

# The effects of nationalist movements essay



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The effects of Nationalist movements against Colonisation in the Pacific was immense and was at its peak from the beginning of the 1900's towards the end of the century. It marked the end of Colonialism in the region and the rise of new nations self-governed by the native people. Thus, it was a sacrifice and a commitment made by our forefathers, with their lives at stake. Therefore, this paper will identify and discuss the causes and the effects of protest in the Pacific, using the Mau movement in Samoa and the Maasina Ruru in the Solomon Island as an example.

Also several sources will be utilised to broaden and justify the validity of the arguments and facts given. This is because, of the complex issue of acquiring reliable information about the two movements. Firstly, the Mau Movement in Samoa was an example of a prolonged and lengthy process of Nationalism in the Pacific. This is because it was an active movement widely endorsed by the natives to represent its voice in the government. However, the stereotype and arrogance of the New Zealand administrators at the time led to more disputes and catastrophic impacts.

The Mau remained true to this sentiment, and despite the exile of Nelson, continued to use civil disobedience to oppose the New Zealand administration. They boycotted imported products, refused to pay taxes and formed their own " police force", picketing stores in Apia to prevent the payment of customs to the authorities. Village committees established by the administration ceased to meet and government officials were ignored when they went on tour. Births and deaths went unregistered. Coconuts went unharvested, and the banana plantations were neglected.

As the select committee was forced to admit, “ a very substantial proportion of Samoans had joined the Mau, a number quite sufficient, if they determined to resist and thwart the activities of the Administration, to paralyse the functions of government. ” Richardson sent a warship and a 70-strong force of marines to quell the largely non-violent resistance. 400 Mau members were arrested, but others responded by giving themselves up in such numbers that there were insufficient jail cells to detain them all, and the prisoners came and went as they pleased.

One group of prisoners found themselves in a three-sided “ cell” which faced the ocean, and were able to swim away to tend to their gardens and visit their families. With his attempt at repression turning to ridicule, Richard offered pardons to all those arrested; however, arrestees demanded to be dealt with by the court, and then refused to enter pleas to demonstrate their rejection of the court’s jurisdiction. In Western Samoa, however, welfare-state thinking was far from acceptable; the European residents still believed in the principles of *laissez-faire*.

The functions of government, so they claimed, should be limited: the Administration should not interfere in or compete with private business, or place restrictions on the individual. Prohibition was viewed, therefore, not only as a practical inconvenience but as an infringement on individual liberties. Education should be left as much as possible to private organisations such as the missions; the only function of government was to give financial aid to these organisations. Government expenditure should also be limited, severely.

The imposition of new taxes and the reliance on loans were unnecessary burdens on the individual; eventual bankruptcy was the inevitable result of this fiscal policy. The civil service was an evil in itself and a drain on finances. (An unnecessary drain because the expatriate officials were incompetent). Richardson's decision to handle high-grade Samoan copra frightened the European community partly because of the principle involved but mainly because of the drastic effects it might have on private business.

According to Richardson, the scheme was an attempt to improve the quality of Samoan copra, and give the producer higher returns for his produce, which previously had been sold to the merchants at a fixed-price. The Minister agreed, in 1926, to let New Zealand Reparation Estates handle Samoan copra. The merchants argued that they had not been given the chance to offer a higher price for high-grade copra, that advances, made by N. Z. R. E. on copra received, were far too high in relation to world prices; that the Administration, on principle, should not compete with private business.

In general, the Samoans supported these European complaints. The Samoans resented the government officials because of the preferential treatment accorded to them, financially and socially. If the Administration could not repay the loans, the Samoans believed that they would lose more of their freedom. They saw the medical tax as a drain on personal finance; some considered the medical dispensaries as being of no use because they lived so far away from them. A century of Christianity had turned them into religious conformists, believing that the missions should be encouraged (and left) to develop education.

When it came to political matters and those connected to custom, there were no significant differences between the views of the Europeans and Samoans. Richardson was a 'dictator', who had absorbed into himself certain powers, which rightfully belonged to the chiefly elite; and, by using these powers he had and was humiliating the Samoans. Richardson had created a political and administrative pyramid in which all the personnel were his subordinates. He had also used the power of banishment, embodied in the Samoan Offenders Ordinance, 1922, to subjugate the chiefly elite. At least those who did not obey his personal dictates).

The power of banishment had been used by Dr Solf, but the liberal manner with which Richardson had (and was) wielding it aroused widespread antagonism. To banish a Tama-a-aiga was a complete perversion of custom. But Richardson had done this in 1924: he had banished and deprived Tamasese Lealofi III of his title, over the matter of a hedge which belonged to Tamasese but, according to the Administration, was growing on someone else's land.

Richardson, while on an official tour of Savaii, had ignored a ifoga<sup>80</sup> made to him by Tamasese and the matai of his village. <sup>81</sup> Insulted, enraged, Tamasese had left the village, to which he had been confined, and had immediately organised Samoan support against Richardson. Richardson, in turn had imprisoned him. After the Mau got under way, Richardson used the Ordinance almost with abandonment. He still believed that he could stem the tide by using the legal spades of repression.

Fifty Samoans, many of whom were matai of powerful standing, suffered under the Ordinance between June and September, 1927. These banishments and deprivations of titles were often carried out on the advice of a committee of Faipule. 82 Samoan antagonism was focused primarily on the Fono of Faipule. The Fono, according to its critics, was not representative of the people. Most of its members still held office for an indefinite period; appointments could only be terminated by the Administrator even though Richardson, after consulting the district, filled any vacancy with a new three-year appointment.

The Administrator had also made the recent appointments and had simply asked the district matai to give their approval of them. Consequently, the Faipule were seen not as district representatives but government officials who owed their status and position to the Administrator, officials who had supported policies of reform recommended by expatriate officials because their appointments were dependent on the Administration's continuing patronage. Because of this, extremely unsuitable policies had been imposed on the population.

Some of these policies had clashed headlong with tradition, had challenged the authority of the traditional chiefly elite. Policies regarding land tenure, banishment, and district councils were considered in direct opposition to the traditional power structure. The composition of district councils had often perverted the traditional political structure of the districts. In these district councils, some Faipule were accorded authority not theirs according to ancient traditions and customs.

Schemes for the individualisation of land threatened to weaken the authority of the matai over the untitled groups. Banishment made a mockery of the authority of the traditional elite: even the highest ranking matai could be deprived of their titles at the will of the Administrator and the Fono of Faipule. The bewildering mass of ordinances passed, by the Fono, for the implementation of other policies, such as village cleanliness and the gathering of rhinoceros beetles, had placed an onerous burden of duties on the people. 3

Such a load, so it was felt, could only be lightened by the appointment of Faipule whose appointments were fully in the hands of the districts; men who did not owe their positions to the Administrator, and would, therefore, voice the opinions of their districts, honestly. Not only did the Mau want the Fono of Faipule to be truly representative, but they also wanted the Samoans to have a voice in the Legislative Council. The Samoans refuted and resented the long-lasting and humiliating claim, by the Administration, that the official members of the Council were adequately representing Samoan interests.

The Mau argued that official and unofficial members should be equal in number, with the Administrator acting as chairman and exercising a casting vote. The Mau also wanted the creation of an elected and independent board of finance. In the case of the Solomon Islands, the Masina Ruru or Marching Rule Movement started on Malaita soon after the Second World War with the aim of uniting people to look after themselves and their own affairs. The movement was founded by Mr. Nori and Timothy George of South Malaita in 1945.

The two men thought they had a better way of ruling Malaita with chiefs over family line and districts. They had nine chiefs and together they thought they would make a better way of living for the people without government officers, missionaries or white people. The Brotherhood or Masina Ruru, pronounced “ Marching Rule” by Europeans was formed when people from different places came together and they built large villages. They also built strong fences round these villages to keep police and government officers out.

The movement which swept across this small island nation during the 1945-1950 period, had profound effect on the people of the time. It’s hard to believe that this small nation at a time when all Africa lay in the grip of colonial powers–India itself was still a British colony–that the Solomon Islanders was asking for their independence. > From humble beginnings, Maasina Ruru, ignited a whole people at a time when communications, transport, education, economic activity and a host of other nation-building essentials were only starting to become a reality in the Solomons.

In their days, they could only ask for structural change and hope that the power forces of their day would at least listen to them and perhaps do something critical about bringing these changes to pass. We, on the other hand, can not only demand structural change, have it gladly paid for by the Intervention force itself but we would literally be in charge of the very change we wish to introduce. Participants united across traditional religious, ethnic, and clan lines, lived in fortified nontraditional villages, and refused to cooperate with the British.



The organization of the movement on Malaita was considerable. The island was divided into nine districts, roughly along the lines of the government administrative districts, and leaders were selected for each district. Courts were set up, each led by a custom chief (alaha'ohu), who became powerful figures. The British initially treated the movement cautiously, even praised aspects of it, but when they found there could be no common ground between the government and the movement, retaliated firmly, with armed police patrols, insisting that the chiefs recant or be arrested.

Some did recant, but in September 1947 most were tried in Honiara, charged with terrorism or robbery, and convicted to years of hard labour. In those early days people believed that Britain was weak and poor and America was rich and strong. They thought that the Americans would return one day with great gifts and everything would be easy, peaceful and happy. Most of the leading men in the "Masina Ruru" were teachers and leaders in the South Seas Evangelical Mission. They were good organizers so they wanted to do many things for the people, but they were very hard on the people who did not want to join them.

They would not work with the British Government at all. As they had learnt to go against the Japanese during the war, so they went against the government. As the movement grew stronger both in strength and number it quickly spread to Guadalcanal, Savo, Makira and Isabel. The British Government decided to end the movement and in 1947, the nine chiefs and eleven others were arrested and put in prison for leading the people against the government, and for not paying tax. About 2,000 people involved in the

movement were also arrested and imprisoned. In 1950 the leaders were set free and by 1952 "Masina Ruru" had come to an end.

However, the movement continued underground, and new leaders renamed the organization the Federal Council. The High Commissioner visited Malaita to negotiate a settlement, and proposed the formation of the Malaita Council, which would have a president elected by members, though they would have to recognize the government's authority and agree to cooperate with their administrators. The council became the first installment of local government in the Solomon Islands and its first president was Salana Ga'a. The establishment of the council reduced the tension on Malaita, although Maasina Rule elements did continue until at least 1955.

The council was shown not to be simply appeasement, but submitted nearly seventy resolutions and recommendations to the High Commissioner in its first two years of existence. To conclude, the nationalist movement in the two Pacific Island countries, showed the determination of the local to pursue independence, despite the ultimate sacrifice. It sent a strong message to the colonial powers, of the desperation of the local people to challenge the authority of these superpowers, which pushed them to their limits and attract the attention of the United Nations to consider independence.