

**THE BOUGAINVILLE LAND CRISIS
OF 1969**

The Role of Moral Re-Armament

Nigel Cooper

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Abbreviations

RTZ = Rio Tinto Zinc

CRA = Conzinc Riotinto of Australia Ltd

BCL = Bougainville Copper Ltd

Series Foreword

The Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies was founded in 1988 through a bequest made by the late Professor John Macmillan Brown, a distinguished Pacific Scholar and a founding Professor of the University of Canterbury. Its task is to facilitate the "investigation and research of the history, tradition, customs, laws and ideas of the peoples of the Pacific". Its focus is on the indigenous peoples of Oceania, including New Zealand.

The Centre encourages research and publication in the fields described above. Research Scholarships and grants in aid enable visiting researchers to come to Christchurch and the Director and associated academics participate in the teaching programme of the University.

The Occasional Paper Series is intended to make the results of study and research of Pacific topics available to both the general public and the scholarly community. The aim is to present interesting material in non technical language and to make it available in low cost format.

The story on Bougainville has been prepared by Nigel Cooper, a student in history at the University of Canterbury, who was himself involved in the events which he describes. It provides one important perspective on events in this part of Papua New Guinea at an important point in its modern history.

The Bougainville Land Crisis Of 1969

I record my appreciation to Mr Tony Shatford and Mrs Kate Scott, who have provided skills for layout and word-processing, and to Drs. John Overton and Garth Cant for their work as Series Editors.

Dr Malama Meleisea

Director

Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies

University of Canterbury

Christchurch

New Zealand

Author's Preface

I have had the privilege of visiting Papua New Guinea many times beginning in 1967, always at the invitation of Papua New Guineans. They wanted help to put into practice the ideas of Moral Re-Armament. A colleague, George Wood, and I were on Bougainville with Paul Lapun, the key figure in the story, at the time of the first violence breaking out in 1969 over the oncoming copper mine. (Plate 1) We were showing a Moral Re-Armament film, *Freedom*, which plays a significant part in this story.

In this paper, I set out the background to the Rorovana land crisis, and explore the part people connected with Moral Re-Armament played in effecting a solution to it. I do not attempt to give a complete history of the mining operation, nor to evaluate other parties' roles in the dispute – Bougainville nationalists, Australian MPs, academics, journalists, unionists and the Catholic Church also played their parts. (See, for instance, Downs (1980), Fingleton (1970), Griffin (1970) and West (1972). For a full treatment of legislation concerning the copper development, land resumption and leases agreed, compensation policies and payments, see Bedford and Mamak (1977).)

Having read several dozen accounts of what happened in the crisis, I realised that little is known about this aspect of the story. This is not surprising. The spiritual factor in international affairs is not easy to prove, let alone explain.

The resolution of the Rorovana crisis led to negotiations eventually enabling the mine to go ahead, formally agreed to by the Bougainville people in April 1973. However, the planned renegotiation of the overall Agreement every seven years since never took place. The reasons for this are complex, not widely

known, and beyond the scope of this paper to examine.

The violence on Bougainville during 1988-91, which caused the cessation of the copper mine, is linked more with the demands by nationalists for secession than with the mine. A start to resolving it was made on board the New Zealand navy ship HMNZS *Endeavour* in August 1990. Two colleagues, Alan Weeks and Mohan Bhagwandas of Australia, and I were on board the ship during the talks, invited by the Hon. Bernard Narokobi, Attorney General and Minister of Justice, who was one of the chief Government negotiators. More recently, two of my colleagues have been on Bougainville helping to build human bridges.

I am grateful to many people who read and made comments on earlier versions of this paper – Sir Paul Lapun, Former Minister for Mines, Papua New Guinea, Sir John Gorton, former Prime Minister of Australia, Sir David Hay, former Administrator of Papua New Guinea, Ray Whitrod, former Commissioner of Police, Papua New Guinea, Talbot Lovering, former lawyer with the Public Trust Office of Papua New Guinea and George Wood and James Coulter of Moral Re-Armament. Also to staff of the *Journal of Pacific History*, Canberra, in which journal a shortened version of this paper appears in March, 1991. I am also grateful to staff of the University of Canterbury: Dr Malama Meleisea, Director of the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, and his staff, for computer and printing facilities and Dr Ian Campbell of the History Department, for helpful advice and ceaseless encouragement over three years.

Nigel Cooper
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November 1991



Frontispiece: Cradle of conflict: Bougainville copper mine.

The Bougainville Land Crisis Of 1969



Plates 1: Paul Lapun and the author: 1969 and 1989.

Introduction

In July 1969, Sir Val Duncan, the Chairman of London-based Rio Tinto Zinc (RTZ), one of the world's biggest mining companies, described the copper mine on Bougainville Island in Papua New Guinea as "the jewel in our crown".¹ Yet less than a month later, Sydney newspapers carried the headlines: *Bloody Thugs, Australia's Shame* and *Australia's Bullies in New Guinea*.² The violent conflict involving Conzinc Riotinto of Australia Ltd (CRA, an RTZ subsidiary), the Australian Administration for Papua New Guinea and traditional landowners in Rorovana village of South Bougainville culminated in police using force to remove protesters from Rorovana land being surveyed for mining purposes. To many people's surprise, the crisis was peacefully resolved by 6 September 1969.

The Rorovana settlement enabled the opening of the world's largest open-cut copper mine, producing about \$NZ2.5 million worth of copper, gold and silver a day. For 17 years, Bougainville Copper Ltd (BCL) was the biggest single contributor to the Papua New Guinea budget, accounting annually for between 16% and 20% of the country's internal revenue. Its 1988 year profit was \$NZ210 million. BCL is owned 53.6% by CRA, 19.1% by the Papua New Guinea Government and the rest by over 9000 individuals and groups in Papua New Guinea.³

The key figure in the story is Mr (now Sir) Paul Lapun, who

¹*Australian Financial Review*, 17 July 1969.

²*The Sun, The Daily Mirror*, 6 August 1969.

³*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 3 August 1989, 18.

became the country's first knight in 1974. He once said to me: "I believe that the future unity of Papua New Guinea will depend on the unity of ten or twelve men in the cabinet." And he was to become one of them in 1972 when he was made Minister of Mines and Energy. He believed that if the members of the Cabinet, who came from most districts of the Territory, could work together, then the whole country could find unity. The inner conviction which drove Lapun along was that "It's not who's right but what's right that matters", and the secret of his success is linked to his vision: "Papua New Guinea's many peoples, together, can give God's answers to a divided world."

* * * * *

The setting

Papua New Guinea is the meeting point of three regions, Asia, Australasia and the Pacific. (Figure 1) Bougainville is a cigar-shaped island 200 kilometres long and 50-80 kilometres wide, lying 800 kilometres to the east of mainland Papua New Guinea. (Figures 1 and 2) Bougainville's central range of mountains, some 2,600 metres high, run the length of the island. There are many volcanos, contributing to fertile volcanic soil on which dense and lush vegetation prospers. In 1969, the population was 75,000; by 1990, it had doubled. Traditionally, Bougainvilleans have a subsistence life style with some growing and marketing coconut, copra and cocoa. Their 19 language groups speak Melanesian Pidgin in common with most of the peoples of New Guinea.

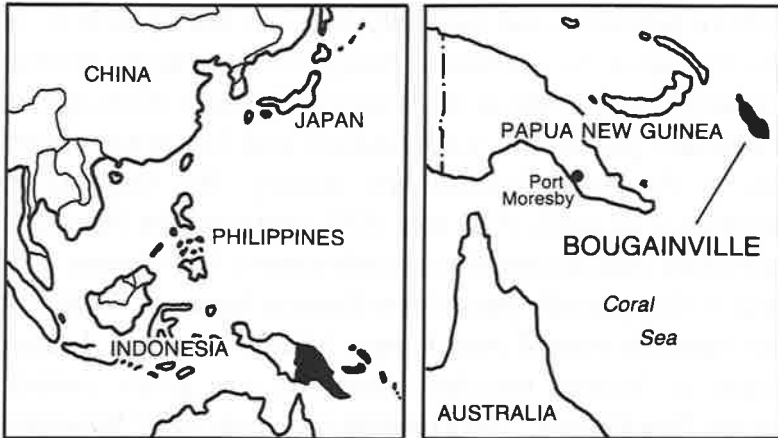


Figure 1: South East Asia and Papua New Guinea

Bougainville, named after an 18th century French explorer, is ethnically and geographically part of the Solomon group of islands. Its people have jet black skins like other people in the Northern Solomons and markedly different from people in other parts of Papua New Guinea. Bougainville became politically separated from the rest of the Solomons because of an agreement by Germany and Britain, whose traders vied for control of various parts of the South Pacific last century. By Anglo-German Agreements of 1885, 1888 and 1898, south-eastern New Guinea came under British control and north-eastern New Guinea and the island of Bougainville passed into German hands. In 1906 Britain gave Australia control over Papua. After World War I, under a League of Nations mandate, Australia was given control of German New Guinea. The Japanese took control of Bougainville for some years during World War II, but Australia resumed control after the war and remained in control until Papua New Guinea's independence in 1975. This was not always welcome.

Indigenous pressure for decolonisation in Papua New Guinea began in the early 1960s. In 1962, a visiting UN mission had been petitioned by a hundred Bougainvilleans asking for the USA to take control of their island from Australia.⁴ The seeds of a separatist movement were alive then. They have grown since and are evident in the critical and violent situation that developed in the late 1980s.

In the late 1960s, while most most educated Papua New Guineans looked forward to independence beginning with early home-rule, I heard many people say, "We don't want

⁴*Pacific Islands Monthly*, May 1962, 138.

independence. We're not ready for it. Maybe in 50 years' time." This was reflected in official policy and attitudes. For example the Australian Minister for External Territories, Mr. C.E. Barnes ('CEB') said on 5 March 1967, "Independence for Papua New Guinea will not be achieved for very many years, if at all."

Whether independence came sooner or later, economic development was urgently needed to underpin the future of the country. The major factor in everybody's calculations about Bougainville was the existence of copper.

Copper and gold traces have been known since the 1930s to exist in southern Bougainville. In 1961 a report by the geologist J. E. Thompson of the Australian Bureau of Mineral Resources led to investigations on the ground and among the maps in the Mines Department of Port Moresby by a CRA geologist, Ken Phillips.⁵ He realised that a major copper ore body existed in southern Bougainville near Panguna, 60 kms from the island's largest town, Kieta. This was in rugged, almost inaccessible mountains, where the annual rainfall is over 5000 mm.

By the mid-1960s, Papua New Guinea had undergone several years of rapid economic change and the country was beginning to move towards self-government with the setting up of the first House of Assembly with representatives elected by universal suffrage in 1964. However, there was no assured substantial source of government revenue, other than Australian aid, or export income. Exports were urgently needed to reduce the country's dependence on Australia to balance its budget. Much money had been poured into mining and fuel exploration, with little success. Thus the need for Bougainville copper to be mined

⁵Downs, I. (1980), 341.

was critical to the Australian government and to the Australian Administration for Papua New Guinea. It was expected to triple Papua New Guinea's export income.⁶ Extensive exploration was needed to determine if it was economic to establish a mine.

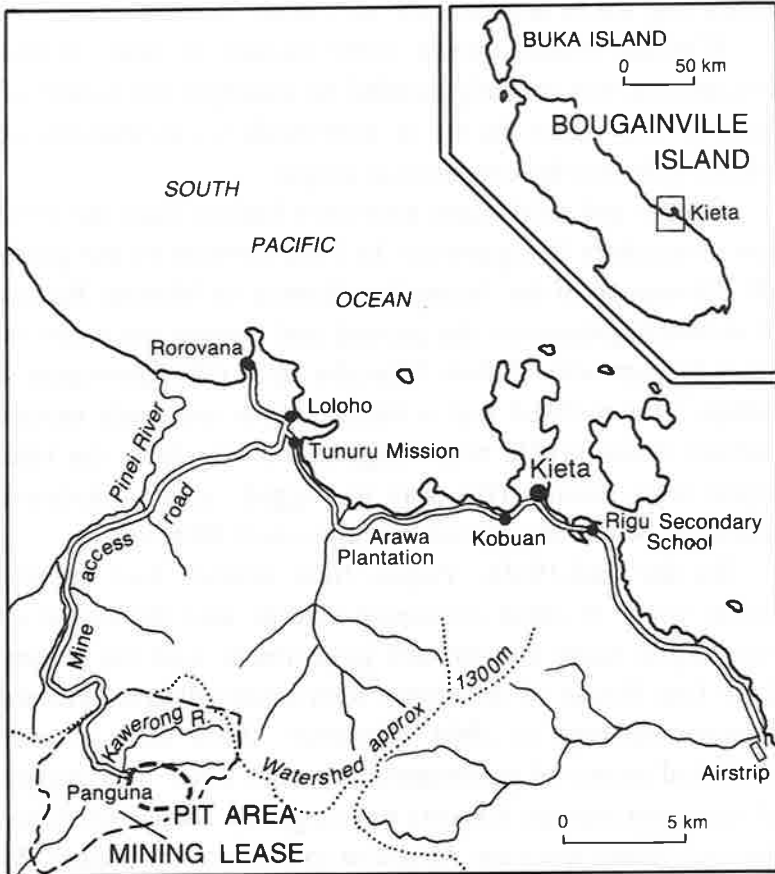


Figure 2: Bougainville and South Bougainville, showing the mine site, the access road, Arawa Plantation and the disputed Rorovana land.

⁶Central Planning Office (1973-74), 25.

Before the decision to mine

On 20 September 1963 the multi-national mining giant, CRA, which had been formed the previous year, applied for a Prospecting Authority on Bougainville. This was granted by the Administration, and a prospecting party entered the area on 14 April 1964. The company's 300 ton ship sailed to Bougainville, equipped with a helicopter and laboratory and modern survey equipment which had to be flown into the mountains. In 1964, CRA was joined by New Broken Hill Consolidated Ltd who would find one-third of the costs of exploration.⁷

Between 1964 and 1966, exploration by CRA confirmed that there was an extremely large copper deposit around Panguna, a rugged, mountainous area, 60 kilometres inland from Kieta. (Figure 2) Because the grade of ore was so low - less than 0.5 per cent - a rapid extraction of large quantities would be necessary to make a successful mining venture out of it. Thus further detailed prospecting would be necessary for some years. A subsidiary company, Bougainville Copper Pty Limited, was formed to determine if it was economic to establish a mine, but it was clear from the outset that the size of the operation was so large that neither Bougainvilleans nor the Administration could attempt it. A large multi-national mining company was needed if the mine were to be established at all. *The Australian Financial Review* called it "the most formidable industrial management task ever undertaken by Australians".⁸

⁷Oliver (1973), 157.

⁸Downs (1980), 341.

Prospecting licences for two years were granted to CRA under the 1928 Mining Ordinance, which did not require the permission of the landowners in Panguna, the Nasioi people, to explore their land. As with other Pacific Islands, land is an emotional issue with the Nasioi. It provides their livelihood and security. All land, whether occupied or not, is associated with specific people or language groups. There is no such thing as wholly free, unowned land. Among the Nasioi people, traditionally, it is inherited through the women, even though men take responsibility for administering it. But land tenure is by inheritance and grants from 'big men' who have the right to make gifts, usually to kinsfolk, or adjust the size of lands owned by a family or tribe according to their need. However, there is no traditional concept of sale. The concept of acquiring land from a particular date, common with Europeans, is foreign to Bougainvilleans. While traditionally there were numerous intertribal wars, including over the possession of land, Bougainvilleans often worked together for trading or other purposes.⁹

Development of the mine necessitated land alienation not provided for by the 1928 Mining Ordinance, and therefore on 8 June, 1966, Don Grove, Director of Lands, Surveys and Mines, introduced the Mining Bill 1966, which enabled large-scale exploration and production over 10,000 acres of southern Bougainville. The price it would pay for the mine-site would be \$1 per acre per year for the term of the company's occupancy. Rent of 5 per cent of the unimproved value of the land was to be paid, but no royalties, because Administration policy was that

⁹Oliver (1973), 32 and 65.

minerals were government owned.¹⁰ The local people felt that the legislation was rushed through the House of Assembly in Port Moresby and were incensed that they had not been consulted. This was characteristic of the Papua New Guinea Administration at the time. Its policy since 1963 had been to handle all negotiations on their behalf on the grounds that the government was better able to protect their interests than the people themselves, and at the same time promote the national interest.

The local people were further upset and angered when a single outspoken member of their tribe agreed, without any traditional authority, to cooperate with CRA and to sell some land needed for a base from which the company could operate.¹¹

The people's protest was articulated by the Member of the House of Assembly for Bougainville, Paul Lapun. Born in 1923 in Makaku village near Buin in south-west Bougainville, Lapun attended a Catholic seminary in Rabaul, where he became a prisoner of the Japanese. After the war, he taught in a remote village school on Bougainville, and was elected to the first House of Assembly in 1964. In November 1966, Lapun introduced the Mining New Guinea Bill No. 2, 1966, in which he proposed that 5% of the royalties which the Administration would receive from the company should be paid directly to the landowners. During two days of debate, Lapun told the House:

“The people approve of Conzinc Rio Tinto
(Australia) mining in Kieta because they know

¹⁰*T.P.N.G. Hansard*, 21 November 1966. Also Downs (1980), 345.

¹¹Fingleton (1970), 13-20.

that this company will generate other money, but they feel that they are entitled to receive payment from the company. If the people receive some royalties from the mining operations at Kieta, later on they will not say that they have been exploited by CRA. If the landowners receive a share of the financial benefits they will welcome the company.”¹²

Administration officials and some elected members vigorously opposed the proposal. Lapun fought hard and managed to get the House to pass the bill by 31 to 21 votes.¹³ This change of policy by the Administration was a significant victory for Lapun. But the seeds of discontent were growing. “The situation is potentially explosive and could lead to ugly incidents,” wrote Mr C. E. Barnes, the Minister for External Territories, on 24 December 1966 to a Catholic leader in Sydney asking him to influence the priests on Bougainville to stop opposing the mine. The reply, while not denying some priests’ attitudes, indicated that the Catholic bishop had intervened at least four times to avoid bloodshed.¹⁴

June 1967 was a critical month for both the mining operation and for Papua New Guinea politically. On 6 June 1967, CRA and the Administration concluded an agreement whereby the company agreed to mine and pay taxes and the Administration agreed to provide the land, build roads, a hospital

¹²*T.P.N.G. Hansard*, 21 November 1966.

¹³Downs (1980), 346. Also *T.P.N.G. Hansard*, 21-24 November, 1966.

¹⁴Downs (1980), 350-352.

and other necessary infrastructure. Because the company wanted to make the agreement more binding on the Papua New Guinea government, especially with the likelihood of independence within the terms of the leases, they asked the Administration to have the Agreement formally approved by the legislature. That same day, the country's first political demonstration took place in Port Moresby. (Plate 2) Its leaders were called the 'Thirteen angry young men' in the press. One week later, on 13 June 1967, these thirteen men launched the Pangu Pati with their main platform being immediate home-rule for Papua New Guinea. Paul Lapun was elected parliamentary leader of the Pangu Pati.



Plate 2: The first political demonstration in Papua New Guinea, 6 June 1969, led by "13 Angry Young Men". That night 7 of these men watched a Moral Re-Armament musical play.

On 29 August 1967, after three months' deliberation, the House of Assembly passed the Mining (Bougainville Copper Agreement) Bill 1967, which became the legal basis for the project. It was supported by Lapun and passed without a division. All speakers agreed that the copper discovery and its development presented the country with a tremendous economic opportunity. According to the terms of the bill, the Administration would give all mining rights to CRA. If and when the company decided to go ahead with actual mining, the Administration would be offered 20% of the shares plus a royalty of 1.25% of the value of copper sold. In addition, the company would pay taxes, after three years of commercial operation, beginning at 25% and rising over a 25-year period to 66%. This Agreement pre-dated the purchase of the land required.¹⁵

Among the Nasioi, opinion on these arrangements was divided. Some did not want royalties, money for damage to their land or occupation fees. "They simply want the company to go away."¹⁶ Others welcomed the economic opportunities and material benefits the mine would bring. Lapun had the delicate task of representing both groups in the House of Assembly. While disapproving of the way the Administration was going about the mine development, his main objection was to the Administration's belief that the minerals under the land surface belonged to the state and not to the landowners, as the indigenous people had always believed. "This is not Britain or Australia, so

¹⁵Oliver (1973), 157-8.

¹⁶D. Grove, Director of Lands, Surveys and Mines, *T.P.N.G. Hansard*, 23 November 1966.

why should we follow their laws?" asked Lapun. "This is Papua New Guinea, and in this Parliament we make our laws."¹⁷

While the Administration was attempting peacefully in 1968 and 1969 to acquire the land needed for the mine, CRA was working on the technical and marketing aspects of the project. In February 1969 CRA signed letters of intent to sell \$1000 million worth of Bougainville copper to Japan.¹⁸ Yet CRA's Chairman, Sir Maurice Mawby, could not say when a firm go-ahead for Bougainville would be announced. "However we would not be signing letters of intent unless we were absolutely confident...plus," he stated.¹⁹

There were at this time growing changes in the political sphere. In 1968 Michael Somare was elected to the second House of Assembly, along with eight other Pangu Pati candidates, and became the party leader. Lapun, who received about 90% of the votes in his electorate, became deputy leader. The party refused ministerial posts in order to retain its independence. It introduced legislation, unlike more than 50 'Independent' members whose main aim was to oppose Pangu initiatives. Pangu drew support from most areas of the country and also from influential white politicians Percy Chatterton, Tony Voutas, Barry Holloway and Cecil Abel.

The Administration requires land

On 3 March 1969, the Administration announced its need to

¹⁷Quoted in Ryan, J. (1969), *The hot land*, Melbourne, p330.

¹⁸*The Age*, Melbourne, 10 February 1969.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

buy 40,000 acres of land for roads, a company town, a port, a large tailings area and for numerous connected projects. Although the best town site would have been in the foothills, halfway between the coast and mine site, this would have involved displacing many people living there. In order to minimise the disruption, the decision was made to acquire Arawa Plantation, owned by F. McKillop, for the town site, and Loloho, plus part of Rorovana, for the port. (Figure 2)

Until this time, the people who lived in Rorovana village on the coast had not been involved in the land issue, as they lived well away from the mine and suggested town sites. But when they heard that their land would be bought or be compulsorily acquired, they objected vigorously.²⁰ A public meeting of about 1500 people was held in Kieta on 27 April, 1969.²¹ There, the people voted almost unanimously against the plans to acquire Arawa Plantation, 640 acres of neighbouring native-owned Arawa land and 175 acres of Rorovana land. The meeting called for a conference between all parties concerned.

CRA was at this time prepared to pay \$6 per acre annually for leasing the Rorovana land.²² When the owners refused, the Administration announced that the people had to agree to sell the land for \$105 an acre, or it would be taken compulsorily. This price was calculated on the value of the land as assessed by the Administration's valuers. Additionally, \$2 would be paid for each coconut tree it contained, but nothing for the copper underneath.

²⁰Downs (1980), 354.

²¹Mamak and Bedford (1974), 8.

²²Bedford and Mamak (1977), 25.

The people were incensed. A crisis was looming.

Moral Re-Armament

Lapun, as the local Member of the House of Assembly, had been deeply involved in these events, and since 1967, had been involved also with Moral Re-Armament, which subsequently played a role in the dispute. Moral Re-Armament has been represented in Papua New Guinea since the 1930s when Cecil and Russell Abel, leaders of the Kwato Mission in Milne Bay, brought the ideas of Moral Re-Armament, or the Oxford Group as it was then known, to the mission.²³ The mission sent parties of Papuans into the ranges about 100 miles east of Port Moresby where headhunting was rife, and managed to help curtail the murders and unite warring tribes. Those tribes are still living peacefully together today.²⁴

In January 1967, Dirona Abe, Under-Secretary of Health, who had met Moral Re-Armament through the Kwato mission in

²³The Abel brothers taught the people how to listen to God or the 'Good Spirit'. Moral Re-Armament is not a movement with a point of view but a voluntary association of people who believe in divine guidance and in living absolute moral standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, personally, nationally and internationally. They are linked by a common commitment to bring a change of heart to people which will extend to all their dealings in society. For a history of Moral Re-Armament, see Lean, G.D. (1985), *Frank Buchman: a Life*.

²⁴Wedega (1981), 37-73. Russell Abel, the Mission leader, died in 1952 after falling ill in the Papuan mountains. Cecil (now Sir Cecil) became a Member of the House of Assembly, and an adviser to the Prime Minister.

his youth 20 years earlier, attended an international conference for Moral Re-Armament in Melbourne. (Plate 3) It was opened by the Prime Minister, Harold Holt. Abe, speaking directly to Holt over lunch, asked for help, not only material aid but “for the ideas we hear about at this conference”. Shortly afterwards Abe invited an international force of Moral Re-Armament to go to Papua New Guinea with their musical show, *Wake Up Matilda*. This show, with drama and humour, portrayed Australia as it is, and the world as it could be. It emphasised that to change a person, a race or a nation, one had to begin with oneself.



Plate 3: Dirona Abe, who invited *Wake Up Matilda* to Papua New Guinea.

On 6 June 1967, Lapun, Dr Reuben Taureka and others who had led the country’s first political demonstration that morning (Plate 2), as well as the Administrator and the leaders of the main churches, saw *Wake Up Matilda*. At the end of the six week visit, Taureka made a public statement which was prominently

reported in *The South Pacific Post*. Taureka said that he had been known as a “rabid white-hater”, but he now believed that “it is about time we planned for our future on a basis of solid hard work, non-violence and no hatred.”²⁵ (Plates 4 and 5)

In the period 1967-9, Moral Re-Armament people were involved in a number of initiatives at the local people’s request, particularly using the film *Freedom*, with its answers to land disputes, tribal jealousy, racial bitterness and power-seeking politicians. *Freedom*, the first full-length film made by Africans, was produced in Nigeria by Moral Re-Armament in 1956. The film, seen by millions world-wide, became the first feature film dubbed into Pidgin. Many thousands of people saw the first screening of *Freedom*, held outdoors in the Hubert Murray Stadium, Port Moresby, in 1971.

Lapun and many other Members of the House of Assembly came to see *Freedom*, and some requested it to be shown in their electorates. Lapun invited George Wood and the author to bring the film to his island in May 1969, because he believed it had application to the present situation. Lapun said that he longed for his people to be united and for peaceful solutions to be found to the problems they were facing, including the mine developments. Every night during this tour, the group prayed together, and every morning spent some time in silence to listen to God and to seek His plan for the day. Lapun told one school, “The way for a nation to find the right road is for its people to listen to the voice of God.” He brought this conviction to the growing crisis.

²⁵Taureka, R. “Territory Can Avoid Unrest by Planning”, *South Pacific Post*, 10 July 1967. Taureka later became Assistant Director of Health.

The Bougainville Land Crisis Of 1969



Plate 4: The Administrator, David Hay (centre), at the showing of *Wake Up Matilda*. On his left is Australian Federal M.P. Kim Beazley.



Plate 5: Dr Reuben Taureka (left) and Albert Maori Kiki, two founders of the Pangu Pati, at the showing of *Wake Up Matilda*

Lapun was showing *Freedom* to people on Buka island to the north of Bougainville (Figure 2) when the first act of violence in the land dispute took place. Surveyors were at work near Panguna when 200 villagers pounced on them and threw them and their pegs off the land, and then prepared their bows and arrows, spears and clubs for battle. The District Commissioner, Des Ashton, sent for Lapun who travelled 200 kilometres immediately and reached Panguna just in time to prevent bloodshed. He talked to the villagers for three days and they agreed to put their weapons away.

The matter passed when it was discovered that the surveyors had accidentally strayed on to land that the Administration had not issued a prospecting licence for. No public apology was made to the villagers for this mistake, although the villagers apologised for their hasty action and helped the surveyors to rebuild their camp. However, the villagers' fears of loss of land had been fanned, and their lack of confidence in the Administration's methods and procedures had been justified.

At this point, mid-May 1969, it was still not certain that CRA would finally go ahead, but 239 people from 5 villages had been moved, with compensation, from its special lease of 10,000 acres near Panguna. The feasibility studies had so far cost \$20 million, while trucks were moving up and down the specially-constructed road to Panguna and drilling was taking place. It was popularly believed that CRA had secretly decided to go ahead but were afraid to announce it.

The people were divided in their attitude to the project. Some felt CRA's coming was not a good thing as it would

seriously disrupt the people's way of life, increase alcoholism, and bring in 4000 foreigners and a larger number of 'red-skins' (people from the New Guinea mainland). Over 10,000 people would be needed for the construction period and this would increase tension between tribal groups, break up the family unit working together, and make the people dependent on the company which would create unemployment later when the construction period was over. They foresaw huge devastation of vegetation and fishing resources because of the tailings and gases the mine would create. They also feared being under the control of a company. Others welcomed the training and employment opportunities and the potential to earn money, as well as the benefit to the nation for much needed export earnings. Permanent contributions to development - roads, schools, housing and power - all would account for about \$145 million, more than one third of the projected ultimate cost of the project. So opposition to the mine was not universal.

The decision to mine

Late in May, 1969, CRA announced that it would definitely proceed with the copper mine, estimated to cost at least \$350 million. Bougainville Copper Ltd (BCL), a subsidiary of CRA, was formed. It predicted that at least 30 million tons of ore would be mined annually for 30 years or more. The mining company had a strict time-table of development. More than \$250 million of the development costs was to be borrowed. Contracts for the supply of copper had been signed with Japan, Germany and Spain, and had to be honoured. A better access road to the mine

costing nearly \$1 million a mile had already been started. Acquisition of Rorovana land was now urgent to enable construction of the port to begin in September. Mine output would be expected to reach full production in 1972.²⁶

The discontent among the people was conveyed to the House of Assembly in June by Lapun in a petition:

“In the matter of resuming native held lands...at no time were we consulted by the Administration...We now ask the Administration to...review its decision to resume populated and planted land...We believe the Administration should immediately commence talks with all parties concerned (including BCL).”²⁷

On 16 June, A. Newman, the Acting Assistant Administrator (Economic Affairs), presented a White Paper on the Bougainville Copper Project in the House of Assembly. In it, he explained that the Administration entered into a formal agreement with CRA in 1967, before making land purchases, because the financial commitment was so big that a mining company embarking on such an operation needed guarantees from the Government that it would receive the authorities and mining rights necessary if they decided to go ahead.²⁸

²⁶Espie (1973), 336.

²⁷*T.P.N.G. Hansard*, June 1969, 1200.

²⁸Territory of Papua New Guinea, House of Assembly (1969): *White Paper: Bougainville Copper Project*, Statement Delivered by the Acting

In the debate on the White Paper which followed, Lapun fought hard and successfully to get an amendment included saying that before acquiring land, the Administration should hold consultations with the Company and all landowners.

Not content with sending petitions to the government, the people formed an organisation, Napidakoe Navitu, on 6 July 1969 to coordinate their protest. Lapun was elected president, a Rorovana landowner, Raphael Bele, became treasurer and an Australian, Barry Middlemiss, secretary. Middlemiss was employed by McKillop, the owner of Arawa Plantation, and provided the impetus for the organisation, which grew rapidly in membership from 1500 in July to 5000 in September and to 6000 in 1970. The stated aims of Napidakoe Navitu were to further the social, political and economic development of all Bougainvilleans, to promote political unity and autonomy, to improve education and to maintain culture and customs. Later, it became the focal point for the secessionist movement of the 1970s.²⁹

On 28 July, Newman told a meeting at Rorovana that the people had to accept their "generous" offer of \$105 per acre plus \$2 per coconut tree by August 1, or the land would be compulsorily acquired. The same would happen to the land adjoining Arawa Plantation on 8 August. The people rejected the ultimatum.³⁰

Then 100 specially trained and equipped riot police were
Assistant Administrator (Economic Affairs), Mr. A.J.P. Newman, M.H.A., 16
June 1969, 1-2.

²⁹Middlemiss (1970), 100-104.

³⁰*Post-Courier*, 28 July 1969.

flown to the island to help the surveyors mark out the boundaries of the Rorovana land required. On 1 August, surveyors, ominously supported by police wearing gas-masks and carrying truncheons, drove in the first concrete peg. Some women among the 500 onlookers managed to get through the police and wrench the peg out, triumphantly carrying it home.³¹

The crisis

On Tuesday 5 August 1969, a major confrontation took place between the bulldozers with lines of riot police carrying batons, shields, rifles and respirators, facing a group of about 65 villagers, men and women and some children, unarmed and quite defenceless. They ignored an instruction to move, then refused an attempt to shepherd them out of the way. When a barrage of 150 tear-gas shells was fired at them, they stood firm. Then the riot police charged with their batons. The villagers gave way and retreated to the Rorovana village - overwhelmed, defeated, and apparently alone - although it was front-page news around the world.

The BBC, over its World Service, told of armed police using tear-gas to try to force native landowners to yield their land to the copper development project. One Sydney newspaper blazoned the headline, *Bloody Thugs*, and published a photograph of a helmeted policeman manhandling a bare-breasted woman attempting to remove a surveyor's peg.³² Even *The Australian Financial Review*, while supporting the copper project,

³¹CRA Gazette, 15 August 1969, quoted in Griffin (1970), 11.

³²*The Daily Mirror*, 6 August 1969.

commented, "Some aspects of Australia's Administration in the Territory were less than impressive", and "Some District Commissioners, with their doubt, their arrogance and their remoteness, seemed to be throw-backs to the British Raj rather than Australian civil servants."³³

The Australian, in an editorial on 7 August 1969, wrote:

"The use of tear-gas and clubs this week to enforce alien laws on an uncomprehending people was a damning indictment of the Administration of Papua New Guinea - which is to say of Canberra. At every stage the Administration has decided what is best for the people concerned. It has probably been right...but the people themselves are not convinced. Tomorrow the villagers are due to receive their ultimatum to negotiate on the Administration's terms or have their land taken over. Is it seriously contemplated that another riot squad will be flown in to enforce the law?"

The District Commissioner, Des Ashton, reported the natives as saying, "To take the land we would have to kill them."³⁴ He felt his duty was a "distasteful task", and he had not been told that the price offered was designed to discourage escalation of native land values in Port Moresby. His actions and

³³*The Australian Financial Review*, 7 August 1969.

³⁴*The Age*, Melbourne, 7 August 1969.

those of the police drew mixed reactions. Canberra's Secretary for Territories was seen as "taking initiatives which amounted to day-to-day intervention in district administration...reducing the apparent authority of its own officers...The district commissioners in Bougainville and Rabaul³⁵ found themselves reduced to a status barely above that of messengers."³⁶ I. Downs, a member of the Administrator's Executive Council and an elected Member of the House of Assembly, wrote that the behaviour of the riot police under the tight control of Superintendent Brian Holloway and Des Ashton was impeccable. "A desperate government managed to avoid the use of firearms despite the pressure from [the Rorovanans]...Ashton and Holloway did well to cope so painlessly with these situations...Their action at Rorovana was a turning point."³⁷

But this was debatable. The Administration was in a difficult position: Ray Whitrod, the Police Commissioner, and David Hay, the Administrator, had disagreed over how to handle the situation, and the press reaction was condemnatory.³⁸

On the day following the tear-gas incident on Bougainville,

³⁵Rabaul was another trouble-spot in which Moral Re-Armament was later asked to help.

³⁶Downs (1980), 346.

³⁷Downs (1980), 357-9.

³⁸Whitrod, R., personal communication, 18 July 1989, believed negotiation was better than the use of force. In retrospect, he wrote, "The Administrator's response was probably the more appropriate." However, at the time, he did not think so. After this Rorovana debacle and two further incidents where his authority was diminished, Whitrod resigned, less than one year after beginning a 3-year contract.

Peter Lalor, the public solicitor in Port Moresby, whose job it was to give legal assistance to Papua New Guineans, told the Administrator in writing that there were no legal grounds upon which the action could be justified, and there was a strong probability that all those taking part in the incident and those who directed the action had brought themselves within the ambit of the criminal law.³⁹ Moreover, the Australian government was facing an election in six weeks' time, and was embarrassed at the bad publicity.

The company was also alarmed, recognising that its long-term position would be untenable with an independent Papua New Guinea government if it was associated with intimidation and confiscation. Its Managing Director, Frank Espie, said, "If Bougainville Copper can't behave itself so that the first President of Papua New Guinea doesn't ask us to stay, then we shouldn't start in the first place."⁴⁰ The company therefore held its hand, knowing that what was at stake was not the future only of the Bougainville mine, but also that of many more mining ventures in developing countries.

Court cases

Thus, with CRA and the government both embarrassed, there was a hiatus in events, while the public solicitor was expected to find a solution. Meanwhile, the legal position was

³⁹Information supplied by Talbot Lovering, a Welsh-born lawyer in the public solicitor's office assigned to Bougainville.

⁴⁰*The Herald*, Melbourne, 7 August 1969.

being challenged by a landmark court case in the Australian High Court as a result of a Bougainvillean, Teori Tau, being arrested in September 1968 for laying hold of a surveyor. The public solicitor, representing Teori Tau, claimed that the minerals belonged to the landowners. He argued that it had always been so, even before World War I, when Bougainville was a colony of Germany. The Australian Administration, after it had taken over the mandate from the League of Nations, had not itself acquired the minerals. And since the Australian Constitution expressly provided that "there could be no acquisition of a person's property, except on the condition that just terms for compensation were payable", and since no compensation for minerals had been paid, the copper in the ground at Panguna belonged to the owners of the land. Therefore the Mining Ordinances of Papua New Guinea giving permission to the company to mine the copper were invalid. The company, already deeply concerned at the Administration's handling of the situation, on hearing of this court case, was extremely worried. It had won orders from Japanese smelters for 15 years ahead, as well as credits and loans from America, Britain and Japan. Its financial backers required security of their investment as well as a substantial return.⁴¹ If this writ succeeded, the operation might be jeopardized. The Australian government used as its defence a High Court ruling in 1963 that, under the Constitution, Australia had the power to administer Territories, and that their power in the Territories was quite self-contained. Thus the terms which applied to the taking of land in Australian States did not have to be applied to the

⁴¹*The Age*, Melbourne 10 February 1969; *Papua New Guinea Post-Courier*, 29 July 1969. Also West (1972), 118.

Territory of Papua and New Guinea. The case was heard in August 1969 and the judgement was handed down four months later. The seven Judges found in Australia's favour, thus removing doubts about the legality of the mining licences.⁴²

Following the police action on Rorovana, Napidakoe Navitu decided to send Lapun and Bele to Australia at the villagers' expense to get a High Court injunction to stop the mine and, failing that, to go to the United Nations. They saw this as the only way to prevent further violence and to get justice.

Just as Lapun and Bele were leaving Bougainville from Kieta airport, they met Talbot Lovering, who was just arriving from the public solicitor's office. He had had 18 years' experience in land matters in Kenya, where he had met Moral Re-Armament and seen how the film *Freedom* had been used to defuse violent situations there leading up to the time of independence in 1961, and helped in land resettlement schemes thereafter.⁴³ After Lapun and Bele had left, Lovering sent a telegram to a friend in Australia, James Coulter, asking him to meet and assist them. Coulter, a journalist born in Perth, flew Sunderland flying boats for the RAAF in World War II and had, since 1946, given his whole time to the work of Moral Re-Armament. He had made friends with many of Australia's leaders.

On hearing Lovering's news, Coulter flew from Melbourne to Sydney to meet Lapun and Bele. Coulter recalled later:

⁴²Bedford and Mamak (1977), 29. The judgement in *Tau v. Commonwealth & Others* can be found in the Australian Law Journal Report 25, 1969, 44.

⁴³Abrams (1979), 80-93.

“At Sydney airport, Paul Lapun told me that he was pleased to meet me. He and Bele were also met by Peter Hastings and other journalists, and a group of lawyers who booked them into a hotel near the Town Hall. I visited them there 15 minutes later. Lapun said that he had been impressed, when shown the film *Freedom*, with the thought that God had a plan for every person and every nation. This, he said, was what he most wanted to do for his own nation, to find God’s plan. In this regard he said that he would appreciate staying not in a hotel but in a private home.”⁴⁴

Coulter took Lapun and Bele to the North Shore home of Eric and Winsome Andrew. Andrew, who had been president of the NSW Institute of Architects, recalled later:

“Raphael Bele was very bitter and refused to eat ‘white man’s food’ for three or four days, choosing to live on bananas. He stayed in his room most of the time, explaining to me, ‘If someone wants my land and I do not want them to have it, he will have to kill me or I will kill him.’”⁴⁵

⁴⁴Coulter’s account on audiotape made in conjunction with Lovering in 1980. Copy in author’s possession.

⁴⁵Andrew, E. , personal communication, October 1989.

Lapun, on the other hand, was anxious to find a workable compromise, and asked if they could take time together to find what thoughts God might have about the problem in Rorovana. He said that he was not convinced that it was meant to go to the High Court. Later, Lapun recalled:

“Nobody could tell us what was right except God Himself. We sat to have guidance from God together. My thoughts were: ‘I believe that God put the copper in the ground, and He must have the right way to get it out again. Do not seek headlines, go for solutions. Try and reach the policy-makers and see if they will change their policies. Try to see Sir Maurice Mawby,⁴⁶ Mr Gorton⁴⁷ and Mr Barnes, and see whether they could agree to the wishes of the people.’”⁴⁸

Lapun had a strategy but no way of carrying it out. It happened that Coulter had met all three men (Mawby, Gorton and Barnes) before. He rang Mawby, who reluctantly agreed to meet them privately later that day, 19 August, at CRA’s headquarters in Melbourne.

Coulter recalled the interview:

⁴⁶Chairman of Melbourne-based CRA.

⁴⁷John Gorton was Prime Minister of Australia from 1968 to 1971.

⁴⁸From Coulter’s audiotape and supported by Lapun when he read the manuscript.

“Mawby began by explaining the company’s policies and the benefits they had brought to developing countries where they had been welcomed. One of his colleagues described the efforts of the company to understand what the Rorovana people really wanted: ‘We spoke with the Administration, with the local planters and with the missionaries. We even flew in three expert anthropologists from America and Australia.’ Lapun replied: ‘Yes, and they were all white and we are all black. You have been speaking to the wrong people. When all these people have gone, the Bougainvilleans and the people of the company will remain.’

“Sir Maurice then asked, referring to the Rorovana port site, ‘How much money do you want for the land?’ Bele replied: ‘To Bougainvilleans, land is like the skin on the back of your hand - you can neither buy it nor sell it. You inherit it, and it is your duty to pass it on to your children in as good a condition as, or better than, that in which you received it. You would not expect us to sell our skin, would you?’

“Mawby paused and said he thought that was a very fine idea, but asked again for their price, whereupon Bele said that even if they accepted a

great deal of money, and then lost it somehow, through drink or other ways, they could never look their grandchildren in the eye.

“At that moment Mawby began to understand that the nature of the problem had to do with cultural values. In two hours of conversation, Lapun said that they had come to get a High Court action, but that they wanted first to ask if the company would negotiate directly with the people. Mawby replied that he was willing, but that they would have to persuade the government. He said that the company would make sure that the social consequences of the mining project would not be too serious for the population. This counted more to Lapun and Bele than all the material advantages they would get.”⁴⁹

That afternoon Coulter took them down to the Melbourne Cricket ground to watch Melbourne’s Australian Rules team training under Ron Barassi. Barassi noted Bele’s physique, “took a shine to him”, and gave him a new football, which later was used to break up the tension back in the village at the height of the affair.

Lapun and Bele with the Prime Minister

Coulter next contacted Tony Eggleton, Press Secretary to

⁴⁹*Ibid*

the Prime Minister, and Allan Griffith, Assistant Secretary for External Relations and Defence in the Department of the Prime Minister,⁵⁰ and between them an appointment was arranged with Prime Minister Gorton for the next morning. At the interview, Gorton asked Coulter to leave so that he could deal directly with Lapun and Bele. After 15 minutes, Gorton asked him to come back in. Coulter later gave the following account of the interview:

“Gorton couldn’t understand what they were saying or what they wanted. He said in some exasperation, ‘What do you *really* want to do - toss the copper company into the sea?’ Lapun replied, ‘I believe that God put the copper into the ground, and that He can show us the right way to get it out again. We’ve come to get your help in finding this.’ This tough man, with his face carrying the scars of a terrible crash when he was a wartime pilot, was visibly moved by the sincerity and faith of these men of village background. Their belief in the part that he could play in finding God’s plan obviously went right to his heart, and you sensed a shift in him in the way he immediately tried to find out exactly what the policy involved, and what changes could be made from the Australian side. He had with him ‘CEB’ Barnes, who at one point in the conversation had

⁵⁰Griffith served as an adviser to six Australian Prime Ministers, and had an intimate knowledge of Moral Re-Armament.

offered them another \$10 an acre for the land in question. The Prime Minister turned and said in front of these men, 'It's no good 'CEB' us trying to up them at \$10 a pop. It just would not work. They need to be able to return to their people and say that we've actually changed our policies or they're likely to have bloodshed on their hands.'

“Gorton turned to the men and asked them would they be prepared to lease the land if they were not prepared to sell it. At that point Barnes jumped in and said the Administration would not be prepared to sanction the building of a port on land that was merely leased. Again in front of the two men from Bougainville, the Prime Minister put it to his cabinet minister that there was no difference between the Administration leasing the land around Panguna for a mine and the company leasing the land at Rorovana for a port. And he carried the day on that. Further, Gorton agreed that the Bougainvilleans should have the right to deal directly with the company and said to Barnes, ‘We may think that our policy is designed to protect them from sharks, but they may do a lot better for themselves than we can do for them.’”⁵¹

⁵¹Sir John Gorton, personal communication, 26 July 1989, referring to this conversation in an early draft of this paper, wrote, “I am, as far as my memory

The Prime Minister asked them if they would like the help of a lawyer and an accountant. They accepted. He then asked if Coulter could help to get the best men, and also asked if Coulter would accompany the two men and help them interpret to the villagers the decisions that had been made in Canberra. The government would pay his fare. Coulter consulted Eric Andrew who suggested a lawyer, Don Mackay, of Sly and Russell, and John Tidex, a senior partner of the accounting firm, Price Waterhouse.

Before leaving Canberra there was a long and detailed meeting seeking ways to resolve the land valuation dispute, and to determine what benefits should go to the people. Those taking part included Barnes, Warwick-Smith (the Secretary of the Department of Territories) and several of the department's officers, as well as Coulter, Bele and Lapun.

Having refused 42 phone calls from the media to date, the Bougainvilleans now gave a news media conference to say briefly what they were doing, without divulging anything of the negotiations which were at such a delicate stage. They were aware that their new approach had yet to be explained to the people who had expected them to get a High Court injunction.

There was a long discussion at the airport before returning about the best way to handle things on their return. Lapun at first felt that they must follow their traditional way of doing whatever the villagers felt unitedly to be the best thing, but gradually he came around to feeling that another element was needed, namely, goes, in agreement with what you have written about the negotiations on Bougainville."

that he should be prepared to say himself what he felt - that the offer made during the Canberra talks was a fair one and the one he felt they should follow.

On 21 August, Barnes reported to the Australian parliament that the Rorovana villagers, the Administration and the company had agreed to reopen negotiations in Bougainville. But he was jumping the gun. Lapun and Bele had agreed, but the people had not.

However, the significance of the change in the government's policy was noted in the press: "The Federal Government made considerable concessions aimed at reducing the dangerous tensions...This is a significant departure from the previous inflexible approach that only the Papua New Guinea Administration was qualified to negotiate with the landowners."⁵²

Back on Bougainville

While Lapun was meeting with the Prime Minister and others in Australia, the uneasy truce on Bougainville continued. The Bougainville people had been told that the delay was costing the company \$30,000 a day but they took no notice. They refused to have any communication with officers of the Administration. The riot police were back in their camp. Everyone was waiting for the next move. The situation was tense. Hay expected to have to use force, although he hoped it could be avoided.⁵³ He said

⁵²*The Canberra Times*, 22 August 1969.

⁵³From Lovering's audiotape.

that the police had had to be sent in because of the actions of the Europeans in stirring up the Bougainvilleans.⁵⁴

On 22 August, several Moral Re-Armament people joined Lapun and Bele in Port Moresby. (Plate 6) One was Alice Wedega, later Dame Alice, who was the first Papua New Guinea woman to be in the Legislative Assembly and the first Papua New Guinea Dame. (Plate 6b) She had been on the Kwato missions into the headhunting areas of Papua in the 1930s. She was the first indigenous Girl Guides Commissioner and the first Papua New Guinea woman to travel the world, doing so with Moral Re-Armament missions on several occasions. Her story, including a chapter on Bougainville, is given in her autobiography, *Listen My Country*.

Wedega told Lapun and Bele of the effect *Freedom* had had a few years earlier on two men in Ianu, the village of the former headhunting chief, Sibodu. For years they had resolutely refused to sell their land to the Administration which had wanted to use it for a land resettlement scheme. The two men said that they saw themselves in the film, that they needed to change, and that they would reopen negotiations on their land on the basis that they would offer to sell what they would not use themselves. The story made a visible impression on Bele and Lapun.

That afternoon, in a plane chartered by the Administration for the purpose, Lapun, Bele and Lovering flew off to Bougainville. They found the Rorovana people in a hostile mood and quite unwilling to agree to negotiate. The Administrator was far from optimistic about the situation:

⁵⁴*The Age*, Melbourne, 2 August 1969.

The Bougainville Land Crisis Of 1969



Plate 6: Port Moresby, 22 August 1969. L to R: Joyce Lovering, Alice Wedega, John and Jean Mills, Paul Lapun, Talbot Lovering, Raphael Bele and Elsie Campbell.



Plate 6b: Dame Alice Wedega.

“We were by no means certain that this problem could be solved, and various contingency plans were prepared in case of failure. A number of meetings were held at which Lapun discussed with the people of Rorovana village the desirability of entering into negotiations...One of the key figures in the meetings was a young man named Middlemiss who had up to this point been a leader in the opposition to land acquisitions for mining purposes.”⁵⁵

On Thursday 28 August, the main parties arrived from Australia. Warwick-Smith led the Australian government delegation. Ray Ballmer, an American, who later took over the whole mining development, led the CRA team from Melbourne. Bill Conroy led the Papua New Guinea Administrator's team. Others included Philip Opas, QC, the company lawyer, Don Mentz, the head of the Economic Division of the Australian Department of Territories, and Don Mackay, John Tidex and James Coulter, the advisers for the Bougainvilleans. Coulter later recalled:

“On the plane from Rabaul to Kieta, Mentz told me that Paul and Raphael were divided with Raphael taking a more militant line with

⁵⁵Sir David Hay, Administrator of Papua New Guinea 1967-70, private papers, 10 November, 1981. The papers are held in the National Library, Canberra. See Appendix 1.

Middlemiss and Paul trying to talk conciliation. Mentz indicated that the Administration were pretty fed up, and while they would not pin anything on Middlemiss, working within the law they may have to remove him from the scene. I counselled against making a martyr of him and said that, while it was the commonly held view that he was 'a stirrer', in the eyes of Paul and Raphael he had been a loyal friend and had fought for them even though he had no land of his own."⁵⁶

The next few days saw much coming and going but little progress. The villagers would have nothing to do with anybody, even the experts sent to help them, so the government representatives and the advisers decided that the only course was to negotiate with the company on their behalf, hoping that later the villagers might accept what had been negotiated. Mackay and Tidex fought hard for the Administration to allow a more generous approach. The company was prepared to pay, but the Administration feared creating a precedent by settling at too high a figure. (Plates 7 and 8)

On Sunday 31 August, Lapun collapsed with exhaustion and pneumonia, so was taken by ambulance to Kieta hospital, having failed to persuade the Rorovana people to negotiate. Coulter, who had been staying with Lapun at Kuka village, moved into Rorovana. Bele invited him to stay. (Plate 9)

⁵⁶From Coulter's audiotape.



Plates 7: Coulter, Mackay and Tidex with villagers on the site of the confrontation.

The Bougainville Land Crisis Of 1969



Plate 8: Lapun talking with Coulter and Mackay.



Plate 9: Coulter and Bele.

That Sunday evening, in the CRA camp of Kobuain, the negotiations to find a formula to enable the Rorovana land to be used and the mine to go ahead came to a climax. Ballmer, together with Conroy and Mackay, conducted interviews, one by one, with Peter Lalor, the public solicitor, James Coulter and Talbot Lovering, the land lawyer from the public solicitor's office. Coulter passed on certain views and feelings of the villagers' he had picked up while living with them. Lovering emphasised that the value of the land to the company was much greater than the agricultural value being offered to the landowners. He had just had three and a half years in the Tasmanian Valuer-General's office, and drew on his experience of valuing waterfront land used there for industrial purposes. The value agreed upon there was \$2000 an acre, and he suggested this figure be adopted as fair, or at least not less than \$1000.⁵⁷

While these negotiations were going on, the tensions increased. A radio report that Newman had said in Port Moresby that there would be a settlement in four days had been taken by the villagers as another ultimatum and had made them extremely angry. Coulter felt very uneasy. "I was the only white man in the village," he says. "I couldn't sleep as I plotted how to get out of the village fast, should I be attacked."

The following day, Monday, the company announced that it would agree to a figure of \$1000 an acre as a basis of assessing a rental for the land under a 42 year lease, and would pay \$30,000 in cash for improvements that had been made on the land. There were other provisions offered. So Ballmer and Conroy flew by

⁵⁷From Lovering's audiotape of his recollections of these proceedings.

helicopter from the company base on the coast to the Rorovana village and put it to the assembly of the villagers. But the villagers still would have nothing to do with the company taking their land. (Plates 10 and 11)

Middlemiss, who had been encouraging Bele's stand, now also moved into Bele's house with Coulter.

Meanwhile the Administration were preparing to use force to conclude the matter. Over a hundred police were there, a third of them with rifles and the rest with over-sized axe-handle shaped clubs. They were doing route marches on the road leading to the controversial port. Both sides concluded that confrontation was inevitable. All hope for a resolution rested with Lapun.



Plate 10: Bill Conroy and Ray Ballmer depart from Rorovana after giving their final offer, 3 September 1969.



Plate 11: Don Mackay being ferried across mangrove swamps from Rorovana village to the mainland.

Coulter reported:

“Raphael [Bele] and Barry [Middlemiss] have taken the militant line which I think at the moment, short of a major miracle, will lead to bloodshed. Paul [Lapun] has been such a miracle, and laid it on the line that negotiation was the way. He was vigorously counter-attacked by the whole village. Finally he said, ‘Even if we went to

the High Court and our case was rejected, would you accept that?' They said, 'Of course not.' He said, 'Then in fact you'll only accept what suits you?' They said 'Yes.' So he made it clear nobody could ever govern if people rejected everything that they did not personally like.

"I heard from all sides that his performance under fire revealed him as a changed man as a result of his time in Australia. Peter Lalor said he had never seen such courage, nor a case for negotiation better put. The Catholic Father Fahey from near here said that the way he had stuck to his guns revealed a real change of nature."⁵⁸ (Plate 12)

Lapun, however, was still in hospital, fearful of the latent violence of the situation. It occurred to him that the film *Freedom* should be shown and he asked Coulter to arrange it. A copy of the film was up at the Panguna office of the mine. It had been sent there in July when Colin Bishop, the site manager, requested it, but he had not used it because of the delicacy of the situation.

On Wednesday 3 September Coulter got the film *Freedom* from the Panguna offices of the company. However, when he asked the site manager, Colin Bishop, for a projector and a generator, he hesitated, saying he doubted if his superiors in Melbourne would agree to what they would see as interference.

⁵⁸Letter from Coulter to his wife, 1 September 1969. Copy in author's possession.

Coulter made it clear that it was the request of Lapun, who was in hospital, and that the villagers would not budge one inch. Bishop then picked up the phone and spoke to his boss, who replied, "No. Don't do anything to rock the boat." Bishop persisted, risking his job and career. The reply was an uncompromising "NO!" Bishop replied that he saw it as the only hope in a completely deadlocked situation, and that if he didn't give this request a chance, there would be violence and bloodshed. This courageous battle won the day, and the company finally agreed to help show the film.⁵⁹



Plate 12: L. to R. Tidex, Lalor and Coulter outside the Tunuru Catholic Mission.

⁵⁹Details supplied by Coulter, recorded on audiotape.

The village is on an island over some mangrove swamps. The equipment was too heavy for an outrigger canoe. Just as dusk was falling, an outboard motor boat was heard. The owner was hailed and agreed to help. (Plate 13) That night, the film was projected onto a sheet hung on the wall of a bamboo-thatched cottage beneath coconut trees in Rorovana village. (Plate 14)



Plate 13: The generator being loaded on to a small boat.

On Thursday 4 September, the day after the film showing, Lapun came out of hospital and immediately went to Rorovana to continue his efforts for reconciliation. From his recent experience of explaining the film to the villagers near his own home, he was able to go through the story and bring out its meaning of change

and reconciliation. "It's not who's right, but what's right that matters," he told them. "Our need is to change and work according to the will of God. Then peace will be found in this country instead of bloodshed. Bougainville can be a great example to the world."⁶⁰



Plate 14: Villagers of Rorovana see *Freedom*. Barry Middlemiss is in the centre of the picture.

That night Middlemiss told Coulter that it was too late to do anything, and that if the police used force there would certainly be bloodshed. He said that some Administration officials should not be able to sleep because of the things they had done.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

Coulter recalled:

“That night, it was I who couldn’t sleep. The Administration’s deadline for a settlement had been extended, but would not be extended again. There was no sign of a shift in the villagers’ attitude. Middlemiss was opposing me at every turn. At 3am, as I lay tossing and turning, a thought struck me which I felt was from God. I said it at breakfast: ‘Barry, while you feel there are members of the Administration that should not sleep at night, if you give the wrong advice, or fail to give the right advice, you will have direct responsibility for the bloodshed that would follow and you yourself should be unable to sleep at night.’ He was shaken.”⁶¹ (Plate 15)

Later that morning, Friday 5 September, Middlemiss admitted to Coulter that he thought that the offer was a fair one, and the people should agree to it. He said he was not prepared to speak up along these lines because he did not think the people would change their minds and if he spoke out in this way they might never listen to him again. Coulter reminded him of the thought he had had in the middle of the night. When Lapun returned to the village to battle again for what he felt was right, knowing he was risking his political career and possibly his life, Middlemiss, who had seen *Freedom* two nights previously, got

⁶¹*Ibid.*



Plate 15: On the disputed land - Middlemiss talking with Mackay and Coulter.

up in front of the villagers and said he now supported Lapun. During that day the people talked, and finally reached agreement. (Plate 16) They would accept the new terms and conditions in principle, and work out the details later. It proved to be the turning point for all the negotiations for land required for the mine. Middlemiss later indicated to Coulter that their discussion had led him to counsel the people to sign.⁶²

⁶²Coulter: Personal communication, 8 September 1969, recorded by the author in "The Bougainville Story", August 1971. Also Coulter's private



Plate 16: Villagers at the Rorovana meeting, 5 September 1969, when agreement was reached.

On 7 September, Coulter departed. Three days later, Newman told the House of Assembly, "All opposition to mining by BCL has ceased."⁶³

On 10 September, in the Australian parliament, Barnes announced that the Rorovana people had agreed to the use of the land concerned on the following new terms offered by the company: The owners of the Rorovana land would lease 140 report, copy in author's possession.

⁶³*The Australian*, 11 September 1969.

acres for 42 years, renewable for another 42 years; BCL would pay \$30,000 immediately and \$7,000 annually, this amount to be reviewed every seven years; the landowners would be offered, through trustees, 7000 ordinary shares in Bougainville Mining Ltd at the issue price; the company to have the right of immediate occupation of the land and the right to do whatever was necessary with it. Finally, the Administration agreed not to acquire any further Rorovana land without the consent of the owners.

Speaking after the Minister, Kim Beazley, Labor Opposition spokesman on Papua New Guinea, said:

“The vast improvement in the policy in relation to Bougainville is a tribute to the statesmanship which emerged when the Minister himself met Mr Paul Lapun here in Canberra...It is obvious that very great concessions have been made to the people in Rorovana village...I personally feel that an apology is owed to the people of Bougainville by the Administration for the way this matter was handled earlier, but I commend what the Minister has done...I applaud the vast improvement which has resulted.”⁶⁴

Editorials in eight daily newspapers in Australia featured the

⁶⁴*Australian Hansard*, 10 September 1969, 1093-4. Beazley became Minister of Education 1972-75. He has believed in the ideas of Moral Re-Armament since 1952 when he witnessed the reconciliation between enemies in the Algerian and Moroccan independence struggles with France.

news of the agreement. One said that although direct negotiations between the company and native landowners in Papua New Guinea was prohibited by law, "There seems to be no doubt about the directness of the recent negotiations between CRA and the Rorovana people with a group of advisers including Moral Re-Armament."⁶⁵

The Rorovana agreement in September was the basis for further negotiations on Bougainville, to which Coulter, because of the tension that still surrounded the negotiations, was again sent up in November by the Australian government. The resulting 27 paragraph Rorovana Agreement, dated 30 November, 1969, acknowledged the validity of the lease set out in the Schedule to the Mining (Bougainville Copper Agreement) Ordinance. It contained all the initial terms agreed in September, plus the following terms:⁶⁶ The Administration would have 20% equity in the project to be paid for by the Australian government. A royalty of 1.25% would be paid to the Administration, and 5% of this would go to the landowners whose land was taken for the project. There would be a 3 year tax-free period for the company, followed by a writing down of assets over about five years effectively giving the company about eight years almost free of taxes. The Administration was to provide schools, hospital services and communications, and there was to be renegotiation of the Agreement every seven years.

The Rorovana settlement provided three significant precedents. Firstly, the company could and should negotiate directly with the landowners; secondly, the Administration should

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁶⁶Bedford and Mamak (1977), 126-130.

not involve itself in this process; and thirdly, the company should, in assessing the value of land, recognise the suitability of the land for the purpose for which the company required it, and not that for which it was being used by the owners.

The importance of the resolution of that crisis cannot be overstated. The *Current Affairs Bulletin* wrote that there ought to be a continuation of agreements “along the lines of the Rorovana settlement”.⁶⁷ This happened. The Rorovana agreement set a pattern for subsequent negotiations between Peter Lalor, the Public Solicitor, representing the Bougainville landowners, and Ray Ballmer, the new manager of the mine. There were some 33,000 acres involved, primarily the Special Mining Lease over 9316 acres, the Tailings Area Lease over 22,300 acres and the Port Mine Access Road over 823 acres.

Eventually, after the demarkation of individual land boundaries and the adjudication of ownership by the Land Titles Commission, agreement was reached on 24 October 1972. They came up with a figure of \$130 per acre for the whole 33,000 acres, giving an annual occupation fee of \$6.50 per acre.⁶⁸ The terms of the agreement were put to a meeting of the landowners at the mine-site at Panguna in April 1973. After listening to an

⁶⁷The author, ‘an academic Australian’, is unnamed. *Current Affairs Bulletin*, vol 45 no 3, Sydney, 29 December 1969.

⁶⁸Information supplied by Talbot Lovering who worked with the Public Solicitor on the case. See also Bedford and Mamak (1977), 24-27. Since that time, there have been no formal negotiations between the company and representatives of the landowners, but the company has increased the figure substantially over the years.

explanation given by Paul Lapun, the landowners agreed to accept the terms – all without threats of confrontation or bloodshed.

Evaluating Moral Re-Armament's Role in the Rorovana Agreement

Many people had a part, but there were conflicting views as to the role played by Moral Re-Armament. Peter Hastings, an Australian journalist specialising in Papua New Guinea affairs, commented:

“There are two views on Moral Re-Armament's actual contribution to negotiations - MRA's and that of other interested parties, among whom there is growing irritation over what they believe is an MRA tendency to claim more credit than is due.”⁶⁹

Barry Middlemiss, the Australian businessman who had championed the Bougainvilleans cause, wrote to prime minister Gorton:

“At no time were we influenced by MRA. MRA, like so many others, merely grasped an opportunity to get publicity. MRA along with others arrived quite late in the event and in no way influenced our thinking.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹Hastings, P. *The Australian*, 13 December 1969.

In contrast to Hastings and Middlemiss, Lapun, speaking in New Britain in 1969, described the effect the showing of *Freedom* had on the Rorovana villagers:

“The film portrayed to us the situation in Africa after the conflict. The people changed their life and the government changed its policies. And this is what happened in Bougainville, a revolution without bloodshed. The Government gave what the people wanted, and the people changed their attitude towards the Government, and there was peace.”⁷¹

Sir David Hay, Papua New Guinea Administrator from 1967 to 1971, wrote that he believed that the influence of Moral Re-Armament in opening the way to negotiations between Lapun and Bele on the one hand, and Gorton and Barnes on the other, was considerable, if not crucial. On the turning point at Rorovana, he wrote:

“I do not know whether it was Coulter alone who was able to persuade Middlemiss of the importance of negotiation as against confrontation. But the fact was that Middlemiss supported Lapun and I believe this was an

⁷⁰Quoted by Hastings, *Ibid*.

⁷¹Recorded by the author, quoted by Hastings, *Ibid*. For the text of the speech, see Appendix 2.

important element in the final outcome. To my mind this was another important intervention by the Moral Re-Armament, and it deserves to be recorded as such.”⁷²

C.E. Barnes, Minister for External Territories, wrote:

“I am deeply appreciative of the very strong influence for good which has been exercised by the Moral Re-armament movement in Papua New Guinea, and on one particular occasion, that of the Bougainville copper project, I believe the intervention of Moral Re-armament avoided a very serious confrontation.”⁷³

Ray Whitrod, Papua New Guinea Police Commissioner in 1969, wrote:

“During a very turbulent period in the history of Bougainville Island the influence of certain Moral Re-Armament workers was paramount in bringing about a peaceful solution to what seemed to me as police commissioner, to be a situation almost certainly leading to a violent and probably bloody encounter.”⁷⁴

⁷²Hay, Private papers, 10 November 1981.

⁷³Barnes, C.E., letter dated 25 February 1972 to George Wood who, with the author, travelled with Lapun in Bougainville in May, 1969.

Britain's *Mining Magazine* stated, "Improbable as it may seem, the crisis was resolved in substantial part through the showing of a film produced by the Moral Re-Armament organisation."⁷⁵ *The Australian* said, "The inference is bound to be drawn that CRA and MRA were capable of finding out and providing what the people wanted where the Administration either could not or would not."⁷⁶

The early attempts to resolve the crisis, doing what seemed natural, sensible and humane, only inflamed the issue. The situation was deadlocked until Moral Re-Armament came into the picture. The issue was resolved because some participants went back to the elements of their Christian faith and acted in accordance with it.

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⁷⁴Whitrod, unpublished letter to *The Times*, London, dated 20 January 1972.

The author has a copy.

⁷⁵November 1969 issue.

⁷⁶*The Australian*, 11 September 1969.

Appendix 1 Statement by Sir David O. Hay

On 16 August 1969, Lapun and Bele went to Sydney with the intention, as understood by the Papua New Guinea Administration, of obtaining a High Court injunction which would prevent CRA from proceeding with the land acquisitions necessary for the copper mining project. When the two Papua New Guinea leaders arrived in Sydney the Department of Territories' representative went to meet them and take them to their accommodation. However, he found that a Moral Re-Armament representative had already met them and taken them to his own home. This was an unexpected initiative. The Moral Re-Armament people had kept in close touch with me and the Minister, and one of our officers in Kieta (Lovering) was a member of Moral Re-Armament. But we were not aware of what they proposed to do in Sydney. My belief is that the influence of Moral Re-Armament in opening the way to negotiations between Lapun and Bele on the one hand, and Gorton (Prime Minister) and Barnes (Minister for External Territories) on the other, must have been considerable, if not crucial.

The fact is that the situation changed dramatically in the space of a few days, and on 21 August Barnes was able to announce in Parliament that there was now an agreement to re-open negotiations in Bougainville between the villagers concerned, the company and the Administration.

There remained the problem of persuading the villagers themselves that this was the best course of action. In the Administration we were by no means certain that this problem

could be solved, and various contingency plans were prepared in case of failure. A number of meetings were held at which Lapun discussed with the people of Rorovana village the desirability of entering into negotiations. One of the key figures in the meetings was a young man named Middlemiss who had up to this point been a leader in the opposition to land acquisitions for mining purposes. But it was reported to me in the later stages that Middlemiss had in fact been supporting Lapun in presenting the case for negotiation. It was also reported to me (and I heard the full story from him personally later) that a Moral Re-Armament member, Coulter, had come to Bougainville when Lapun and Bele had returned, and that he was in constant touch with both Lapun and Middlemiss. I do not know whether it was Coulter alone who was able to persuade Middlemiss of the importance of negotiation as against confrontation. But the fact was that Middlemiss supported Lapun and I believe this was an important element in the final outcome. To my mind this was another important intervention by the Moral Re-Armament, and it deserves to be recorded as such.

Signed: D. O. Hay, Canberra, 10 November 1981. Extract from private papers held in the National Library, Canberra.

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Appendix 2 Statement by Sir Paul Lapun

In New Britain and Bougainville, we have had trouble with the Government - you with the multi-racial council, we with land. In the film, both the people and the government were ready to fight. But, as you know, revolution, like fighting with guns and other weapons, is not the cheapest way of settling any problem - men will die.

You heard in the film *Freedom* the African leader, Mutanda, say, "If there is no bloodshed, how can we achieve freedom?" Adamu replied, "Freedom is a good thing, but we can find a better way than fighting. It can be achieved if you listen to God. Permanent freedom comes if we live four standards: absolute honesty, absolute purity, absolute unselfishness and absolute love."

Now we can relate what happened in the film to what is happening on these islands here. In regard to the trouble over the ownership of the land in the Rorovana area of Bougainville, the people were ready to shed their blood for their land. But I went to Australia and talked to the Prime Minister. He changed his mind and listened to the people. This means that victory can be won without bloodshed. The Rorovana people have seen this film produced by Moral Re-Armament. This is not a new denomination, but a movement that deals with, and helps solve, the trouble spots in the world. We have racial discrimination and other disorders in our society because we are too selfish. We are so self-centred. The 'literate' criticise the 'illiterate'. Whites hate blacks and blacks hate whites, because we do not think of

other people. Instead of talking right and living wrong, we must put love into practice.

There are a lot of troubles in this place. Disorders in the family, unhappiness in marriage - why? Because we are no longer behaving like human beings. We say the world is changing, but God has a better plan for us. God did not put trouble into the world - we brought trouble into the world because we have not lived God's way.

We must love one another, not just with words, but with deeds. In our world today, white and black are spoiling our society because we do not live these four standards. These are not new. We were born with them in our hearts. But as the lady discovered in the film, we have to change our life if we are to live them.

The film portrayed to us the situation in Africa after the conflict. The people changed their life and the government changed its policies. And this is what happened in Bougainville, a revolution without bloodshed. The Government gave what the people wanted, and the people changed their attitude towards the Government, and there was peace.

Extract from a speech at a showing of Freedom in Ulagunan village, near Rabaul, New Britain, October 1969, reported by P. Hastings, "Debate on Group's Achievements - What is MRA doing in New Guinea?", The Australian, 13 December 1969.

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