia, including the Vanuatu archipelago, was riven by internal interclan, interethnic, and interisland dissension and strife. In postindependence Vanuatu, some mechanism is required to facilitate unity. Melanesian Socialism is nationalist in scope, drawing ni-Vanuatu together by its mythology of the past and its vision of the future. All ideologies that have succeeded in crisis situations do this. They rewrite and reinterpret history in contemplation of contemporary needs. Melanesian Socialism under the charismatic Lini, backed up by his grassroots-based Vanuaaku Pati, organizes the perceptions, emotions, and energies of the ni-Vanuatu toward common nationalist goals. Vanuatu, like nearly all states in the Third World, needs to unite to survive. Melanesian Socialism offers visions of a new unity over the entrenched traditional mosaic of rival clans and divergent cultures.

NOTES

1. H. Fraser, "Accusations Fly in Libya Trip Wrangle," *Pacific Islands Monthly*, January 1987, 19.
2. W. Lini, *Statement to the 38th Session of the United Nations General Assembly* (New York, 1983), 7-8.
3. Ibid., 6.
4. Ibid., 7.
5. Ibid., 9.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 10.
8. Ibid., 8.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. W. Lini, *Beyond Pandemonium: New Hebrides to Vanuatu* (Suva, 1980), 14.
12. Lini, *Statement to the 38th Session*, 9.
13. Ibid.
14. See R. Premdas, "Papua New Guinea: Internal Problems of Rapid Political Change," *Asian Survey* 15, no. 12 (1975): 1054-1076.

15. See B. Narakobi, *The Melanesian Way* (Suva, 1983).
16. J. Jupp and M. Sawyer, "The New Hebrides: From Condominium to Independence," *Australian Outlook* 33 (1979): 15-26.
17. J. Jupp, "The Development of Party Politics in the New Hebrides," *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 17 (1979): 264-280.
18. Lini, *Statement to the 38th Session*, 8.
19. R. Premdas and J. Steeves, *Decentralisation and Development in Melanesia* (Suva, 1984); see also R. Premdas and J. Steeves, "The Evolution of the Administrative and Political Content of Decentralisation in Vanuatu," *Public Administration and Development* 4 (1984).
20. R. Premdas, "Secession and Decentralisation in Political Change: Vanuatu," *Kabar Sebarang* 15 (1986).
21. C. Plant, *The New Hebrides-- The Road to Independence* (Suva, 1977).
22. R. Shears, *The Coconut War: The Crisis of Espiritu Santo* (London, 1980).
23. Premdas and Steeves, *Decentralisation and Development*.
24. See R. Premdas and M. Howard, "Vanuatu's Foreign Policy: Contradictions and Constraints," *Australian Outlook* 39, no. 3 (1985).
25. *Islands Business* 9, no. 9 (1983): 36. There are some indications that Lini may realign his relations away from Britain and more favorably toward France. See "Lini Speaks Out in Plain Language," *Pacific Islands Monthly*, April 1986, 17.
26. *First National Development Plan 1982-86 (Vanuatu)* (Vila, Vanuatu, 1982), 1-210.
27. D. Shineberg, *They Came For Sandalwood* (Melbourne, 1967).
28. For these and the other economic statistics that follow, see *Economist Intelligence Unit 1986-87* (London, 1987), 64-70. Also see Premdas and Howard, "Vanuatu's Foreign Policy."
29. "Lini Pleads for Understanding of the Melanesian Renaissance," *Pacific Islands Monthly* 53, no. 4 (1982): 25-28.
30. For a full discussion of Fanon on this feature of the colonial question, see R. Premdas, "Ideology, Pragmatism, and Great Power Rivalry in the Pacific," in *Foreign Forces in the Pacific*, edited by R. Crocombe and A. Ali (Suva, 1983).
31. M. Rodman, "Masters of Tradition: Customary Land Tenure and New Forms of Social Inequality in a Vanuatu Peasantry," *American Ethnologist*, February 1984, 77.
32. Ibid.
33. W. Rodman and M. Rodman, "Rethinking Kastom: On the Politics of Place Naming in Vanuatu" (Mimeo., MacMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, May 1984), 9.
34. Ibid.
35. R. Tonkinson, "National Identity and the Problem of Kastom in Vanuatu," *Mankind* 13, no. 4 (August 1982): 306-315.

36. See J. Larcon, "The Invention of Tradition," *Mankind* 13, no. 4 (August 1982): 330-337.
37. Lini, *Statement to the 38th Session*, 8.
38. *Ibid.*, 22.
39. M. C. Howard, "Vanuatu: The Myth of Melanesian Socialism," *Labour, Capital, and Society* 16, no. 2 (1983): 191.