

# POWER SHIFTING IN SOUTH PACIFIC

## Islanders Hold Key Posts for the First Time

By ROBERT TRUMBULL  
Special to The New York Times

SUVA, Fiji, Sept. 27—Significant changes in the political profile in the southern Pacific, one of the last colonial areas, came to the fore in meetings just ended here between island leaders and representatives of Western powers in the region.

For the first time since the beginning of Western dominance more than a century ago, men from the South-Sea islands hold key positions and make the effective decisions in international deliberations affecting their own people. In the last few days they have demanded further advancement in their status.

These developments affect deeply the interests of the United States and other Western countries whose Pacific-island territories are becoming more important strategically for space and missile research, testing of advanced weapons, and surveillance of important sea routes at a time of significant naval expansion by the Soviet Union and Communist China.

### Pacific Termed a Nation

Island leaders who attended the meetings of the South Pacific Conference here were told by a Melanesian politician that "collectively, the entire Pacific is a relatively big nation and should be paid more attention by the great powers of the world."

The conference, founded in 1950 as a discussion group in association with the South Pacific Commission, the Western-dominated regional development organization, has evolved into the international forum of political leaders who say they speak for about four million natives of islands and atolls.

"Change must come, and is coming, where Pacific Islanders must take their place in the world of today," Oala Omalara, an outspoken young member of the elected legislature of Papua and New Guinea, told the conference.

"Metropolitan countries in the Pacific must change their ideas and attitudes towards us Islanders quite voluntarily and not wait until we tell them to do so," he added.

### Cabinet Ministers Present

Two members of the South Pacific Commission, Australia and New Zealand, responded to the growing importance of the meeting of island leaders by sending senior Cabinet ministers as observers for the first time.

The other member nations are the United States, Britain, France and the sovereign Pacific-island states of Western Samoa and Nauru.

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In a series of steps that began in 1965, the South Pacific Conference has become an effective policy organ that controls their budget allocations for development projects by the South Pacific Commission and exerts regional influence in other ways.

At this year's meeting, the island delegates adopted a resolution demanding that their voice in the South Pacific Commission's affairs be recognized juridically by changes in the organization's charter.

The South Pacific Conference greatly enhanced the regional character of inter-island relationships this year by approving a number of mutual-development projects for all the territories, among them specialized training schools to qualify islanders as experts in various fields.

Numerous delegates urged the creation of new regional structures for economic cooperation such as trade organizations and a "Common Market." However the island leaders shied away from suggestions of political federation.



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