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# South Sea Isles Ready to Change But Want to Retain Style of Life

By ROBERT TRUMBULL  
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SUVA, Fiji, Sept. 23—South Sea Island leaders meeting here are concerned with a struggle to meet the demands of youth without eroding the traditional dreamy existence that has enchanted Western travelers for two centuries or more.

Already they say, the old ways are crumbling under the erosive impact of ideas picked up from tourists and the ubiquitous transistor radio.

An educated young Samoan chief, Tofa Laufo Meti, warned that though the social turmoil elsewhere had not appeared in the South Pacific to any extent, the time would come when the area's standards would be challenged.

Another speaker at the gathering, the South Pacific Conference, an annual assembly of leaders from 15 island dependencies and the independent states of Western Samoa, Tonga and Nauru, was Sir Robert Foster, the Governor of Fiji, a British colony that will become independent Oct. 10.

### Briton Opened Session

Officially opening the 11-day session last Tuesday, Sir Robert, who has served on many of the islands, said:

"The transistor radio has brought the world to the lagoons of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, to the forests of the Solomon Islands and the highlands of Papua and New Guinea.

"Tourism has imposed an increasing strain on custom and traditional ways of life, while the drift to the towns and the impact of a monetary economy have brought sociological stresses and problems."

According to Gordon Siam, a member of the recently instituted elected Parliament of the Solomon Islands, economic development and political advancement have brought growing demands for social services

in the South Pacific territories. "To meet those changes we must also change our ideas, our customs, even our way of life," he declared. "We must try to keep what is best of the old, but we cannot avoid shifting our ground and accepting the best of the new."

### Impact of Technology

"In many cases the products of modern technology have entered before the islands were ready to absorb them," said Senator Frank T. Palacios of Saipan, a member of the upper house of the Legislature in the American-administered Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, also called Micronesia.

Adjustment to a strange money economy is complicated by "a culture based less on materialism than on family and kinship ties," he added.

Prime Minister Tupua Tamasese Lealofi IV of Western Samoa asserted that Polynesians were "trying to raise the standard of living in an atmosphere that has never regarded such activity as urgent."

Another economic factor, the paucity of natural resources, was underlined by Reuben Utaiwa, leader of the Parliament in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, which, like most of the other islands, are atolls—strips of coral and sand around lagoons. He added that "nature has been a little unkind in preparing us for the modern world."

One of the prices of progress was mentioned by Robert R. Rex, head of local government on Niue, a tiny, isolated, coconut-growing Polynesian island 350 miles southeast of Samoa that is a Pacific territory of New Zealand. Improvements in secondary education, he said, have quickened the pace of the emigration of young people to Auckland and other cities in New Zealand.

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