PRESS STATEMENT

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PAPUA & NEW GUINEA

Over the last week you will probably have seen reports in the newspapers which criticised the Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck, in the strongest possible terms. One member from Queensland, who comes from my side of the House, went so far as to say that the Minister should be moved to some other position. I disagree completely with the charges that were made, and I thought you may be interested to know some of the background of what has been going on.

When looking at the problems of New Guinea it should be remembered that there are nearly two million natives and about thirty thousand whites. The two million natives are broken up into many tribes with different languages. The Government's policy has been, over its term of office, to develop New Guinea for the natives of the area. There is no intention, nor will there ever be any intention of developing New Guinea for a few thousand whites, some of whom regard themselves as a superior type of animal. White people are welcomed in New Guinea if they are of the right kind. The sort of white person who is a hangover from old colonial days and who thinks that a packet of cigarettes is sufficient wages for a week's work would do much better to stay away. On the other hand, there are many white people in New Guinea who are doing a magnificent job. There are many with plantations who help the natives to improve their own farming and agricultural techniques. Such people do a lot of good for race relationship between the natives and the Australians, such people are almost certainly in the majority in New Guinea. The very few in the Territory who wish the area to be developed in the interests of the whites only have, for a long time, been disturbed at the progress and success of the Government's efforts to help the natives take charge of their own affairs.

When the Government decided last year to replace most of the export and import taxes or customs duty by a relatively low income tax these people seized the opportunity to make a lot of noise. They violently objected to the income tax which had not hitherto been levied on people in New Guinea, and completely ignored the fact that the total level of taxes raised from the Territory was not going to be increased. This issue made it possible to arouse a certain amount of enthusiasm for
attacks on the Government and on the Minister for Territories, but I repeat these attacks have been made by people who have the interests of the white minority at heart rather than the interests of the native population.

So far as New Guinea is concerned Australians must remember that the eyes of all South East Asia, and of the United Nations, are watching what we are doing. There may be many who expect, or even hope, that we will fall into the kind of error that has been made in South Africa. While a man of Mr. Hasluck’s character, integrity and strength of purpose is in charge of the Territories that will not happen. It does not matter very much if a Minister loses the confidence of a few white people in Australia or in New Guinea, what is important is that he should maintain the confidence of the natives of New Guinea.

The Minister and the Government have had quite marked success over the last ten years, there are now 28 native local government councils and more are being formed each year. There are 16,000 native children attending administration schools, and a further 25,000 attending mission schools. Unfortunately, not all the children have been brought within the reach of schools, and much expansion remains to be done over the next few years. In the last six years the number of schools has been increased from eighty-eight to two hundred and twenty-two, and the number of native teachers has been increased from 222 to 523. The Department of Territories is doing a great deal to improve and expand agriculture. 1,900 native farmers have received agricultural training, and in this year it is proposed to increase the number of trainees to a total of 780. Extension work is assisted by 150 native agricultural officers and 15 new extension centres will be constructed this year.

Rural industries are expanding rapidly. 100,000 tons of copra is exported each year and acreage producing cocoa has been increased from 8,000 ten years ago to 56,000 now. There are 6,000 miles of roads in the Territory and 500 miles were added to the total last year.

Progress in an area like New Guinea and Papua can only be slow because of the difficulty of the country, the backwardness of many of the natives and the multiplicity of languages, there is no common language for the different tribes. Having regard to the background the
the Minister's achievements over the last few years have been quite notable. Criticisms of his administration have not been based on impartial review of the facts, they have rather been made by people who tend to look to their own interests rather than the interests of the natives of New Guinea and Papua.

It is the Government's hope that these territories will, one day, reach full democratic self-government. It is impossible to set a time table for this, but when the day does come we hope that the people of New Guinea will want to maintain close ties with Australia. Whether they do or not depends upon our efforts in the next few years.