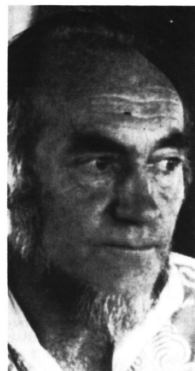


ALL customary tenures in the Pacific provided for a significant element of taxation, in the true sense of contributions in labour, food, service and otherwise to the community. The defence, public works and related responsibilities are now carried by central and local governments, but there is considerable resistance to transferring the relevant taxes to them, usually on the grounds that it has no customary precedent - but it has.

It is not practicable to impose money taxes on all customary lands, but it is both feasible and generally desirable to do so for those which have a reasonable production potential. But foreign aid in the Pacific islands is so abundant that governments avoid unpopular land taxes and rely instead on handouts. The inevitable reduction of self-reliance and the negative impact on agricultural productivity is unfortunate, but unlikely to change in the existing political context.

- Ron Crocombe, Director of the Institute of Pacific Studies, in *Land Tenure and Agricultural Development in the Pacific Islands*, Taiwan: Food & Fertilizer Technology Center, Extension Bulletin No. 187, 1983.



• Ron Crocombe

The

AUSTRALIA'S original inhabitants, the aboriginals who were culturally decimated by the white colonists, have taken their campaign for land rights back to the Mother of Parliaments in Westminster, writes Ian Barron.

Two representatives were present at the launch of the London-based Anti-Slavery Society's report *Aborigines Today: Land and Justice*, written by Dr. Julian Burger.

Mr Burger toured the continent taking evidence. "Most people expressed concern that the present government had made a commitment in 1983 to provide land rights for all aboriginal people, giving them the opportunity to own land in inalienable freehold, but the pledge had never been honoured. Hopes had been raised and then dashed."

The aboriginals want a clear affirmation that they owned the land, and white settlers should pay them rent for the sites which they occupied.

"The obvious consequence of this is that lands that they are not renting revert back to aboriginal ownership and control, rather than being described as Crown lands," states an advertisement published by the Aboriginal Land Council of Victoria. "In effect the payment of rent would mean that non-aboriginal Australia will at last, after 200 years, recognise black sovereignty of this country."

Mr Robbie Thorpe, chairman of the Koorie Information Centre, Fitzroy, Victoria, insisted that a policy of genocide continued in the country that is celebrating its bicentenary. Britain's prosperity had been at the expense of aboriginal children.

"This report condemns Aus-

Trading places

THE FIRST military coup in the South Pacific was led by Col. Sitiveni Rabuka.

Last year, Fiji elected a coalition government dominated by Indians, and the Colonel did not like it. His men marched out of the barracks to overthrow the democratically-elected government.

To the rest of the world, this was a typical case of an upstart soldier taking power into his own hands; who committed an unpardonable offence against democratic values and institutions; who had forgotten that he was paid to defend the realm, not take control over it.

That was the picture painted by the media. For the instant analyses failed to identify the source of the problem, which is that the indigenous peoples had finally asserted themselves after 150 years of religious and cultural domination by colonial powers.

They were worried that the Indians, the descendants of the indentured labourers who were imported by the British farmers to work their estates, were poised to replace their former colonial masters.

By PETER POOLE

Rabuka expresses the discontent articulated by the Taukei, or sacred owners of the soil. A founder of the movement is Inoke Kubuabola, a devout Baptist who was appointed Fiji's information minister. He explained:

"We believe this land was given to us by God. The Indians came in 1879, brought in by the British to work the sugar. They multiplied. During the wars, they didn't want to go and fight. Our Fijian men went and they stayed back to multiply and make money."

Now the ethnic Fijians are slightly outnumbered by Indians in the population of about 715,000. The indigenous people are losing their land to the Indians, and they feared that if this was capped with political power there was nothing left for the original occupants of the Pacific paradise.

So in marched Rabuka's soldiers.

Right or wrong, the fact is that there can be no resolution of the problem until the original grievance - the erosion of traditional rights to land - are satisfactorily resolved.

• *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appeared in 1850 and not as stated in our last issue.

big steal

ALIEN FORCE



• Stating their case... Thorpe, left, and Shields

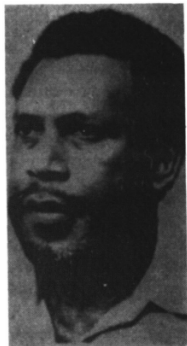
tralia, and I hope that something is done about it, because we have got people dying in gaols and we can't take any more. We see the actions of the Queen, who is going out there to condone the actions of the last 200 years, as an aggressive act against the aboriginal people."

Richie Shields, a film maker and story teller, said that the centenary celebrates "the biggest real estate land sale in the world."

Talking passionately in Committee Room 13 of the House of Commons, he declared: "Charles Darwin said we were the missing link, so white Australians don't see us as human. They want to steal our culture, steal our land, but they want us to have the white man's face and lust for money." Hitler, he said, would be happy to see what was going on in Australia today. The bi-centenary was "a celebration of our holocaust."

Some land had been given to them in South Australia, but it was useless, he claimed.

The two aboriginal spokesmen wanted the whites to recognise their sovereignty over the land, the rent from which would help them to restore the culture which had enabled them to survive for 40,000 years on the continent. "Our land claim doesn't take one



• Leonard Maenu'u

EUROPEANS, weaned on the notion that there is nothing special about property rights in land, have difficulty in understanding the cultural consequences of colonial interference with traditional societies, writes Fred Harrison.

Throughout the world, man's biological and cultural evolution was inextricably associated with the way he related to the ecological environment.

Land was not a commodity to be bought and sold; members of a community were not denied fair access to the resources of nature: these were the inventions of civilisation.

The peoples who, over the millennia, migrated to the South Pacific islands, were lucky: they had settled in a paradise where the minimum of work was required to give them a good living and plenty of time for cultural enrichment and recreational pleasure.

The white man, with missionaries often in the vanguard, sought to change the rules in these island-locked gardens of Eden. And only now are the ethnic

scholars beginning to document the results.

Leonard Maenu'u, a former Commissioner of Lands in the Solomon Islands, explains the contrasting land ethic which created cultural conflicts on his own island of Kwara'ae:

"Our land tenure really consisted of a system of rights of usage from which we knew what units of our society held what land, and the extent of rights of land usage. People didn't attempt to exceed these, and in fact there were few disputes over land."

The colonial power introduced institutional problems, which included courts (notably land courts), which were simply means by which an alien system was directly imposed upon our Kwara'ae system. Over the years, experience showed that the two could not work together. Ours was based on humanity and *distribution of wealth*, while the other was that of English-speaking societies which tend to be individualistic and favour the accumulation of wealth."

Pacific know-how

A FINE body of knowledge has begun to be assembled by students and teachers working with and under Ron Crocombe, the Director of the Institute of Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific. These include:

Crocombe, R.G., *Land Tenure in the Cook Islands*, Melbourne, OUP, 1964.
Crocombe, R.G., *Improving Land Tenure*, South Pacific Commission, Noumea, New Caledonia,

Technical Paper No 159. Kalauni, Solomona, et al., *Land Tenure in Niue*, Institute of Pacific Studies, 1977.

Larmour, Peter, Ron Crocombe and Anna Taugenga, editors, *Land, People and Government: Public Lands Policy in the South Pacific*, Univ. of the South Pacific, 1981.
Larmour, Peter, editor, *Land Tenure in Vanuatu*, Institute of Pacific Studies, 1984.

Maenu'u, Leonard P., *Bib-Kami na Ano: Land and Land Problems in Kwara'ae*, Honiara: Solomon Islands Centre, 1981.

Report of the Regional Conference on Land Management, Institute of Pacific Studies, 1981.

Watta, Ben, et al., *Land in Solomon Islands*, Institute of Pacific Studies, 1979.

* The University of the South Pacific's address: P.O. Box 1168, Suva, Fiji.

piece of land from anybody," harmony with the whites, provided they enjoyed the opportunity of self-determination.

They were willing to live in