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PRESS STATEMENT ISSUED BY MALCOLM FRASER, M.P., MEMBER FOR WANNON.

The Commonwealth Parliament recently amended the Papua and New Guinea Bill which is, in fact, the Constitution of New Guinea. The changes represent a most important landmark in the progress towards self-government for New Guinea and Papua.

Perhaps I should describe briefly the old Legislative Council and the changes that the Government has introduced.

The old Council consisted of 29 Members, including the Administrator. In this old Council there were 17 official Members and 12 non-official Members. The official Members are all appointed by the Commonwealth Government and therefore it is clear that the Administrator had a ready-made majority for anything that he wished to do in the Territory. This was all right in the initial stages of self-government, but the time has now come for more authority to be vested in the local people of both native and non-native origin.

In the old Council, all Members except 3 native Members appointed by the Governor-General were non-native. In the new Council, all appointments, whether of official or non-official Members, will be open to natives as well as non-natives. The Commonwealth has laid it down in the Act that there should be not less than 11 native Members in the new Council. There is no statutory maximum; there is only a statutory minimum. There is nothing in the law to prevent all the Members being native Members although this, in practice, would not happen. Of this bare minimum of 11, 5 of the natives would be appointed and 6 would be elected. The elected native Members will not be elected in the general fashion to which we are accustomed in this country. The reason for this is that there are still a great number of natives of New Guinea and Papua who have had little contact with the workings of democratic institutions and therefore it has been felt that, for a transitional period, the native Members should be elected in an Electoral College which will be formed from representatives of the different native local government bodies.

It must be emphasised that the ultimate objective of the Government is the common roll on which both natives and non-natives would have their names placed.

This increase in the extent of native representation is one of the most significant changes in this new Constitution for the Territory.

The other changes are these.

The Legislative Council of the Territory is being expanded from 29 to 37. I have already said that in the old Council there were 17 official Members and only 3 native Members the rest being elected or appointed non-natives. Under the new Council there will be only 15 official Members and 22 non-official Members, therefore, for any measure that the Administrator wishes to have brought into effect he must obtain the support of some of the non-official Members. There is no ready-made majority for the Government or administration policy. This will place a great deal more weight in the hands of the local people.

As progress in New Guinea continues, there will be further changes which will place more and more authority in the hands of
local inhabitants until the Territory attains full self-government as a multi-racial, prosperous and peaceful community.

The present changes represent a step towards this end. What has been achieved is all the more praiseworthy when you consider the fact that the last war destroyed all the administration and services that had previously existed.

Since 1945, 32 thousand Australian public servants have been attracted to the Territory. 300 native members of the Public Service have been recruited and there are 7½ thousand native employees in the Administration. There are 5 main ports properly equipped; 5,000 miles of road and 100 airfields. Normal services supplied by the Government have been improved and extended. Good hospital services are available throughout the Territory. 200,000 native pupils are taught in either Government or Mission schools. The vigorous Agriculture Department has 250 trained native extension officers engaged in improving village agriculture. Furthermore, law and order have been established over 50,000 square miles of country which was previously in a state of savagery.

These facts represent the bare outline of a notable achievement in a short period, and it is worth noting that the development of the Territory is not made easier by the fact that there are reputed to be over 200 separate native languages.

When you have regard to the Australian achievement in developing the Territory and in placing more and more political responsibility in the local population and when you consider that Australia spends about £16M. in the Territory each year for no return at all, it is clear that Australians have a record of which they can be proud in the Territory. When the facts are known as they are to many Australians and as they are to people overseas who pay an interest in these affairs, it is difficult to understand how Mr. Khrushchev can make vicious charges of colonialism against us. What we do in the Territory is done because of a sense of obligation and of duty, without return to ourselves except the pride that we can take in the development of what will ultimately be an independent nation whose goodwill we hope to have and to earn.
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