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PACIFIC ISLANDERS GAINING NEW ROLE

Regional Parley Dominated by Territories' Leaders

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TUMON BAY, Guam, Sept. 20 — From the 18th-century writings of James Cook, the British navigator, to the works of the American novelist James A. Michener, enraptured accounts of the islands have identified the term "South Pacific" with visions of the easy life on golden beaches shaded by swaying palm trees.

Leaders from many of the islands that are just specks on the map but possessed of haunting beauty have been holding their annual regional forum, called the South Pacific



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**Sir Kamisese Mara is the
Prime Minister of Fiji.**

Conference, for the last few days in a hotel overlooking just such a beach here.

The island elite gathered here are the nucleus of a new political community — the unified Polynesian, Micronesian and Melanesian peoples of the South Pacific, a region that was entirely colonial less than half a generation ago.

They think of themselves as shaping a new chapter in a history defiled, since the coming of the white man, by loot, enslavement and disease. They are also the defenders of a gentle culture threatened by a new awareness of technology and the lure of a money economy.

Leaders Now Are Outspoken
Eloquent expressions of these abstract concepts at South Pacific Conference meetings come from areas that until recently were mute in the presence of the colonial overlords.

At first, according to those who have followed the sessions since they began in 1950, the island representatives read stilted papers prepared with the aid of white advisers. They spoke diffidently, if at all, in discussions with the governing authorities.

Gradually, however, vigorous leaders emerged, like the tall Cambridge-educated Prime Minister of Fiji, Sir Kamisese Mara. The new breed, usually garbed in multihued shirts, and often wearing the comfortable skirt-like lavalava instead of trousers, eventually took over the entire running of the conference from the white professionals, who now appear mainly as observers and advisers, often wearing flower-patterned shirts themselves.

"When we first came to these meetings, we had to be taught how to wear shoes and use knives and forks," Albert Maori Kiki, the leader of the Papua New Guinea contingent here, said the other day.

Changes in Aid Structure

Mr. Kiki, the fiery Foreign and Defense Minister in the semi-independent government of Papua New Guinea, was a leader in winning the adoption of a resolution demanding a full voice in the regional aid programs that have been administered by a Western-dominated commission.

This group, known as the South Pacific Commission, is the parent body of the South Pacific Conference. The senior members — the United States, Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand — are expected to accept a proposal by the islanders that delegates from the dependencies participate as equals in the commission's future deliberations on aid programs for the region.

Island states and dependencies represented at the conference range from the tiny atolls of the Tokelau Islands, administered by New Zealand, to the sprawling Australian territory of Papua New Guinea, which is due to become fully self-governing on Dec. 1, and independent in a year or two.

Others are the French territories of the Wallis and Futuna Islands, French Polynesia and New Caledonia; the British Solomon Islands and Gilbert and Ellice Islands; the United States territories of Guam and American Samoa, and the American-administered Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands of Micronesia, the New Zealand dependencies of Niue and the self-governing Cook Islands, the British-French condominium of the New Hebrides, the Republic of

Practical Problems

Delegates here complained that priorities in aid programs for the region, run by the Western powers with territories in the area, often get ahead of the realities of island life. For example, an island educator complained, textbooks for arithmetic put problems in terms of yards of carpet while pupils live in villages where floors are covered with woven mats, if anything.