

DUTCH PUSH PLAN ON PAPUAN VOTING

Officials Are Eager to Have Self-Government Started in West New Guinea

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HOLLANDIA, Netherlands New Guinea, June 25 — Dutch officials here are pushing plans to give self-government to the 700,000 primitive, black-skinned Papuans of West New Guinea.

This is being done despite an almost complete lack at this time of a demand for self-rule and an almost total absence of any sense of national unity or identity among the Papuans.

For some years advisory councils of Papuans appointed by Dutch officials have functioned in the more developed districts of West New Guinea. This year the people of Biak and Numfur Islands named their own council in the first elections ever held in Netherlands New Guinea.

Both men and women voted in a 90 per cent turnout of the eligible adults. The council now exercises extensive powers in local affairs, including the levying of taxes and the dispensing of revenues. By this time next year, Dutch officials expect several more districts to have elected councils.

Up for consideration in the Netherlands Parliament is a bill, believed here to be certain of approval, that will provide for a council to represent all West New Guinea. The council will sit in Hollandia and will have a wide range of legislative powers.

The more advanced districts will elect their members to the council. In the more backward regions, the members will be named by Dutch officials on a basis of various methods of consultation with local people.

In many primitive parts of the colony where tribesmen are still cannibals and headhunters, it will be impractical to have representatives for the time being. However, West New Guinea's Governor, Dr. P. J. Platteel, expects to have councilors from thirty of the forty-eight districts when the legislature meets for the first time late next year.

Unclothed, Not Unfranchised

At the moment, this Texas-sized land of jagged, jungle-covered mountains, marshy valleys and narrow, palm-fringed coastal plains seems an unlikely entity for self-government. Many of its inhabitants wear no clothes, do not yet know the use of the wheel and live in a Stone Age culture.

West New Guinea, in fact, is one of the most primitive territories on the globe. Despite this, the Netherlands is determined to make haste in turning over the Government to the local people. To the Dutch, Africa has been a lesson showing that colonial peoples demand and cannot be denied independence, no matter how low their level of modernization or how limited their political experience.

West New Guinea, moreover, is an economic liability and a defense burden for the Netherlands. Claimed by Indonesia because it was once administered as a part of the Dutch East Indies, West New Guinea constantly faces the threat of being taken over by Jakarta as long as it is under Dutch rule.

If the Papuans become the rulers of West New Guinea, Indonesia will have less justification for claiming this territory.