

## A Memorable and Rewarding Service

By Simon Pentanu

Parliament House-Bougainville

I've had the privilege and honour of serving many parliamentarians in our country's pre-independence House of Assembly 1969 - 1974 and the National Parliament 1975 - 1993. The time and calling was very rewarding serving elected members - including a number of Speakers - at the highest echelons of leadership. It was a rewarding twenty five years.

One of the many former MPs I've had the great opportunity to know, serve, learn from, travel with and represent the country through my time with PNG's National Parliament was Sir Barry Holloway, one of the original founders of Pangu Party.

Sir Barry served the people of Eastern Highlands Province in the pre-Independence House of Assembly and in the National Parliament following Independence in 1975.

As the last Speaker of the House of Assembly, Sir Barry presided over the National Constituent Assembly meetings that adopted the PNG Constitution in August 1975. He became the first Speaker of PNG's First National Parliament at transition when the Territory of Papua AND New Guinea became the Independent State of Papua New Guinea as the new nation came into being on 16 September 1975.

To build the country we now call PNG took the foresight, dedication and commitment of a host of early leaders – from simple, selfless ordinary villagers to community leaders to traditional and tribal 'big men' from the Highlands who ran for office and served their people as elected leaders.

Some of them couldn't read very well but that didn't matter because they could think, see, listen, reason and talk earnestly about their roles as their peoples' mouthpieces.

Some couldn't speak fluent English but this was never a handicap because they had more than one lingua franca to pick from to express their views.

A few may not have had the writing and reading skills but this was a time when you could find out and know more about what was going on by listening to radios territory-wide and nationwide which broadcasted in Tok Pisin and Hiri Motu by dedicated broadcasters.

Foresight, dedication and commitment were qualities all members, including the early Speakers of the House like Sir John Guise, Sir Barry, Sir Kingsford Dibela, and Sevese Morea had in spades. It was a privilege to know all of them. After the early Speakers in the old Parliament downtown it was a privilege to serve as Clerk with others Speakers in the new Parliament House at Waigani, among them Timothy Bonga, Akoka Doi, Brown Sinamoi, Dennis Young and for a very brief time, Bill Skate.

It is something I will always hold dear - that a career took hold and took shape serving among such men (though too few women). They were proud times. What an opportunity to grow up and serve the leaders and the country!

And there is no reason why it cannot be the same today with our leaders and the country if we stop being negative, abusive and disrespectful.

There are many countries – developed, developing and under-developed, so to speak, that are in far worse quandaries and facing far worse circumstances than PNG. We live in a relatively peaceful region of the world. PNG is a leader in the region in many respects.

My plea to our National Government - and let's include our Autonomous Bougainville Government as well - is to improve its governance and performance.

Good governance means protecting, maintaining, improving, strengthening and respecting state institutions, particularly oversight institutions. The highest oversight and accountability institution in the land is the Parliament. It begs the question: do our parliamentarians know this? The new Government should know this, it must.

My plea to the Opposition is that it cooperates wherever it can see a chance to address the very real issues confronting the country. This often means resisting to take political positions when it concerns matters of common interest on which the House is required to take decisions on. This

is often difficult in times of vexatious politicking but it is not impossible given our Melanesian tradition of consensus decision making.

Every parliamentarian shares a common interest in improving the lot of the people of Papua New Guinea. All parliamentarians also have a duty to ensure that the role of the Legislature to keep the Executive accountable for its decisions must be upheld. Regular parliament meetings and debates are a feature of Parliaments and Governments that have a good track record of maintaining respect and comity between the these two arms of Government.

We all know in our hearts that things can be solved with consensus and a sensible approach to negotiation – and that must include cooperation across the political divide. Nothing beats meeting in a room and talking across the table to each other, not talking at and about each other in absentia.

The politician's worst fear should be that they might let their people and the country down. Under the leadership code it is misconduct in office if the leader is acting in ways, doing things that amount to demeaning the integrity and respect of the office of a member and of the country.

Despite the feeling of tension and doom that grips the country leading up to, during, and following elections, I will always have fond memories of many politicians and parliamentarians, past and present, who put the country first .

There is growing genuine concern that dedicated, conscientious, good politicians may be diminishing in numbers. Improving the quality and accuracy of the electoral roll and educating voters about the democratic process could help solve this enduring issue.

The Bougainville House of Representatives looks forward towards forging closer and better cooperation and relationship between our two Parliaments, between our two Speakers with our two Clerks, between our members of our respective Parliaments and, most of all, between our two Governments.

It is important that both our Governments and our respective Parliaments work critically and genuinely hard at forging greater cooperation. Members of both our Houses deserve to work in closer cooperation and have meaningful contacts and dialogue at political and parliamentary level. The political arrangements between the National Government and Bougainville beholds us to do this.

I look forward to do so with the Speaker of the Tenth National Parliament, the Hon. Job Pomat MP.

This can be done with respect and dignity in much the same way as some of us have done so in the past working with former PNGNP Speakers, and with the same spirit of getting the best out of our human understanding in the knowledge that we will be doing this for the benefit and greater good of our Legislatures and our elected leaders.

If we just sit down and only talk or complain, nothing will give or happen. The only way to get another person to do something - good or bad - is to make that person want to do it.