

Masalai i tokaut

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Aid debate masks the government's commitment to continuing with corruption

The Prime Minister is using the current debate on aid as a smokescreen to cover his own inability to take effective measures to deal with corruption.

The National Alliance swept to victory in the 2002 election on a raft of promises to deal with our endemic corruption: an end to nepotism, fair and transparent appointments, the prosecution of offenders, the denial of office for those under investigation and an Independent Commission Against Corruption.

Not only has the government failed to deliver on its promises it has been actively involved in promoting corruption especially in the forestry sector where there have been a raft of illegal logging deals and numerous instances of political interference.

These are the issues that have prompted action from the Asian Development Bank, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and now the Australian Government.

These institutions can see behind the blatant hypocrisy of our government to the clear fact that it is the ruling elite who continues to abuse the system at the expense of ordinary people.

While Sir Michael may huff and puff about sovereignty and interference, Masalai asks if it is his own failures that he should be answering for?

Michael Somare labelled the previous government "the most corrupt ever" in the run up to the 2002 national elections.

He derided the Peoples Democratic Party for its failure to deal with issues like Concord Pacific and its involvement in illegal logging, the passport scam, the multi billion dollar loan proposals and the protection that it received from a wide net of political friends.

Somare also scoffed at Morauta's Forest Minister, Michael Ogio, for his involvement in numerous illegal logging deals, unlawful tax concessions and his constant interference in due process.

It is a historical fact that Michael Somare and his National Alliance were swept to victory in the elections on a wave of public revolt against corruption and mismanagement.

People were excited by the promises of an end to nepotism, independent appointments to the Public Service and an end to Ministerial patronage. There was a commitment Minister's would be forced to stand aside if they were under investigation. There was even the promise of an Independent Commission Against Corruption.

But the reality of course has been very different.

- At least four Department Heads have been appointed with no due process or transparency
- The famous 'Passport Scam' report has been buried
- There has been no action on the Cairns Conservatory scam
- Disgraced leaders like Andrew Baing, Peter Yama and Peter O'Neill have been appointed as government Ministers
- While others like Julius Chan and Ted Diro are still circulating in the corridors of power very close to the Prime Minister

And of course the logging corruption is as bad as ever. The latest government review again describes logging companies as acting like robber barons and reveals they are being assisted by a centrally coordinated web of deceit amongst politicians and public servants. But there has been no effective government action on companies like Concord Pacific, Kerawara and Rimbunan Hijau who are responsible for illegal logging and the theft of resources

"Economy Hostage to the Robber Barons" was a headline in the Sydney Morning Herald in January 1995. The report stated that "the squandering of vast areas of natural resources is the worst legacy of PNG's ruling elite".

How little has changed in the last eight years and how tragic it is that the new breed of MPs who promised us that they would not tolerate the corruption of the old ruling elite are so silent.

But it is clear that the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank and the Australians have had enough.

The ADB is still holding back on K150 million kina in aid funding because of the blatant mismanagement in the appointment of the new Head of the National Fisheries Authority

The World Bank has suspended funding for the Forest and Conservation project because it has seen that the government cares more for the profits of the Malaysian logging industry than it does for the poor resource owners.

The Australian government has made good governance its priority and basically stated that it does not trust this government not to waste and misuse money.

These institutions know all about the government links to illegal logging:

- Sinai Brown, Kerawara and illegal logging at Simbali and Pondo;

- Patrick Pruaitch and the bags of money from Rimbunan Hijau;
- Zachary Gelu and his role in the Kiunga Aiambak Deed of Settlement;
- Alan Marat and his proposed tax concessions for Rimbunan Hijau;
- Francis Damien and his involvement with Concord Pacific;
- Michael Somare's personal support for Wari Iamo and his links to Rimbunan Hijau;
- Joshua Kalinoe, Meda Assets, Bismarck Industries and Concord Pacific;
- Andrew Baing, Kamula Dosa and Rimbunan Hijau;
- Patrick Pruaitch, Yagi Lawyers and Philip Lee;
- Michael Somare and the Sepik River Development Corporation;
- Chris Haiveta and his election support from Rimbunan Hijau;
- Mark Makapai and illegal logging in East Kikori;
- Arthur Somare and Heybridge.

While the ADB the World Bank and the Australians do indeed wish to protect their own interests and are not innocent of mistakes in the past, they can also see that Papua New Guinea cannot help itself while it is still buried in a mire of corruption by a political elite that looks no further than its own bank balance.