

## CHAPTER VIII

### The Movements in the New Hebrides

*But the fearful, and the unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*  
Revelation 21.8

THE ISLANDS OF THE NEW HEBRIDES GROUP suffered greatly during the last century from 'blackbirding' of labour recruiters who took thousands of natives from the islands, often by force or deceit, and shipped them to the plantations of Queensland or Fiji, from which many of them failed to return. Disease- and mortality-rates on the estates were high; at the very worst they reached as much as 750 per 1,000 (1). And there was little interest in seeing that the labourers got back to their own islands after their term was over.

A disastrous decline in population took place in the Solomon Islands and in the New Hebrides. The population of Aneityum, in the New Hebrides, for example, declined from some 5,000 in 1839 to 199 in 1843; that of Tanna from between 15,000-20,000 in 1872 to 6,000 in 1876; that of Aniwa from 192 in 1894 to 140 in 1896.

These inroads on native society soon attracted the attention of scientists. The views of Rivers, who attributed the bulk of the decline to 'interference with social customs, notably head-hunting, this promoting lassitude, lack of interest in life, and therefore decreased will to have children's were for long widely accepted.

Belshaw, however, sums up his authoritative survey of the question by observing that 'violence and the introduction of new diseases would appear to be the prime causes of depopulation'. It is therefore to the blackbirders, who introduced firearms and diseases, that the decline in population must be attributed.

*Belshaw, 1954, pp. 39-40.*

2. *op. cit.*, pp. 188-90, and *New Hebrides, Col. Ann. Rpt., 1921-2, p. 4.*

*Belshaw, op. cit., p. 92.*

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Source :

Worsley, Peter. 1957. *The Trumpe shell sound: a study of 'Cargo' cults in Melanesia.* MacGibbon & Kee, London.

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And of labour-recruiting after the establishment of the Anglo-French Condominium over this group of islands, Belshaw remarks 'Since the Condominium the graver abuses have been checked, but still, in 1946, numerous accusations were being made of traffic in liquor, of the use of women as decoys, and of debt to force labour to work beyond its contracted period. Inspection by most administrative officers of the Condominium was an empty formality.'<sup>1</sup>

Even after the suppression of the worst excesses of the black-birding era, European diseases and the sale of alcohol and arms all continued to devastate the population. Deacon remarked of Malekula in the 1920's: 'Whole districts have vanished, while in the areas remaining the population consists largely of men back temporarily between periods of work in the big plantations.... The result is that the pattern and flow of native life is broken; the body politic is a desiccated corpse.'<sup>(2)</sup>

But if the islands were valued as a source of labour, they did not become important centres of plantation development themselves. Only four or five settlers lived on Ambrym, for instance, before World War II. The Condominium Government had slender financial resources and small staff. It is therefore universally spoken of as an example of ineffectiveness which has become almost a byword, symbolized in the popular name of 'Pandemonium'. Education and medical services were described recently as 'not worth mentioning'.<sup>\$</sup>

In this vacuum of civil government the power of the missions was greatly enhanced. The first Protestant missionaries arrived in 1848; it was not until 1906 that the Condominium Government was established. The missions reigned supreme, with their own courts and their own laws.<sup>4</sup> Their interference in the lives of the natives early attracted official notice and criticism. Comments on the suppression of native institutions were severe, and the 'would-be civilizers' were said to have 'no consideration of the effects, positive or negative, good or ill, of such instruction on the native mind or character'. Those things in which the natives took pleasure it was said, were suppressed.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>\$</sup> Deacon, p. 22.

Belshaw, 1950 p. 92; see also the figures on p. 114.

<sup>o</sup> Barrow, p. 379.

<sup>r</sup> *New Hebrides, Ann. Rpt.*, 1923, p. 5.

*Espiritu Santo: The Naked Cult*

On the island of Espiritu Santo, the impact of the Europeans had disastrous effects. By the turn of the century the island was in a state of anarchy: feuds, infanticide and epidemics were rife. Outbreaks of violence were common, and several Europeans were killed. Most of these killings were straightforward murders, as in the case of the Greig family murders in 1908, but the murder of a British planter named Clapcott in 1923 at Tasmalum in the south of the island was somewhat different.

The Clapcott murder, it transpired, contained millenarian elements, though the idiom was pagan and not Christian. 'Clapcott had been for some years on rather bad terms with most of his native neighbours, who accused him of interference with their women. He had been subjected to assaults and some destruction of his coconut trees.' (1)

The killing was sanctioned by an ancient myth which told how, when a noted native murderer was finally done to death himself, all his victims came to life. (2) The murder had been carried out on the orders of a native named Runovoro or Rongofuro (3) who had been educated at the Presbyterian central school and who was now organizing a movement aiming at the extermination of all Europeans. Clapcott had been the first to go; Runovoro promised that if the other Europeans were killed, the dead would arise, and the ancestors would return from a far land where the Whites had sent them. He soon gained a wide following in central Santo, and charged a fee for admission into the movement, ranging from 5/- to £1. His agents covered the whole island in their organizing campaign.

Runovoro prophesied that the ancestors would arrive after a Deluge in a great white ship loaded with Cargo. This would only be distributed to paid-up members. His followers built a large store for the Cargo; once they nearly seized a recruiting schooner, for 'every passing sail aroused great excitement and fire-signals from the anxious watchers posted on the beach'. Plantation-workers were convinced by Runovoro's ability to write meaningless marks, and the prophet was credited with having raised from the dead not

| Guiart, 1951 c, p. 86; other accounts describe Clapcott as an inoffensive man.

2 Williams, 1928, p. 100.

s see the account in Guiart, 1956b.

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only human beings, including one of his followers who 'died' in the excitement of a dance, but also a dead cow.

The awakening of the dead was constantly postponed, but this only strengthened the more radical wing of the movement. The demand 'Santo for the Santoese' was put forward, and the death of the Whites called for, since they were preventing the resurrection of the dead.

'The culmination was a tragedy which occurred on the 24th of July last year [1923]. Ronovoro was holding a great "sing sing" at the conclusion of which the resurrections were to take place. Probably it was decided then that the Europeans were to die. A half-caste visited this "sing sing" and was recognized by Ronovoro as his deceased son. The resurrection bodies were to be white-skinned. The half-caste did not appreciate his adoption and took the first opportunity for flight. In the middle of the "sing sing", Ronovoro's wife died and when all attempts to raise her to life failed, he declared that Clapcott was the cause and must be killed before she would come to life. Five men were sent to shoot this planter, who was an inoffensive man, deaf and in a very lonely place. He was shot, his body mutilated, and parts of it eaten."

In retaliation for the murder, HMS *Sydney* shelled the bush. (2) Eighteen men were arrested and seventeen tried, one having died in the meantime. Of these, six were sentenced to death (three of the sentences being commuted), and six others to varying terms for stealing the dead man's goods: five were acquitted. Ronovoro himself firmly believed in his own invulnerability, as he had already returned from the dead once, and faced execution quite fearlessly.

Little further was heard of the movement, though it was known to be persisting among the inland tribes, until an outbreak in 1937 was suppressed, and the leader arrested; he later died in prison. Once more, the Cargo myth and the theme of the White man's interference were put about; now, however, the Cargo was to be landed where Clapcott had been killed. (3)

Friction between White and Black was still strong. In the early part of the war, when a volcano erupted on Lopevi, the population

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. Raff in Williams, 1928, pp. 100-101.

<sup>2</sup> Harrison, pp: 380-1.

<sup>3</sup> Guiart, 1951a, p. 128; see also Simpson, pp. 114-9.

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was evacuated to Paama, and settled there. But the evacuees refused to accept government assistance in the shape of food. Earlier, there had been refusals to accept Coronation medals from the High Commissioner, since this was feared to be the prelude to the introduction of poll-tax. One chief of Paama was found guilty of spreading 'false rumours' and imprisoned for creating trouble, but even worse rumours circulated after his release. (1) And native attempts to play off the British against the French were standard tactics by this time.

The full impact of the war was not so devastating in the New Hebrides as in those parts of the Solomons, the Bismarck Archipelago and New Guinea directly affected by the fighting. But the large-scale activities of British and American forces in the New Hebrides, and rumours of events in the north, had powerful repercussions.

With the end of the war, missionaries on Santo began to be alarmed by the recrudescence of Cargo notions. At first only two small villages were affected, but the movement—now called variously the Naked Cult, Malamala or Runovoro School—spread to a large number of villages by 1948, and was openly anti-White. Over a third of the population of some districts in the southern half of the island was affected. The originators of the cult, in central-west Santo, had difficulty in controlling the eastern areas

The leader of the movement, Tsek, advocated the destruction of native-owned European goods as well as the products of indigenous crafts, the killing of all stock, and refusal to work for Europeans. Existing huts were to be burnt down and replaced by communal houses, two in each village, one as sleeping-place for the men and one for the women. It was forbidden for families to cohabit at night, and this domestic communism was reinforced by the construction of a large kitchen for each house, where cooking was allowed only in the mornings.

Special steps were taken to emphasize the abandonment of the past: many important taboos were scrapped, clan exogamy and bridewealth abolished. Although the movement embraced many different language groups, a new 'language' was now adopted. It

<sup>1</sup> PIM, 15th March 1940, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Belshaw notes that 'the inland villages of Aoba and Espiritu Santo are not visited' by administrative officers (1950a, p. 12).

*Miller, pp. 330 ff.*

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was said that it was America who would bring everything the people wanted, and that there would be no death.' Thus the destruction of property was not merely asceticism; it was an affirmation of faith in a future of plenty. The replacement of the ancestors by the Americans is common in these post-war movements, and reflects the effect made upon native consciousness by the plentiful equipment of the U.S. forces.\*

Although the practice specially insisted upon was the ban upon clothing and ornament, and although dances were also proscribed and cleanliness and purity stressed, this was not in the name of any primitive puritanism. It was rather an emphasis upon purity of heart and freedom of self-expression to such a degree that the sexual act was to take place in public, since there was no shame in it; even irregular liaisons should be open affairs. Husbands should show no jealousy, for this would disturb the state of harmony which the cult was trying to establish. Bridewealth was also abolished and exogamy converted into endogamy within the lineage. (2)

Tsek was little concerned with the Whites. His main aim was the removal of all quarrelling and friction, which were the causes of illness. To further its aim, cult-members were formed into separate villages, containing, on the average, between twenty and forty people. One large village contained three sections, two being made up of cult-members, and the third of traditionalists. Cult-solidarity was also emphasized across village boundaries, for much inter-visiting went on, but only between cult-villages. Status differences were weakened in the stressing of unity, and wealth-differences obliterated by the killing-off of pigs. This rigid morality proved too much for some of the weaker vessels who at first joined, but later reneged; others resented the destruction of their property, and became opponents of the cult.

A road several miles in length was built to the sea at Tasmalum, the scene of Clapcott's death, for the use of the Americans; at the end of it, a 'dock' was built to receive the Cargo.

The Administration now began to take heed of the missionaries' warnings, and launched an attack on the cult. The 'dock' was

• Natives in some parts of New Guinea believed that 'Australia had no troops and only aeroplanes; others ... that only American land troops were fighting; yet others ... drew conclusions from the Australian preponderance in all arms' (*Stanner, p. 88*).

1 *Miller, op. cit.*, and *Poirier, passim*.

*Guiart, 1956b, p. 196.*

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burned down, but despite this attack, the movement persisted, though driven underground. New elements were added: a 'special house for a modernistic ritual including preaching and community singing', poles and creepers representing a 'wireless belong boy', shaking fits, prophesying, and so on. (1) Later, a European was asked to leave the area where the ship was expected to land.

The spread of this movement on Santo showed that an indigenous organization could unite a large number of separate social groups over a wide area. This was even more apparent in the movement which developed on another island, Tanna.

### *Tanna : John Frum*

Tanna, a large, fertile and well-watered island in the southern New Hebrides which had suffered in the past from the activities of the blackbirders, was beginning to show signs of population increase once more by the forties, though there were still less than half the number of people there had been a century before. Blackbirding depredations left their effects in a 'legacy of bitterness which is not yet dead', (2) as well as in reduced population.

The people came under administrative control in 1912, and had had the same Agent, a Briton named James Nicol.\* since 1916. Just as on Santo, Government was weak, and the missions strong. Economically, the island was ill-developed; most revenue came from the sale of native copra or from the wages of migrant labourers. In the years just before World War 11 only four traders lived on Tanna, one being Mr Nicol's assistant.

There were three mission-stations: the Presbyterian, the most powerful, on the west coast; the Seventh Day Adventist, also on the west coast; and the Roman Catholic in eastern Tanna. The White staff of the missions was small; from time to time it included female missionaries and nurses.<sup>3</sup>

A critic of the missions writes

" Nicol's attitude to natives is shown by his action when Sir Harry Luke asked him who a certain native woman was. He went up to her, slowly pulled up her head by her top-knot so that he could have a good look at her face, opened her mouth and inspected her teeth, like a vet judging the age of a horse, and said "Oh that's Rosie" (*Luke, p. 149*). Nicol originally went out as engineer of the Government yacht. Sir Harry describes him as a 'rough and ready old Aberdonian'.

<sup>1</sup> Guiart, 1951a, p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> O'Reilly, 1950, pp. 69 ff.

<sup>§</sup> Barrow, p. 379.

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The Presbyterian Mission ... first to arrive ... acquired a preponderant position, which it has jealously guarded.... Later, English district agents were appointed, but often they could hardly be other than the secular arm of the Mission.

With the praiseworthy intention of preventing the alienation of native lands, the Mission had been given custody of the greater part of the coast; but, as proprietor in the eyes of the law, it profited by expelling those whom it considered undesirable.

Convinced of the intellectual inferiority of the native, the Presbyterians neglected educational work."

The dissatisfaction of the natives with mission teaching predisposed them to radical change. One native told a District Agent that he had been so disappointed with prayers and hymns all the time, and the 'little practical gain' of missionary activities, that he had joined another Church. Here also he found 'pray, pray, pray and sing, sing, sing, all the time'. (2) Except for one missionary, no European could communicate with the natives in anything but pidgin and none had the confidence of the natives or lived with them. (3) Under these conditions, movements of protest on Tanna naturally took on an anti-Mission flavour, and drew their recruits from existing Christian congregations, above all Presbyterian.

Millenarian tendencies had been noted just before the turn of the century, when there had been rumours that Jesus would descend and lead the Christians to Heaven while Tanna and the pagans were consumed by fire. (4) But the first important signs of native unrest did not become apparent until much later. In early 1940, there were signs of disturbance, exacerbated no doubt by a fall in copra prices. Meetings were held from which Whites were excluded, as were women. These meetings were to receive the message of one John Frum (spelt sometimes Jonfrum),\* described as a 'mysterious little man with bleached hair, high-pitched voice and clad in a coat with shining buttons'. He used 'ingenious

\* Rentoul derives the name John Frum partly from 'Broom' (Frum-the broom with which the Whites would be swept from Tanna) and considers that the 'John' reflects the breakaway from the John the Baptist Mission and the formation of an independent native church (*Rentoul, loc.*

1. *Guiart*, 1952a, p. 172. 2. *Rentoul*, p. 31; cf. *Poirier*, passim.  
3. *O'Reilly*, 1950, passim. 4. *Guiart*, (in press).

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stage-management ... appearing at night, in the faint light of a fire, before men under the influence of kava'. (1) John Frum issued pacific moral injunctions against idleness, encouraged communal gardening and cooperation, and advocated dancing and kava-drinking. He had no anti-White message at first and prophesied on traditional lines.

The prophet was regarded as the representative or earthly manifestation of Karaperamun, god of the island's highest mountain, Mount Tukosmeru. Karaperamun now appeared as John Frum, who was to be hidden from the Whites and from women.

John Frum prophesied the occurrence of a cataclysm in which Tanna would become flat, the volcanic mountains would fall and fill the river-beds to form fertile plains, and Tanna would be joined to the neighbouring islands of Eromanga and Aneityum to form a new island. Then John Frum would reveal himself, bringing in a reign of bliss, the natives would get back their youth, and there would be no sickness; there would be no need to care for gardens, trees or pigs. The Whites would go; John Frum would set up schools to replace mission schools, and would pay chiefs and teachers.\*

Only one difficulty prevented the immediate attainment of this happy state—the presence of the Whites, who had to be expelled

first. The use of European money was also to cease. A corollary was the restoration of many ancient customs prohibited by the missionaries: kava-drinking above all, and also dancing, polygyny etc. Immigrants from other islands were to be sent home.

This was not simply a programme of 'regression'. Only some of the ancient customs were to be revived, and they were customs banned by the missions. And the future envisaged was not the restoration of primitive tribalism and hand-agriculture, but a new life with 'all the material riches of the Europeans' accruing to the natives. (2) John Frum would provide all the money needed.

Natives now started a veritable orgy of spending in European stores in order to get rid of the Europeans' money, which was to be replaced by John Frum's with a coconut stamped on it. Some even hurled their long-hoarded savings into the sea, believing that when there would be no money left on the island the White

\* Chiefs were not paid, and teachers were supported by the faithful and by small allowances from the missions. *O'Reilly, loc. cit.*

1 Guiart, 1952b, p. 166. 2.

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traders would have to depart, as no possible outlet would be found for their activity'.<sup>1</sup> Lavish feasts were also held to use up food. There was thus no puritan or medieval-European 'asceticism' in these general joyful expectations of plenty. Rather, solidarity between rich and poor alike was expressed in this orgy of consumption, since existing wealth was meaningless in the light of the prodigious riches to come. Friday, the day on which the millennium was expected, became a holy day, whilst on Saturdays dances and kava-drinking took place. 'A certain licence accompanied the festivals', Guiart remarks. We may be sure that this represents some socially-recognized breaking of existing conventions.

The movement was organized through messengers known as 'ropes of John Frum'. The enthusiasts broke away from existing Christian villages which the missions had set up under Christian chiefs, and broke up into small family units living in 'primitive shelters', or else joined pagan groups in the interior. This development, though formally the opposite of Santoese domestic communism, symbolizes the same basic social fact: a break with the mission-controlled villages and the old pattern of group life.

The first John Frum wave in April 1940 occasioned little alarm, but the revival of the movement in May 1941 created considerable perturbation. Large amounts of money were suddenly brought in by natives. Even gold sovereigns, which had not been seen since 1912 when they were paid to the chiefs who accepted the authority of the Government, appeared; this perhaps symbolized renunciation of the agreement. Some natives came in with over 100 pounds in cash; cows and pigs were killed, kava drunk, and there was all-night dancing at the Green Point villages on the west coast where the movement had its centre. The Presbyterian missions, on Sunday the eleventh of May, found their services unattended. One of the most influential chiefs had given the order to abandon the mission and their schools. Dominican services were equally neglected.

After a lapse of a week, Nicol visited Green Point, only to find it empty except for a few women and children. He summoned twenty police reinforcements from Vila and, with the aid of one of the chiefs, arrested the John Frum leaders. A menacing crowd followed him shouting 'Hold firm for John Frum!'

In the trial, it transpired that John Frum was a native named

<sup>1</sup> Guiart, 1951b, loc. cit.

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Manehivi in his mid-thirties.\* He was illiterate (though he pretended to read), and refused to say where he had obtained his gold-buttoned coat. Manehivi was sentenced to three years' internment, and five years' exile from Tanna; nine others received a year's imprisonment. Nicol had Manehivi tied to a tree and exposed as an impostor for a day, and made five chiefs sign a statement asserting that they renounced John Frum, and fined them £100. (1)

The movement still flourished in spite of repression. December 1941 was the significant date of the next major outbreak. News of Pearl Harbour had percolated through even to the natives of Tanna, though the defeat was credited to the Germans, who were going to win. Because of growing anti-British feeling, Nicol had twenty men arrested and sent to Vila, and recommended the establishment of a permanent police force.

Meanwhile the John Frum leaders in Vila were active. Manehivi was not the real John Frum; people said; the latter was still at large. Missionaries intercepted messages written from Vila by a second John Frum, a Tanna police-boy, Joe Nalpin, and addressed to a west coast chief and two other men. They contained a new theme.: John Frum was King of America, t or would send his son to America to seek the King, or his son was coming from America, or his sons were to seek John Frum in America. \$ Mount Tukosmeru would be `covered by invisible planes belonging to John Frum'. Nalpin actually helped to direct the new phase from gaol, where he was serving a nine months' sentence.

In January, Australian Catalina flyingboats on patrol were the probable origin of the rumour that three sons of John Frum-Isac, Jacob and Lastuan (Last-One?) - had landed by plane on the

\* see photo 75m in *Luke*. Guiart states that Manehivi was handed over to justice to protect the real culprit. Further information on native-mission relations is given in Guiart, 1956a.

† Guiart, 1951c, p. 87. Mr G. S. Parsonson informs me in a private communication that the theme of the Coming of the Americans, and also of the Coming of the Japanese (both of these nationalities being well known to the natives of the New Hebrides), was in fact quite an old theme and was not just a product of the war. Indeed, none were more surprised than the Tannese when the Americans and Japanese actually did appear on the scene. This helped to swing the people towards John Frumism, about which they had previously been sceptical. A full account of these early manifestations is being prepared by Mr Parsonson.

‡ Rusefel (Roosevelt), King of America, was also frequently referred to.

1 *O'Reilly, loc. cit.*

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other side of the island from Green Point. 'Junketings' were going on night and day, as it was believed that John Frum's advent was imminent. The appearance of the first Americans and of numerous planes added fuel to the flames.

The three sons of John Frum 'were half-castes, had black hair, and were dressed in long robes and jackets. They showed themselves near a banyan tree, and gave their orders to Gladys, a girl of twelve, who translated the words which the other young boys and girls heard without understanding. A sack of magic stones had to be laid at the foot of the banyan tree to ensure the Coming of the divine children.... Isac was the mouthpiece of his brothers.... He was to be king of the south-east part of Tanna. The other two were also to be kings."

The movement thus had two separate foci, apparently following the lines of traditional east-west rivalry. Young girls and boys were dedicated to the new gods and lived together in a common dwelling. They bathed together ritually by day and danced by night, and went on pilgrimages to Green Point, the place of origin of the movement. This area, evidently, had at least ritual superiority.

The Administration became greatly alarmed when natives began to guard villages and escort strangers, and when one man asked a Chinese merchant's son the price of his father's store, because he expected the Chinese to leave with the Europeans.

Nicol found that young girls were 'waiting' on the leaders, and that another run on the stores was in progress. One store had done £300 worth of business in January, following on a very slack period. He then arrested Isac (Siaka) and others, and sent them to Vila for a years' detention; one sentence was imposed for 'incest' and others for 'adultery'.

As the Americans moved in to meet the Japanese threat, the news of their arrival swept the islands. A man was arrested for saying that Mount Tukošmeru was 'full of soldiers'; it would open on the Day, and the soldiers would fight for John Frum. But the most astounding piece of information was the news that many of these U.S. troops were *black!* It was prophesied that large numbers of black Americans were coming to rule over the natives. Their dollars would become the new money; they would release the prisoners, and pay wages.

Consequently, the Americans met with a splendid response

l. *Guiart*, 1952b, p. 08.

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when they set out to hire native labour. The movement now revived on Tanna, and kava-drinking and dancing were the order of the day, especially on the east coast; the missions were still boycotted. More arrests were made, and the prisoners sent to Vila, where many were allowed to work for the U.S. Air Force.

At the beginning of 1943, Nicol left Tanna for a period. His replacement, Mr Rentoul, noted the atmosphere of tension as soon as he arrived. He attributed this partly to anti-mission feeling and partly to price-fluctuations and to the absence of consumer-goods in the stores.' John Frum adherents now adopted a new approach. John Frum himself asked for permission to attend services while in custody, and in June 100 native notables asked to visit the Residency to 'make it up with Government.' (2)

In October, Nicol returned. His arrival precipitated a new John Frum demonstration which was broken up by the police. Natives armed with guns and clubs resisted arrest and reinforcements were summoned. A new leader in the north of the island, Neloig (Nelawihang), proclaimed himself John Frum, King of America and of Tanna. He organized an armed force which conscripted labour for the construction of an aerodrome which the Americans had told him to build for American Liberator planes bringing goods from John Frum's father. Those who refused to work would be bombed by planes. This pressed labour was resisted by a few natives who were wounded. The District Agent, under the pretence of demanding a ship to evacuate him from the island, radioed for help. He arrested Neloig when the latter visited him at his office.

The arrest of Neloig produced demands for his release. The supporters of John Frum, undaunted, went on feverishly building the airstrip, and a band of Neloig's followers even attempted to liberate their leader from gaol. The police reinforcements, with two US officers, were quickly despatched to the John Frum airstrip. There they found Zoo men at work, surrounded by others with guns. After the latter were disarmed, an American officer spoke to the natives, trying to persuade them of their folly. This was backed up by a demonstration of the power of a tommy-gun turned on a John Frum poster pinned to a nearby tree. Many fled in panic; the police then burned down a John Frum hut and took forty-six prisoners. Neloig received two years, ten others one year,

1 Guiart, (in press).

2 O'Reilly, loc. cit.

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and the rest three months. Later Neloig escaped from gaol and hid in the bush on Efate for three years before he gave himself up. In April 1948 he was committed to a lunatic asylum. His wife was detained at Vila, but the people of north Tanna still paid homage to her.

Though illiterate, Neloig had pretended to read and had started his own schools. When the missionaries at Lenakel tried to restart classes in 1943, only fifty children out of a total population of 2,500 attended. Dances and kava-drinking still flourished, and villages were allowed to fall into untidiness. John Frumism still flourished. Pagans, too, provided recruits: pagan leaders had long attempted to play off Government against mission, Neloig's father among them.

There were two more arrests in 1945. In 1946 a revival started, and contact was established with the prisoners at Vila and on Malekula. The growing tension came to a head in April 1947 when, in reaction to high prices, natives raided a store, mounted the counters, and tore the price-tickets off the goods. This, they announced, was on orders from John Frum, who objected to the colours of the tickets, and who asserted their rights to these things 'John Frum like black now white.'

Iokaeye (Yokae), the new John Frum, claimed to have received and transmitted orders from Isac, John Frum's son, who spoke like a man, at a special place in the bush on Thursday evenings before sunset. Isac abhorred the colours red (blood), blue (sickness), and yellow (death), and women were forbidden to dye their skirts with these colours; only black and white were allowed.

Iokaeye and fourteen others were now arrested; Iokaeye and two other men received five years, the rest two years plus five years' exile, but all fourteen had been involved in the outbreak of October 1943, and had clearly been little overawed by their previous failure. Two villages were declared out of bounds to other villagers.

Towards the end of 1947, four coconuts arrived from exiled John Frum adherents with instructions that the nuts be planted on the sites of four of their houses which had been demolished on European orders. There is doubt as to whether these coconuts were a mere gift or some esoteric sign of rebellion, but the coconuts were dug up. Continuous suppression seems to have weakened the movement by this time. At their own suggestion, 133 people signed an undertaking not to have anything to do with John Frum and to

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help the Government.' But the explosive potentialities remained great.

From 1948 to 1952, however, complete calm reigned on Tanna. The economic disorders of the war gave way to an era of high copra prices, which rose from £25 per ton in 1947 to 78 pounds in 1952. Then, in 1952, the price fell again to around £30. These fluctuations were regarded as the deliberate work of local European traders. (2)

New signs of unrest appeared in various parts of the island: the daily wearing of leaves normally only worn on ritual occasions; the boycott of European stores; visions of the dead and of 'Jake Navy', a figure derived from a popular brand of cigarettes, and so on. John Frumism was clearly still alive. A whole series of rumours began to circulate: some people had seen the indigenous god Mwayamwaya; others had seen the mythical mannikins who were believed to live in ravines; some saw Isac and Lastuan once more; and the recently-arrived British Delegate was said to be an avatar of Noah, who was now equated with John Frum. There was little sign of any immediate decline in the movement's appeal. (3)

Yet, despite these undercurrents, Government reported that the natives were 'in general very happy ... and had ... few desires for exterior expression'. (4)

### *Malekula: Cargo Cooperatives*

One of the newer developments on Tanna was the setting up of cooperatives in order to dispense with the services of the distrusted European traders. This tendency was very much more marked on Malekula, an island to which the John Frum movement spread partly through the exile of cult-leaders there, and also through direct evangelization, which often followed traditional lines of communication. The Tanna leaders thus had some influence on the peoples of Ambrym and Malekula, Epi and Paama. On Malekula, for example, secret night-time meetings and dances were held only three miles from the mission.

But events on Malekula took a less directly political turn, though many people were influenced by John Frum and Naked Cult agents. Independent native organizations on Malekula did not concentrate on an expected supernatural coming of the Cargo; they set out to

<sup>1</sup> Barrow, p. 382.

<sup>2</sup> Guiart, (in press).

<sup>3</sup> *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> extract from the *New Hebrides Ann. Rpt. for 1948*, noted in Simpson,

1955, p. 149.



ABOVE Feast days and dancing ceremonies play a big part in the lives of Trobriand natives  
BELOW People of Nondugl, Central Highlands of New Guinea, gather in a low-roofed but for the Kanana ceremony



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advance native economic interests by the cooperative efforts of the producers themselves.

In 1939, three natives, chief Paul Tamlulum, Kaku, and Ragh Ragh (Charley), formed a company to produce and market copra. The profits were to be placed in a community bank and used for the benefit of the community: at first, for the free distribution of goods, and later for the building of schools, hospitals, etc. „

A great deal of coconut planting was done, and a deputation was sent to Vila to make arrangements for sale. A British planter was eventually asked to take over the marketing and to administer the bank, under the control of a British official. When this arrangement came to an end, the bank was handed back to native control. The first trouble came in 1941 when Paul Tamlulum was sent to prison because chiefs had been illegally putting pressure on people to carry out collective clearing and planting.

The arrival of the Americans meant the exodus of many men to Santo where they were employed in unloading operations. The wealth and generosity of the Americans amazed the natives. Even today native families still possess crockery and furniture left to them by the Americans. Pro-American feeling was strongest in the cooperative area, where the American flag was hoisted. But there was much more behind the pro-American sentiments. Ragh Ragh announced that an American, Capt. W. Otto, had described the riches which would be given to the natives after the war. Ragh Ragh, Paul Tamlulum and a Pentecost islander named Bule John were then arrested and imprisoned.

After the suppression of this first wave of American-inspired enthusiasm, the movement took some time to regain its impetus. By 1945, the cooperative movement had been revived, but now with a very different purpose: land was to be cleared, not for agriculture, but to make roads for the expected lorries, and to mark out an aerodrome for Capt. Otto's planes. Roads were also made on Pentecost; Bule John was now rearrested.

Paul Tamlulum and chief Etienne now resumed more orthodox cooperative activities, and in mid-1949 persuaded the son of their old White representative on Santo to assist them. Under his guidance, the 'Malekula Native Company' was formed. Though there were a number of 'councillors' as local representatives, the White agent on Santo in fact dominated the movement. He sent a

<sup>1</sup> Guiart, 1952b, pp. 429 ff.



Primitive men of Kokoda, in ceremonial attire, stand beside a memorial plaque giving details of the campaign in the area after the Japanese invasion in 1942

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boat round to pick up copra, and also to collect labourers, who were not to work for any other European except him. Profit went into the Company's bank, but before long there was trouble with the Administration over the books.

In northern Malekula, complaints were made. Here there was a division of interest between the rich indigenous landowners and refugees from uncontrolled Big Nambas country existing on small borrowed plots. The larger landowners had a correspondingly larger share in the cooperative and the immigrants were under their economic domination. And though payments were made to cooperative members for the copra marketed, they only received about a third of what they were entitled to.

The use of former members of the New Hebrides Defence Corps to impose a quasi-military discipline over the workers soon aroused alarm. Medals stamped with individual numbers and 'Malnatco', originally issued as a means of identification in sales, gradually became badges of rank. Little by little, Cargo elements began to re-emerge; there was talk of the arrival of arms and ammunition and a black flag. Ragh Ragh, who was in touch with the John Frum leaders, was thereupon expelled from the Company by moderate elements who wished to develop the cooperative as a purely economic venture and to avoid the government suppression which the continued presence of Ragh Ragh in the leadership would invite.

The movement now gained rapidly in strength on Malekula, on Pentecost and on Ambrym. Despite mission disapproval, there were large group-enlistments cutting across religious affiliations. The Company now began training truck-drivers and building roads, and diverted a considerable amount of labour from the plantations. The channelling of the movement into harmless courses led the Administration to abandon attempts to suppress it, and it forged ahead.

### *Religion on Ambrym*

The importance of the missions in the New Hebrides has been noted for Tanna and Espiritu Santo, where the cults were particularly anti-mission. A more detailed examination of the effects of mission influence on native society can be made for another island, Ambrym, where Christian proselytization produced complex social differentiation, even though social change there had been much less radical than on other islands.

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In 1952, contact with Europeans was limited, especially with government officials. There were sporadic visits from traders buying copra, and one or two Roman Catholic missionaries and sisters. There was only one planter, and little migrant labour as compared with other islands. But shortage of labour had resulted in improved conditions for workers, and employer-employee relations were relatively harmonious. Migrant labour held less of the terrors of the past, and tended to attract youths eager to see the world. Many signed on for a different area each time. This produced a 'great intermingling of the natives of the archipelago which in a few years should make a more uniform development of the archipelago possible-and all the more so as the last refractory tribes accept, and even seek to sign on, in their eagerness to make up their leeway.'

Besides sporadic visiting traders buying copra and selling trade-goods, White traders have established stores run by native clerks. Unlike other islands, native entrepreneurs have not yet set up their own stores, but the growth of commerce has resulted in a new social differentiation, undermining the traditional hierarchy of wealth and rank of the Mage society. And traditional kinship rights and duties are flouted: one native catechist, for example, 'entertained relatives ... at his home (a but belonging to the mission) and when they were leaving, he presented them with a bill of expenses for his hospitality'. (2) Another individual profited from the devaluation of the pound by buying dollars from bush natives. The devaluation was attributed to the illness of the King represented on the money.

Today, the major social divisions among the 1,500 natives are between the various Christian groups and the heathens. The former do not oppose the heathens as a single bloc, for they are divided into various denominations; mainly Presbyterian, a large Roman Catholic group, and some Seventh Day Adventists.

We have seen how elsewhere the recruitment of converts into Christian villages under Christian 'chiefs', who were often 'teachers' and not from traditional ruling families, disrupted native communities. On Ambrym, this was not done to the same extent. This fact, together with the persistence of a strong, consciously independent, heathen community, had meant a lesser degree of disturbance than on Santo and Tanna, and is reflected in the relative freedom of Ambrym from millenarian cults.

1 Guiart, 1952a, pp. 256 ff.

2. op. cit., P. 259.

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But the considerable powers vested in the Presbyterian teachers have inevitably weakened the authority of the chiefs. The teachers, untrained in religious matters, but trusted by missionaries to spread the gospel, hold a key intercalary position between the Whites and the islanders. Some teachers have used the authority of the missionary for their own ends. They also exert considerable influence over the White mission-staff who rely on them for information on matters affecting the natives, since only two missionaries speak native tongues. For the native who is illiterate (as with nearly all the Presbyterians), or cut off from personal Bible study because the Bible has not been translated into their tongue, the teachers have access to unique knowledge and authority.

The Roman Catholic catechists form a similar elite. Village life was further disrupted when the Catholics centralized their flock round the mission-church, and then later dispersed them. The Seventh Day Adventists restrict the authority of their teachers to the religious sphere and have no 'chiefs'. Yet this mission's policies have also profoundly altered native life. The discipline enforced by their teachers is stricter than that of other denominations; acceptance of this discipline is facilitated by the attraction of technical training in joinery, carpentry and elementary iron-working given by this mission. Others have joined because of dissatisfaction with existing missions. The Adventist teachers are also trained to see farther than their own locality: they are taken away for training to other islands as part of a deliberate policy of welding the small Adventist groups into a solid body on an archipelago-wide basis.

New systems of authority, prestige and status, residence and association, have thus developed. They are replacing, and competing with, the old and with each other. The Roman Catholics, for example, forbid marriages between Catholic and 'unconverted' natives. And all denominations seek to recruit the 'heathen'.

The missions have little influence in the interior of the country, except the Presbyterians to some extent. Here the central institution is the Mage society, with its hierarchy of age-grades, entry to which is gained by the payment of pigs: £A300-400, in pigs is the estimated cost of entry to a medium grade.\* The men of the highest grade, the Mal, provide the secular and religious leadership of the community.

\* cf. the Mangki society of Malekula, *Deacon*, Chaps. X-XIV.

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Two men held this highest rank, one of them an ex-Queensland labourer, the other a native assessor and a conscious defender of heathen independence. The assessors, appointed to assist European officials, included another heathen, two Roman Catholics and two Presbyterians. Thus the religious divisions of the island were recognized in the governmental structure, and the internecine struggles for power were carried into the sphere of the assessorship.

There seems little doubt that both assessors and teachers used their power illegitimately not only for forced conversion, but also for quite secular ends, though Guiart's critical analysis has been challenged by a former Presbyterian missionary.'

Native leaders have seen that the strengthening of their religious power also meant the strengthening of their political power, and the aim of 'achieving equality with the Whites' has never been far below the surface.\* The heathens have suffered serious blows in their attempt to maintain their independence. The pigs which form their principal source of animal food and of wealth, and which are vital to their social institutions, have been the object of attack by mission and Government.

Pig-rearing is 'seen as the *sine qua non* of heathenism'. It is attacked in the name of hygiene and the protection of gardens, but other evils have resulted from the abandonment of swine-culture by Christians, such as dietary deficiencies, increased in the case of the Seventh Day Adventists by religious taboos on the eating of such foods as shellfish and fish without scales (and on less beneficial things such as alcohol, tobacco, tea and coffee). Although Christian villages are no cleaner than the heathen ones, the campaign against swine-culture was vigorously carried on until 1952. Using mission and government authority, some native Christian leaders had an excuse for a field-day against the heathens' pigs, which they slaughtered, often when the pigs were not in fact damaging gardens. The heathens passively resisted government orders to pen their pigs.

\* Guiart, 1952a, p. 262. Cf. Deacon's remarks on the character of those Malekulan natives who took to Christianity with enthusiasm: 'the Christian converts ... form a small band, corresponding ... to the (idealistic) social revolutionaries of the Bakunin type **in Europe; they are out for the destruction and reconstruction** of native society' (op. cit., p. 20).

This perspicacious analogy goes far to explain why the Christians were so readily attracted to millenarism.

1 Paton, passim.

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These attacks on the heathen community are only one side of the picture, however, for the heathens attempt to utilize divisions in the Christian ranks for their own ends, and set Catholic against Presbyterian, and even Englishman against Frenchman. They thus offer protection to natives who have offended Christian rules, e.g. women fleeing from their husbands. For such action, however, one heathen assessor was nearly imprisoned; he fled, and his brother was taken as hostage for six months. His fear and suspicion of Government and mission were intensified until a rapprochement was effected. This suspicion is evident in the heathen resentment of educational and medical services which they consider to be the thin end of the religious wedge. And one heathen leader accused the Presbyterian Mission of wanting to annex the island for Britain when Mr Paton distributed some Condominium flags.'

In spite of these ideological and political divisions, the people are still bound together by economic and other activities: 'the ways diverge, but there is a certain compensating economic inter-dependence between the Christian and the heathen regions; the latter are customers in the stores of the Christians; while for their part they supply the Christians with bamboos and creepers for house-building, with native remedies and even with foodstuffs at the time of the gathering of the harvests. The Christians can put sailing canoes on the stocks on behalf of the inland groups of heathen.' (2)

But the opposition between the factions was such that when the John Frum movement spread to Ambrym, it did not succeed in unifying the whole population, but was canalized by existing divisions. It was principally among the Presbyterians that the movement had its success, though these, of course, did form the largest group on the island.

Once more the exiling of John Frum leaders led to the spread of the movement to other islands where these leaders were deported. Exiled leaders at Port Sandwich thus used traditional channels of inter-island communication, as well as Ambrym islanders evacuated to Malekula following an earthquake, to start the movement up on Ambrym.

The growth of the movement at Uro village, on military lines, showed how much had been learnt from the war. Village entrances were guarded by a militia commanded by 'captains' and 'lieuten-

10/10/1934, pp. 20 and 201. 1. ep. col. p. 26.

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ants'. This force exercised daily and changed trousers (i.e. uniform) on handing over duties. On entering Uro, one had to give one's name, and the reasons for one's visit or transit, all of which were entered in a register. The newly widened and cleaned roads were flanked with notices saying 'Halt!', 'Stop!', 'Mouia!', 'Compulsory Stop!' etc.

The people were ready to abandon the missionaries; they could run their own religion and schools, they declared. Government would not touch them, for they would take refuge in the mouth of the volcano. As on Tanna, Tamar, the ancestor-god of the volcano, was worked into the ideology: 'young boys played at putting leaves in crabholes and at telephoning to Tamar ... speaking into tinned food tins.... An old woman ... was said to have seen a light in a craggy portion of lava and had heard what seemed to be the sound of a bell. In the evening, the village went in procession to the music of the guitar and dancing, to the lava flow. They heard the sound of the bell and waited. As nothing happened they began to kill the cats, at the direction of the old woman. The dogs were tied up in the village during the evening, and, of course, began howling."

Store-debts were paid off, and money thrown into the sea, for it was soon to be replaced by new. A white steamer (the colour of *Le Polynisien*, the Messageries Maritimes vessel) would bring vast stores to John Frum followers from America. Watch was kept through the night, but the cry of 'Sail ho' was not made. When *Le Polynisien* did arrive at Craig Cove, the chief of Uro went to ask the priest if the Cargo was really consigned to him.

The John Frum movement now spread to other villages; mission regulations were ignored, and men discussed holding women in common. Paama, a fully Presbyterian island, also received the cult, again along traditional channels, and pig-killing and money-disbursement broke out.

On Ambrym, the Presbyterian teachers appeared to have succeeded in stamping out the cult, but it would be rash to say that it was dead. Guiart remarks that the collapse of heathen resistance might well provide 'fresh impetus to John Frumism; and this is the more probable since distrust of the Whites is general' (2) The dynamism of the John Frum cult might be the stimulus to the building up of a unified, independent and probably anti-European move-

1. op. cit., pp. 170-1.

s op. Cit., p. 267.

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ment which some native leaders have attempted to establish by manipulation of the various Christian denominations. These existing channels, however, might well prove more satisfactory, since, on Ambrym, anti-mission feeling does not seem to have been as strong as elsewhere, and considerable liberty of action was afforded to native leaders by the missionaries. Indeed, in 1948, the native Presbyterian Church of the New Hebrides achieved its independence.

But the field is evidently open for intensive recruitment to movements promising amelioration of present conditions. Fluctuations in copra-prices, news of technological innovations at Vila, and other economic matters were matters of concern to the natives of Ambrym. Equally, there was deep fear that the New Hebrides might share the fate of the islands to the north during the last war. Knowledge of the war in Viet Nam stimulated this fear, and the anthropologist Guiart was suspected of being occupied in preparing for the next war.

On Ambrym, native aspirations towards self-expression have taken the form of religious factions. But the basic pattern is not unlike that of other islands, even if there are local peculiarities. As in other islands of the New Hebrides, where there are channels easily open to independent native enterprise (e.g. the cooperatives on Malekula) within the framework of the existing social order, millenarism has failed to strike deep roots, even though no large opportunities for political advancement are available. But demands for the latter will come. The frustration of such demands could lead to the development of orthodox political movements, but it could equally lead to a revival of the cults. The wider possibility of the linking up of such movements on an archipelago-wide basis has been shown to be quite feasible.

Nevertheless, existing sectional divisions have as yet hindered the development of such a unified, proto-nationalist movement, except to some extent on Tanna. Whether the reported interest of educated half-castes will affect this process remains to be seen.

The process of economic differentiation in native society can best be seen from the Malekulan cooperative movement. Here the veer-

\* The missions, for example have not attempted a frontal attack upon traditional marriage customs, including polygyny and child betrothal, because these are still supported by all natives, but attempts are made to 'render them less brutal'.

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ing of the Company between the poles of orthodox economic enterprise and millenarian Cargo activity may be seen not as a shift of the whole membership from one side to the other, but as the epiphenomenal expression of internal differences within the movement. We have seen the differentiation of society into men with large land-holdings on the one hand, and poor dependent immigrants with small borrowed plots on the other, and the newer growth of wage-earners and entrepreneurs among the natives. This precipitated a struggle for power in the post-war period which culminated in the success of the new native entrepreneurs, their expulsion of the radical millenarist Ragh Ragh, and the consequent direction of the movement by the economically dominant moderates along the lines of increased production and the further growth of their economic strength. Their programme appealed also to the poorer natives, since it met with some initial success in a favourable world economic climate.

It was therefore able to counter much of the appeal of Cargo propaganda by showing that real economic advancement, whilst not on the prodigious scale envisaged by Cargo leaders, was actually possible under existing conditions by orthodox secular means. Such policies may have lacked the dynamic, root-and-branch appeal of millenarist solutions, but they did represent a fresh approach to the question of native economic and political advancement which was likely to be a more effective threat to White rule, and more beneficial to native interests in the long run, than millenarian activity.