Pauulu’s Diaspora

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The New Hebrides National Party’s (NHNP) delegation to 6PAC returned to Port Vila, Vanuatu, full of political ideas for its struggle against British and French colonialism. In Tanzania, delegation members met leaders such as Julius Nyerere and representatives of the African National Congress, South West African People's Organization, the Cuban government, and Algeria’s National Liberation Front. Before leaving East Africa, the party invited Kamarakafego and other members of 6PAC’s science committee to come to Vanuatu and help train activists with skills that could be of use to their movement. In 1974 and 1975, both Kamarakafego and Jimmy Garrett traveled to the condominium to assist in the party's rural political education programs. To the chagrin of the British and French administrations, Kamarakafego’s time in Vanuatu solidified the deepening linkages between Africana liberation struggles and decolonization in Oceania. This chapter shows how this process also transformed his life and personal relationships.

The NHNP sought to incorporate Tanzania’s lessons of self-reliance and African socialism within its political movement. During 6PAC, party leader Walter Lini traveled to New York to speak before the United Nations Committee of Twenty-Four, initiated by the efforts of the Tanzanian and Jamaican governments. After doing so, Lini traveled to Tanzania. There he was introduced to the grassroots organizational structure of TANU. John Bani, the Sopes, and the Taurakotos also had this opportunity while there. Subsequently, the party endorsed Tanzania’s model of development around self-reliance—Ujamaa—and organized itself via village party cells.

This troubled Vanuatu’s French and British colonial administrations. In May 1974, French resident Robert Jules Amédée Langlois alleged that Lini and the Pati were engaged in a “liaison dangereuse” with Tanzania. He
claimed that this “dangerous connection” was certain to set back France’s efforts to thwart political independence in Vanuatu. Langlois felt that there was a risk that the National Party would mobilize the condominium’s indigenous population and found Lini’s abilities to link with pan-African organizations and countries like Tanzania to be problematic. He was concerned by Sope’s and Bani’s attendance at 6PAC, Kamarakafego’s invitation, and the “Black Power organization” in general. He was also aware that the Tarautokos had been invited to Ujamaa Safari by the World Council of Churches (WCC) as a cover for their participation in 6PAC. Langlois was certain that Kamarakafego had advised the party to take its movement underground. While the resident believed that the party’s older leaders would be reluctant to do so, he felt that its younger organizers such as Sope and Kalkot Mataskelekele would be open to such subversive action. This was partly because they were students at Fiji’s University of the South Pacific (USP) and the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG), respectively, and could also be radically influenced by leftist professors who taught at these institutions.4

Vanuatu’s police force knew Mataskelekele quite well. In February 1975, he and a friend had entered Port Vila’s British Ex-serviceman’s Club (BESA) and ordered drinks. They were refused service by a patron and challenged by the police superintendent. Mataskelekele responded by grabbing a picture of the queen of England that was hanging in the club and, according to one witness, he “wrapped it around the superintendent’s neck.” Mataskelekele was imprisoned for two weeks.5

French officials were also concerned about the party’s success in asserting itself as the only political representative of Vanuatu’s Melanesian population. With its focus on issues of political independence and land rights (including its calls that land taken by European settlers be returned to their Indigenous communities), and buttressed by its international affiliations with the WCC, the Black Power movement, and the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the French felt that the party’s chances of success could not be overestimated. With an inadequate police force, the joint administration believed itself to be an uncomfortable and dangerous position—that the indigenous black population of Vanuatu could actually achieve political power—*Black Power*. The French were unsettled by the “incessant” activity of Lini, Bani, and Sope, who devoted all their time to the NHNP; this allowed the party to flourish not only in Vila but also in other islands, such as Santo. This gave it a significant advantage over other indigenous political groups such as Nagriamal that were localized or that collaborated with the British and French administrations, European planters, or American capital interests.6
The trip to Tanzania had given the party new audiences and emboldened audacity. The French administration feared direct and subversive intervention by the Black Power movement or the OAU. It heard rumors that New Hebridean “boys” would be selected for political training in Tanzania. Under such conditions, Langlois believed that Vanuatu could become a foreign “point d’impact d’actions subversives” across France’s colonies in Oceania, namely New Caledonia and Tahiti. It was a real possibility that the party would make connections with “subversive” Kanaky political groups from New Caledonia, such as Groupe 1878 and the Foulards Rouges (Red scarves).  

Vanuatu was geographically, politically, and linguistically hinged on the Melanesian, British, and French worlds. This made the archipelago an ideal relay for black internationalism. Langlois felt that, given the British government’s apparent passivity toward the party, this would be easy to do, as his colonial colleague did not intend to intervene against this “danger.” He informed Paris that this issue needed to be taken on unilaterally by the French, and he called for “means of action” adapted “à la menace” to be made available to him as soon as possible. Given an increase of land disputes between indigenous peoples and European landowners, the French resident felt that the burden of social maintenance and restoration of order rested on his shoulders. Halting the momentum of the party would prove to be an insurmountable task, as Langlois admitted that he could not find a way to slow the National Party’s “parade of activities,” which had managed to paralyze other political movements in the condominium.  

In July 1974, the party held a public meeting at the Anglican Mission of Tagabe bay. Chaired by Lini and Sope, it was attended by about four hundred people. Sope and Bani spoke about their trips to Tanzania. They constructed a notice board of photographs and materials from 6PAC, and sold mimeographed copies of their speech at the congress for 20¢. Langlois believed that Courtland Cox had “fine-tuned” the speech in Tanzania, who allegedly gave Sope a copy to bring back home. The Party added a page to the document, titled Niu Hebrides Emi Ples Blong Black Man—Les Nouvelles-Hébrides Sont le Pays Des Noirs. Originally written in Bislama and translated in French, in English this read as, “New Hebrides is the Land of the Blacks.” It continued:

Today everything changes quickly. New Hebrideans must be aware of this change. The National Party is fighting resolutely for the Blacks to take control of the New Hebrides and that is why we demand independence. But independence is not something Whites, from France
or England, are willing to give us. . . . We must demand it. And if both refuse to leave, we must fight to get it. Whites only came to the New Hebrides to make money. They did not come for the progress of the country. White people use Blacks of the New Hebrides for their sole benefit. They pay them inadequate wages for food and clothing. They took the land and they killed Blacks to create their plantations. The two Governments help the French and the English, but what do they do for the Blacks? . . . England and France must leave the New Hebrides immediately. The majority of New Hebrideans no longer want whites to stay here. . . . The New Hebrides is the land of the Blacks. Any White man or foreigner who wants to stay there must follow what the true New Hebrideans say. Black Power.  

Sope urged all true New Hebrideans to unite and work for independence. He held that the best way to economically develop Vanuatu for the benefit of the indigenous community necessitated the study of the countries that had already done so. Referencing Tanzania, he argued that 6PAC had brought more than two hundred delegates together from across the black world. There, he had learned how European colonialism continued to oppress Africa. This included Portugal’s atrocities in Mozambique and Britain and France’s sale of arms to apartheid South Africa. He and Bani had visited a guerilla training base in Tanzania, and they saw how these “combattants de la liberté” (freedom fighters) were training to “help their black brothers in South Africa.” They also visited a hospital and donated blood for these soldiers. He expressed that one day, he would see Vanuatu’s name placed on the map of these black freedom struggles.

While in Africa, Sope realized that many people wanted to help New Hebrides gain independence. Black people of various trades were ready to come to the island as skilled volunteers. This was in contrast, he argued, to whites who administered the archipelago for profit with little social contact with blacks. He listed white clubs such as the BESA and golf and Kiwanis clubs as examples of racial discrimination in Vila. Furthermore, while whites did not occupy menial jobs in Vanuatu, this did not mean that they belonged to a superior race. New Hebrideans needed to be proud of their color and, if they wanted freedom, they had to be ready to fight for it.

Bani stressed that freedom was not just characters printed on a sheet of paper, but “a way of thinking.” He denounced white society’s poisoning of the spirit of blacks in Vanuatu. This persuaded them to believe that they were second-class citizens and that they needed to be content with being
domestics in a society that was based on master-servant relations. He called on his audience to consider independence in the context of their indigenous political history. New Hebridean people would choose their own system of government that would not necessarily be based on a European model. Before Whites had arrived, he argued, they had their own customary laws that would have to be incorporated in any new form of government. Finally, Bani announced that the party had organized a scholarship scheme that would allow New Hebridean students to study in Tanzania and the United States. Bani noted that in Tanzania, black people held all positions of responsibility, and he saw no reason why this should not be the case in Vanuatu. He urged his listeners to be racially self-reliant and to work for independence so that the “black people of the New Hebrides” could run their own country.

French officials considered Sope’s speech to be ripe with “racist theories” and felt it unsurprising that he had come back from Tanzania “brimming with anti-white and anti-colonial propaganda.” Yet they hoped that far from the “overheated mood” of 6PAC, Sope would become a “peaceful inhabitant” of Vanuatu. Without question, both colonial administrations equated the party’s calls for political independence and land rights with Black Power. This public meeting was the first time that the French had been able to document the party’s formal reference to Black Power. Langlois felt that this reflected a critical element of the NHNP’s political evolution, conceding that it would be difficult to stop it from achieving Black Power.

In November 1974, the Pati held a governing council meeting. During these talks, Taurakoto spoke about the need for adult education and education for self-reliance. He referenced his and his wife’s travels across Tanzania’s Ujaama villages, stating that there was not much difference between what the East African nation was doing with education with self-reliance and what could be done in Vanuatu.

The Party understood the value of technology and science in their liberation movement. It invited Garrett to investigate the possibility of training their members via technical skills and political education. Garrett arrived in August 1974. Greeted at the airport by Lini, the group went to the party’s office located at Tagabe’s Anglican Church. He spent most of his trip with the NHNP’s executive. He was referred to as a leader of the Black Power movement and a professor who specialized in education.

Garrett informed a closed Party meeting that he had met Sope and Bani at 6PAC and that they had invited him to Vanuatu to assist in the party’s training of students. Addressing his enthralled audience of about two hundred, Garrett talked at length about the African American freedom struggle.
since the era of slavery to black oppression in ghettos and contemporary urban uprisings. He described how white violence killed and incarcerated black leaders. To gain freedom, he explained, black people in United States had to fight for it. They had learned how to make their own weapons and were now ready to teach these techniques to other freedom struggles.17

Garrett called for black people to take up technical subjects and to give up beliefs that they were incapable of harnessing technology. This included, for example, flying aircraft, which black people were doing all across the world. He announced that the Center for Black Education (CBE) was teaching various kinds of technology to black youth and that New Hebrideans could study there if they wanted to.18

Garrett expressed criticism of missionaries who preached love and charity to black people but did not live by those principles themselves. Across the world, he declared, black communities needed to be able to live without being bothered by white racism. He expressed sympathy for the people of Vanuatu in its liberation struggle and offered the assistance of the Black Power movement. He warned his audience to be wary of black people who thought white, as these persons "posed a threat to black nationalism."19

Garrett’s short trip was full of similar events. He was a guest of honor at the barbecue organized at Tagabe. Hosted by Taurakoto, he visited and spoke at Léléppa island during its “Feast of the Assumption.” Organized by NHNP member George Kalkoa, he talked again to a crowd of about two hundred persons at Mélé village, the largest community on Efate island.20

The party decided to send Daniel Nato and Peter Salemalo to Los Angeles to work with Garrett and the CBE. Born in the island of Malekula, Nato headed the party’s Youth Wing. He had met Kamarakafego the prior year in Vanuatu. Nato respected Kamarakafego as “a father figure” and Garrett as a brother. The pair arrived in the United States in April 1975. To their dismay, Garrett was unable to meet them in the airport. Having also lost his address, they were not able to contact him. They telegraphed Lini and Mataskel-ekele from the airport for help.21

About three days later, Kamarakafego called Nato and Salemalo, who were staying at the nearby Sands Motel. Nato cried with joy when he heard Kamarakafego’s voice. Kamarakafego picked them up the next day and drove them to Garrett’s home, which was about an hour away. Garrett provided them with warmer clothing, and they flew to San Francisco, where they stayed with Oba T’Shaka and the Pan-Afrikan People’s Organization. They spent about six months there at T’Shaka’s Malcolm X Unity House. The
engaged in all kinds of lessons—African American history, politics, martial arts, and break dancing. They also met activists from Southern Africa and attended a rally in support of Angela Davis. At Oakland’s African Liberation Day, they spoke about Vanuatu’s liberation struggle.22

Appropriate Technology in Longana

The National Party’s strategic plans aimed to encourage economic self-reliance, appropriate technology, and national consciousness at the grassroots/village level. This had long been the idea of Lini. For eight years, he had studied in the Solomon Islands and New Zealand at an Anglican theological college. In New Zealand, he cofounded the Western Pacific Students’ Association and, along with Bani, edited its journal one talk. Featuring essays, correspondence, poetry, kastom stories, political satire, literature, photographs, visual art, and comic strips, one talk was a cultural and political expression of Melanesian identity. Upon his return to Vanuatu in 1970, Lini became a parish priest at Longana, Ambae island. Along with Bani and Donald Kalpokas, Lini formed the magazine New Hebrides Viewpoints and subsequently the New Hebrides Cultural Association. On August 17, 1971, they transformed the association into the NHNP.23

In 1971, Lini founded the Longana Peoples Center on Ambae island, some 270 kilometers from the British colonial administration on Efate. This was essentially a project of Vanuatu nationalism and black internationalism. Lini’s vision was to use the center to “encourage a community spirit” of self-reliance beyond the village level. By 1974, it had become a critical base for the party. It aimed to create community development programs and link them with other satellite centers. Each center was to organize social, educational, cultural, and political activities. These included sports events, courses, seminars, and conferences. Organized by chairpersons, committee members, and village residents, each center would be administered by appointees chosen by each village. All centers were to be wholly New Hebridean-controlled and independent of religious missions and colonial administrations. Upon independence, these would be transformed into educational institutions.24

The WCC supported this initiative and the party in general. In 1976, it granted the NHNP US$10,000 in support of the struggle of the country’s black majority over its white minority. Working through the network of the WCC, Lini sent community leaders to other countries to receive training.
This included Edison Mala, who had been at the center since 1970. Between 1973 and 1974, Mala traveled to Papua New Guinea’s Port Moresby community development group for rural community training.\(^{25}\)

This was part of the party’s efforts to build relationships with the broader black world. In March 1975, it invited Kamarakafego to Vanuatu to conduct political education among its “rural indigenous masses” and advise the party in adult education and youth activities. Lini had informed the British commissioner that after a stay of about four weeks, they intended to retain Kamarakafego’s services for at least a year.\(^ {26}\)

The British and French residencies had concerns about the “leading Black Power figure” since his 1974 trip to the condominium. British resident commissioner Roger du Boulay had intended to proclaim him as an “undesirable immigrant.” Through covert surveillance, he knew Kamarakafego’s whereabouts (Warwick, Bermuda—May 1970; Dar es Salaam, Tanzania—April 1972; Claremont, California—February 1975). However, he sought advice from the Immigration and Visa Department of the Foreign and Commonwealth Department (FCO) as to how his office could inform Kamarakafego of this prohibition without “prejudicing the sources” of their information and how Kamarakafego’s address could be obtained through normal channels. Routine investigations discovered that although Kamarakafego was on the United Kingdom’s “watch list,” he was not a prohibited immigrant anywhere. Still, the Immigration and Visa Department asked both Bermuda’s chief immigration officer and the US State Department to help determine his address so that he could be notified that he was an undesirable immigrant.\(^ {27}\)

All this was perhaps too much, but it was definitely too late. Kamarakafego arrived in Vanuatu in early May 1975 on a one-month visa. While traveling with Peter Taurakoto, he gave a speech to about one hundred attendees on Lelepa Island. According to the head of Special Branch, Taurakoto introduced him as an “African who had come to talk” about what was going on in Vanuatu and the world between blacks and whites. Kamarakafego discussed how whites were covertly selling the land of New Hebrideans to foreign investors. He talked about the impact of blackbirding on Vanuatu (British agents agreed that his account was correct). Kamarakafego also detailed how Europeans had inflicted diseases on indigenous communities that decimated their populations. He described how Korowa had been prevented from returning to Vanuatu. Similar to Korowa’s own talks in Vanuatu, Kamarakafego told his audience that religion started in Africa and not Europe. Proof of this was that there was no mention of France or Britain in the Bible.
Furthermore, Europeans distorted history to keep oppressing black people. But America had been discovered by African sailors—not Christopher Columbus. Speaking at length about atomic testing by Europeans, he explained that it would poison fish and kill off the population. The only answer was to “chase the Europeans out of the country” and then “prepare to defend it against their enemies.” A “long diatribe against the white man” supposedly followed, including an attack against family planning.28

Several questions followed his talk, and he was asked if Ni-van communities would get their land back after independence. To this Kamarakafego responded, yes, if they voted for the party. Participants also asked him to address the British secondary schools, but he replied that he could not do so as long as “the whites” were in power.29

The British attorney general studied Kamarakafego’s lecture but could not find anything seditious about his speech. It was true that Europeans were selling land in the New Hebrides for profit and were blackbirding, that European diseases did indeed shatter the population, and that the effects of nuclear testing described by Kamarakafego were legitimate. He felt that Kamarakafego was a person of considerable experience who knew how far he could go to keep within the bounds of the law.30

Lini told Kamarakafego that the party wanted to train the masses of young people who had completed elementary school but had little opportunities to continue their education. Kamarakafego suggested that he tell the colonial authorities that they were going to “take the children off the streets and train them.” The concept of training “drop-outs” seemed to be well-received by merchants and colonial administrators, who supplied them with all the tools that they requested. They loaded a boat with equipment and sailed to Ambae.31

The British and French were aware of the pair’s efforts to remain covert. They noted Kamarakafego’s “rather feeble attempt” to conceal his movements as Lini had purchased six boat tickets in his own name. Three days later, on May 23, Kamarakafego addressed a public meeting in Longona attended by two hundred people. Introduced by Lini, Kamarakafego said that he had come from Africa especially to set up a young people’s center at Longana. He was happily there at the invitation of the party, which had paid all of his expenses. Along the lines of his comments at Léleppa, he warned New Hebrideans to become educated about the covert activities of whites in the country. After discussing blackbirding, he chastised missionaries for not teaching that “true religion began in Africa and that Jesus Christ was black.” He argued that Ni-Vans needed to retain their culture, ignore
family planning, produce local food, and avoid unhealthy European diets. He added that as a scientist, he had studied such matters. He encouraged his audience not to sell any more land to whites.32

Kamarakafego also spoke about his plans for the youth center, which included teaching technical subjects. As a qualified sports coach, he would instruct young men in activities such as football, singing, dancing, and dialog. Kamarakafego announced that Salemalo and Nato would lecture at Longana and that six other individuals from Africa would come to continue the work that he had started.33

The implemented program was called the School Leavers for Longana People Center. Training was based on self-reliance and praxis and included making coconut oil, producing sugar from sugar cane, making mattresses from coconut fiber, building things with local materials, domesticating animals, building homes, maintaining tools, tending to gardens, and practicing self-care. Courses were free and would last for two years. Students would live in the neighboring villages so that they could become part of their communities, for whom they would provide services and assist in the construction of homes, nakamals (traditional meeting halls), schools, and churches.34

“Come and learn to work with the knowledge you have!” read a party communication about the program. It invited all interested school leavers to make their way to Longana. They were asked to bring their own mats, bedding, knives, football boots, cups, plates, and utensils. Sample courses proposed for Longana included basic woodwork and metalwork, technical drawing, building low-cost housing, making salt, sugar, oil, and mentholated spirits, brick making, machine maintenance, using a pit saw, techniques of ferro cement and firing clay and lime to form cement, techniques of building cheap water supplies (such as ferro-cement tanks and solar evaporators of saltwater), boat building, building cheap wind mills and solar energy machines, basic mechanics and electronics, canning and food preservation, and processing of food.35 These projects, which Kamarakafego worked on intensively for six weeks, were designed to build local self-reliance by enabling rural residents to produce key commodities and provide key services, thereby empowering their communities to reduce their dependence on Australian and New Zealand firms.36

Longana’s community fondly remembered his work. Children flocked to him for his chocolate sweets. Adults laughed at how he caught chickens to prepare meals. In a night full of pouring rain and kava, the aforementioned Mala recalled Kamarakafego’s time at Longana and how he also showed the
community how to use coconut shells in building fences. Kamarakafego built great relationships with the humble community, and all was going well. As far as the British and French officials were concerned, it was going too well.37

According to Special Branch, Kamarakafego’s presence had “given rise to alarm” among French expatriates and opponents of the NHNP. Paris regarded “all Black Power propagandists as a threat to security.” Langlois called for Kamarakafego’s immediate expulsion, while du Boulay preferred just to not extend his visa. The British resident also had been informed that Kamarakafego was encouraging the party to recruit Kanak youth leaders from their Melanesian neighbor, New Caledonia.38

But what was perhaps most disturbing to the British resident was the impact of Kamarakafego’s “gospel” on his audiences. While FCO officials claimed to not have underrated the “insidiousness” of his message, they hoped that his approach would be “so novel and sophisticated as to be somewhat above the heads” of Vanuatu’s rural communities. However, they felt that he had been “well-briefed” and was adapt at “matching his style for the occasion.” For these officers, this situation had become a “difficult and potentially dangerous problem.”39 One could only assume that they would have disagreed with the FBI’s earlier assessment that Kamarakafego was “no orator.”

The colonial administration had long since pressed Lini about his activities at Longana. For example, in 1971, the British information officer thanked Lini for informing him that the center had been formed. However, he preferred such news to come quickly, otherwise, he wrote, it was not news but history. But now, the British police commandant had other concerns—Kamarakafego had made “quite an impact on the people” and he was considered to be “very well educated and intelligent.”40

On May 15, newly arrived French resident commissioner Robert Gauger wrote to du Boulay lamenting that his worries about Kamarakafego’s presence in the archipelago “refused to leave him.” He imagined that du Boulay felt the same. From Gauger’s perspective, the British resident’s reports about the “subversive” Black Power agent’s speech in Vila reflected intense propaganda and xenophobia. If the party adopted such ideas, it would “incite racial hatred and public order disorder.” Gauger felt that it was up to the NHNP to decide how it presented itself. However, he asserted that the “public power” that he and the British resident collectively represented could not remain indifferent to the risk that awakened political passions could result in “violent animosities” in the condominium’s upcoming elections. He felt
it obvious that Kamarakafego’s presence would not remain unnoticed for long by the French community. He asked, “Did the Joint Administration intend to respond or would it allow the country’s politics to lead towards violence?” He warned du Boulay that if they did not “stop it quickly,” they would “incur a serious responsibility towards the populations” that they had a duty to protect. As Kamarakafego was a British subject, he wanted to know what plans the British resident had to remove him from Vanuatu.41

Du Boulay’s response was unsurprising. He agreed with Gauger about the “perniciousness” and potential “damage” of Kamarakafego’s Black Power doctrines in Vanuatu. His collaboration with the French residency about how to counteract the spread of black consciousness in Vanuatu included a public speech that he himself gave about Black Power. Both the British and French residencies had considered long and carefully about declaring the “two agents of the Black Power Movement”—Garrett and Kamarakafego—as prohibited immigrants, but they concluded that this would do more damage than allowing them into the archipelago under supervision. Furthermore, they doubted if their speeches would draw any prosecutions in court. Now, with Kamarakafego back in the condominium, the British preferred to not extend his four-week stay.42

On May 16, du Boulay summoned Lini to his office. He claimed that Kamarakafego was doing harm to Lini’s, the party’s, and Vanuatu’s future. He told Lini that he would have to be convinced that Kamarakafego would “really behave himself” before he would prolong his stay. In response, Lini said that he would be personally responsible for ensuring that Kamarakafego “ceased propagating Black Power doctrines.” Lini asserted that the NHNP was still mulling over the need to extend Kamarakafego’s permit, particularly if other persons would be able to continue the programs that he had established. Kamarakafego had been invited to launch the party’s social programs, which the British residency claimed were “unexceptional” but “beneficial.”43

While Lini had informed du Boulay that Kamarakafego had been “warned” not to intervene publicly in local politics, British officials believed that Kamarakafego would “run rings” around him. Still, du Boulay felt it best to wait a week to see if Lini could “make good his promise to put an end to Black Power propaganda,” if Kamarakafego would leave Vanuatu, and, if so, who would continue the social programs of the party (possibly as a Black Power cell). He doubted Lini’s understanding of, or ability to control, these undesirable manifestations. Yet he was hopeful that New Hebrideans, who would not forget the injuries done to them by the initial white
settlers and traders, would largely “recoil from these repugnant Blank Power doctrines . . . if suitably encouraged to do so by” the colonial administrations. The British preferred to encourage indigenous leaders to embrace the “right” kind of leadership and not to harm to the situation by overreacting, handling the matter clumsily, or ignoring it totally.\footnote{44}

The British clearly underestimated the ideological unity that existed between Lini and Kamarakafego, and the NHNP’s leader’s shrewdness. Kamarakafego’s presence in the country was a manifestation of his long-term political vision. According to Lini’s sister Hilda, her brother saw in Kamarakafego someone who shared his views and understood his vision.\footnote{45}

The French and British officials unsuccessfully tried to convince the party that it should not associate with a Socialist, Communist, and Black Power activist like Kamarakafego. But for the NHNP, this was exactly why they embraced him. According to Sope, they had already been advocating for Black Power. For example, Sope wore an Afro as both an expression of his Black Power politics and traditional indigenous aesthetic; he also named his daughter Angela after Angela Davis.\footnote{46}

On June 5, British officials served Kamarakafego notice that his permit had expired and that he had become an “unlawful immigrant.” He was ordered to leave Vanuatu by June 27. The British hoped he would do so voluntarily so that they could avoid the fracas of a forced deportation. From their perspective, the “undesirable” Kamarakafego intended to stay. He had the support of the party and village extremists. Du Boulay pressed the NHNP to not make an issue of this move, with an upcoming election and Kamarakafego’s “extreme racist propaganda.” He felt that Kamarakafego should not have been allowed to pass through immigration at the airport as he did not have a return ticket.\footnote{47}

Lini wrote to du Boulay from Longana. He informed the British resident that the Pati had decided to employ Kamarakafego for three years to help run the School Leavers program. He reminded the resident that although there had been talk from the joint administration about developing the agricultural standards of the community, little had been done. Instead, the party aimed to use school leavers to serve that function, and it was prepared to pay Kamarakafego and provide him housing as part of this effort.\footnote{48}

Lini wrote to both the British and French residents. He challenged a number of public statements made by du Boulay that referred to the NHNP as being a Communist Black Power movement. He wanted to know the resident’s definition of power. The presence of the French and British administrations proved that there was “White Power in the New Hebrides.” For Lini,
Du Boulay suggested that the party preached Black Power simply because they were black New Hebrideans focused on political independence. But the party had neither confiscated anyone’s land nor divided anyone’s land to sell to others—these acts were expressions of white power. By those standards, neither Kamarakafego nor the NHNP were Black Power. There was nothing wrong with what they were doing or with Kamarakafego’s presence in Vanuatu.

Du Boulay’s response was unsurprising. He reiterated that he did not think that Kamarakafego’s presence was in the interest of the party or the people of Vanuatu. Black Power did not accept peaceful democracies or universal suffrage, and it believed that changes could only come about by racial violence. He argued that Kamarakafego was determined to propagate Black Power in Vanuatu. It was not in the interest of the archipelago to allow the continued “presence of a person whose approach was to dwell on the past.” Kamarakafego had to leave. Du Boulay claimed that Lini should not be surprised if the NHNP’s association with a well-known Black Power leader and “apparent acceptance of his attitudes” was regarded as evidence that it also believed in racial violence as the only solution to the problems of Vanuatu.

Days later, the British resident informed the FCO that Kamarakafego and extremists in the NHNP had prevailed. They had “decided to provoke a confrontation,” but he could not confirm any intention by them to resist by force. Yet he sought to have a British police officer, corporal, and district agent visit Longana to arrest Kamarakafego. If they met resistance, they were to assess the strength of the opposition and withdraw. In the meantime, they continued to put pressure on local leaders. It was out of the question that he would rescind his removal order, which would not only undermine British authority in Vanuatu but also be unacceptable to the French. “British prestige” was at stake.

Du Boulay felt that a combined British and French local force could extract Kamarakafego from Longana, but it had to be a “clean and effective” operation. This contingency plan would reinforce the local police and require the total strength available to handle a “hostile crowd of five hundred of more persons” that could be materialized by the party. Yet this would leave Vila open to “local party adherents supported by unruly elements.”

Also of concern was the strong French antipathy toward the NHNP, which could have led to violent clashes with French forces and possibly sabotage Britain’s constitutional program for neocolonialism. Du Boulay stressed this to the FCO: “It would be most, repeat, most undesirable either
to invite French participation in possible raid on Longana or to seek gendarmerie reinforcements” from Noumea, New Caledonia, some 336 miles south of Port Vila. He preferred only British reinforcements.  

The FCO disagreed. It preferred that a special operation to extract Kamarakafego should be undertaken by a joint Anglo-French police force. Furthermore, officials called for French gendarmeries from New Caledonia to be placed on standby in Vila. To complement these troops, they considered the possibility of flying in British soldiers from Singapore or Fiji, or importing Gurkhas from Hong Kong. This was politically, practically, and logistically preferred to using troops located in the United Kingdom.

The FCO painstakingly thought through Kamarakafego’s arrest. The commander of the British Forces lent his advice. A company of the First New Hampshire Regiment was in Fiji on a training exercise, but the plane that they were utilizing was too heavy to land in New Hebrides. A “poor bet” was to bring troops from Hong Kong, some forty-eight hours away. A Royal Air Force Britannia aircraft on its way back to Britain could be turned around to pick up Gordon Highlanders from Singapore and take them to Vanuatu. All things considered, it was felt that First New Hampshire Regiment flown in from Fiji on a civil airlines flight would make the most sense in terms of speed and political concerns.

According to Ben Lowings of Radio New Zealand International, London’s Ministry of Defense constructed “detailed plans to dispatch a warship, a landing party, transport planes and soldiers from Hong Kong.” However, they had concerns about whether Indonesia and the Philippines would allow them to utilize their airspace. Furthermore, they were afraid that the equipment used by French forces in Vanuatu would be incompatible with that of the British military.

Du Boulay remained skeptical about using French participation in Ambae, a Party stronghold and the center of Lini’s community-development activities. He felt that given the historic hostility of the French toward the Pati, this community would be particularly resentful of this intervention. Furthermore, he felt that the “French police would include several European gendarmes” who, sharing colonial mentalities and attitudes, would be tempted to use the notorious riot-control methods of the Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité. Violent demonstrations or counter demonstrations that necessitated further French reinforcements could also result in the postponement of the upcoming elections and would diminish British ability to “influence events.”

Despite all these preparations, Kamarakafego was arrested in Longana
with little incident; being practically unarmed, with only three people owing muskets that they used for hunting (any other firearms had been taken by the police years before), the community was hardly in a position to offer any real resistance. Members of the community remember the morning of his arrest. The police plane landed right in the immediate vicinity of the village, and people were shocked when the officers arrived. Kamarakafego did not resist, and they took him away. Father Lini was there. When they asked him why Kamarakafego had been taken, Lini told them not to worry; Kamarakafego would see them again. They were left with rumors. One morning, Kamarakafego had told one youth in Longana that the community had all the natural materials they needed to make a bomb, prompting the child to run away. Through “coconut news,” they assumed this was why he had been arrested.58

As described in the introduction, Kamarakafego’s arrest was timed to surprise the party. It was delayed by three days to coincide with an outgoing commercial flight from Vila. Kamarakafego was taken to a deserted American airstrip in North Efate, where he spent the whole day berating his accompanying British police commissioner, the Australian pilot, and five Ni-Vanuatu officers.59

Several hours later, Kamarakafego was flown to Vila’s main airport to match the arrival of the Pacific Air flight headed to Fiji. This time, twenty-six NHNP members caught “the police on their wrong foot.” Through their own intelligence networks, they had received word of the British resident’s plans. At the party’s Tagabe headquarters, organizer John Naupa informed Mataskelekele that there “was a person who was working with Father Walter and the police have gone to arrest him. They are now flying a special plane to bring him to Vila to deport him today.” The group sprang into action.60

Taurakoto picked up Mataskelekele in his brown car, fashionably spray painted with a black-and-white ring. Their plans for action ranged from the spectacular to the splendorous. They initially considered “blowing up” the airport. Another idea was to steal bags of money from airline counters, but it was decided that this would not make “big enough of a splash.” They settled on rushing the airport’s tarmac.61

Sope arrived first. They found him standing there in front of the airport’s apron. The British police commissioner asked the group if they had a right to be there. Taurakoto asked the commissioner if he had the right to be there. As Kamarakafego’s plane was taxiing to the back of the Pacific Air plane, Mataskelekele shouted, “Let’s go!” He jumped into the commissioner’s car and tried to start it. The commissioner shouted, “Kalkot, what
are you doing?” Mataskelekele could not get the stick shift into gear, and he left the car. Led by Mataskelekele, Taurakoto, Sope, and William Edgell, four cars were driven in front of the plane. Shouting “Black Power!” they reached through the roofs of the vehicles they were in, pumping both fists to the sky. Sope stood on the roof of his car and raised his fist to the pilot. Mataskelekele could see the stunned pilot put on the brakes of the moving plane and noticed it rock forward and halt. They parked and locked their cars in front of the aircraft and threw away their keys. Mataskelekele instructed them to sit on the tarmac. Eventually joined by other supporters, they refused to move.

They handed the British district agent a letter that included a list of demands. Written by Mataskelekele, it referenced a July 12 meeting between himself, George Kalkoa, and du Boulay when they expressed their displeasure with the latter’s unreasonable position. It stated that Kamarakafego was employed by the NHNP, just as other institutions in Vanuatu had done with other foreign employees. Mataskelekele felt it a foregone conclusion that the French and British would reject any advisors of their liberation movement. As such, his letter included a description of seven white American, French, New Zealander, and Australian nationals and “yachties” who were allowed to reside in Vanuatu but who were working against the freedom of its indigenous peoples. This included the notorious American Eugene Peacock, who financed the Nagriamel movement. The letter demanded that Kamarakafego should not be deported before these persons were removed.

According to the French, NHNP leaders also inscribed on the airport, “Boulay get out and stay out,” and “Colonialism is white power.” As party members argued with the district agents, the French resident placed his police at the disposal of the British commandant. At one end of the runway were Kamarakafego and his escorts. On the other was the plane, its disembarked passengers, the police, and NHNP members. Three hours later, the police moved in at nightfall and arrested the demonstrators so that the crowd could not clearly see what was happening. With the British prisons overcrowded and insecure, the French resident agreed to take all of their current incarcerated persons to make room for the protestors. He refused to take any of the party members, because of charges of police brutality that were launched against the French forces during an incident the prior year. Meanwhile, Kamarakafego was sent to Fiji.

All of those arrested were fined 1,000 FNH or two weeks imprisonment. Godfrey Toa, Sope, Naupa, and Taurakoto were all fined 2,000 FNH or one month’s imprisonment. When Taurakoto arrived home later that evening,
his wife questioned him as to his whereabouts. He told her that he had used his car to chase cattle off of the airport. When she heard about the incident on the radio, she cussed him out.65

The incident was spread across media in Vanuatu and beyond, including in a brief report in Fiji’s Pacific Islands Monthly. The NHNP discussed the “Brown affair” in its newsletter, New Hebridean Viewpoints. In its August 1975 issue, Taurakoto wrote that du Boulay’s claims that Kamarakafego was racist were surprising. He found it “heartbreaking to see the few persons who wielded power . . . ruthlessly insist on the exploitation of other human beings.” His letter stated that Kamarakafego had been a lecturer at the University College of Tanzania when he had heard about their struggle. They sought him out because he was once a petitioner to the UN Committee of Twenty-Four. Those in the rural areas who had heard him speak agreed that he was intelligent. Kamarakafego’s speeches there addressed racism, reminding the British commissioner that he had done the same just a year before. Kamarakafego’s discussion of the slave trades between Africa and America and the Pacific Islands and Australia were also well known. The British government’s failure to address their request to keep Kamarakafego there led him to believe that Vanuatu was “another South Africa,” with one immigration law for whites and another for blacks.66

Viewpoints detailed the peaceful demonstration and twenty arrests at the Bauerfield Air terminal against du Boulay’s “unscrupulous and inconsiderate supremacist” deportation of Kamarakafego. It denounced the British resident for disregarding the importance of someone as skilled as Kamarakafego, for accusing him of “preaching Black Power,” and secretly expelling him. The demonstration was primarily a show against the immigration laws and the “racist attitude” imposed upon the party. Finally, the writer hoped that the colonialists would get it into their “fatty brains” that they would continue to break laws that stood in the way of their freedom struggle. 67

The June 1975 edition of Viewpoints addressed Black Power specifically, arguing, “The people who accuse the party as being a Black Power movement do not know what Black Power means.” It challenged the following quote made by du Boulay in a public speech against Black Power: “If a white man has wronged a Black man, it is no remedy for a black man to wrong a white man now. White supremacy movements are as misguided and mischievous as Black Power movements.”68

The NHNP felt that if the colonial administrations called them Black Power, then the French and British must have been White Power. According
to Sope, there could be no justice for the black masses under colonialism and the morally and politically unjust exploitation of Vanuatu. For Taurakoto, Black Power meant self-determination, self-rule, and decolonization.  

The party held its fourth congress in January 1976 at Lelepa Island. It resolved that as Kamarakafego's arrest was racist and not legal, those charged would refuse to pay their fines or go to jail. If they were arrested, the police would have to arrest all the NHNP's supporters. This was partly in response to court notices that called for the immediate imprisonment of those involved if they did not pay the fines. At the time of this writing, Taurakoto had yet to pay his fine.

Concerned about negative local and international publicity, both British and French administrations addressed the incident through their own publications. The British Information Office's *New Hebrides News* simply stated that Kamarakafego was removed because his visa had expired. It made no mention of Black Power or the NHNP, simply mentioning that a group of protestors were detained after they drove their cars onto the airport. Du Boulay suggested that if questioned, British ministers should falsely state that Kamarakafego was allowed to enter temporarily *despite* his Black Power association. Then they would claim that it was only when he publicly attempted to “stir up racial hatred” and “promised assistance with revolutionary methods” for the “overthrow of white supremacy” that it became impossible to tolerate his stay.

The British then considered banning both Kamarakafego and Garrett indefinitely, but preferred not to make a declaration until after Vanuatu's upcoming elections. Officials of the FCO stressed that the French and British administrations should make a joint regulation surrounding race relations. This they hoped would strengthen their ability to deal with any visitors or residents who attempted to “propagate the Black Power doctrines.”

The French administration's paper *Nabanga* used a Léopold Sédar Senghor quote that “*les grandes civilisations sont métisses*” (the great civilizations are mestizo) to challenge racist ideologists in Africa or Vanuatu as being xenophobic and “nasty shepherds” of the myth of “herrenvolk.” It followed this front page statement with a story about the airport incident. Unlike the British administration's *New Hebrides News*, *Nabanga* referred to the West Indian Kamarakafego as a Black Power advocate and friend of the NHNP. It also stated that crowds stood outside the roadblock and that at least two women joined the demonstration. The paper's photographer took pictures of the passengers standing outside of the plane but claimed that the party
prevented him from taking pictures of themselves. Curiously, the article referenced the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee as launching Black Power as a slogan and advocating urban guerilla warfare.73

Kamarakafego’s popularity among Ni-Vans was clear to all observers. The French felt that his autarkic subsistence activities at Longana’s “so-called center of community activity” had given him an “undeniable ascendancy” among the party and that he “indoctrinated” populations. In the aftermath of his deportation, Lini wrote to Mataskelekele, stating that it was good to hear of the heroic act at the airport. He admitted that the party did not do much to stop his arrest in Ambae, because he thought that they had agreed to go along with it. This guesswork by both him and Kamarakafego was because they had not heard otherwise. At the time, they had ten students who were making a number of useful things, ranging from cooking oil, candies, mattresses, sugar, pig’s food, cocoa pruning, and leather from cattle.74

Return to Oceania

Kamarakafego’s flight from Vanuatu stopped in Fiji. He was detained by immigration authorities there and put on a Pan-American flight for Honolulu and Los Angeles. Shortly afterward, however, British authorities remained unaware of Kamarakafego’s whereabouts. United States officials expected that he would go to New York before returning to Bermuda.75

But Kamarakafego was determined not to go back to the island. Though it had been about two years, he remained concerned that he would be questioned about the assassinations of Bermuda’s governor and police commissioner. While in Fiji, he had called and arranged for a friend, Thais Aubry, to meet him outside Los Angeles Airport. It is likely that Kamarakafego first met Aubry during his time in California in 1958–59. During the flight, he befriended and convinced an African American passenger to pick up his luggage for him. He memorized her phone number so that he could call her later to pick up his bag. All that was left for him to do was to evade his lanky security escort in the crowded airport. In this, his height came in handy. After stooping down to tie his shoelaces, he did this successfully. Aubry met him as arranged and they drove to her place. He later got his baggage.76

While in California, Kamarakafego stayed with Aubry, whom history has been proverbially unkind to. Scholarship remembers the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking linguist as “the friend of David Baldwin,” who attended the 1963 meeting between his brother James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry,
Attorney General Robert Kennedy, Kenneth Clark, Lena Horne, and Harry Belafonte. However, the brilliant Aubry, who earned a BA in international relations from UCLA in 1959, was a “staunch advocate for black power well before it became fashionable.” Months later, in October 1975, she attended Fiji’s Pacific Women’s Conference (PWC), which was organized by Fijian activists Vanessa Griffen, Claire Slatter, and Amelia Rokotuivuna. Rokotuivuna radicalized Suva’s Young Women’s Christian Association as its director and mentored both Griffen and Slatter. Rose Catchings, the executive secretary of the United Methodist Church’s Ministry of Women, facilitated funding for the trip. While at the PWC, Aubry meticulously presented on Africana freedom struggles. In January 1976, she visited Vanuatu. Hosted by H. Lini, she worked at Longana’s Community Center for about a week.

In contrast, Kamarakafego could not return to Vanuatu, as he had been marked as prohibited immigrant for six months. Faced with the nagging question of resources, he reached out to his network of activists and artists for support. One of his contacts at an African embassy was able to secure a new passport for him. He received help from some unexpected sources as well.

Kamarakafego’s Rolodex included visual artist and chairperson of Howard University’s Art Department, Jeff Donaldson. A major figure in the Black Arts movement and cofounder of Chicago’s AfriCOBRA, Donaldson had also attended 6PAC. He was now asked to assist Kamarakafego in his return to Oceania. In February 1976, Donaldson penned a somewhat cryptic letter to his contacts, including Toni Cade Bambara:

Some of us well recall the dramatic speech delivered by Brother Sope, Secretary-General of the New Hebrides Nationalist Party at [6PAC]. . . . Before hearing Sope’s address I had only vague knowledge of the existence of Black people in New Hebrides and other Pacific Islands. Indeed, this was my first exposure to the already protracted Liberation struggle.

He continued:

According to exceedingly reliable sources 10–20 million Blacks of African descent have been engaged in survival/liberation warfare for over 10 years on several of these Pacific Islands. Some of these military conflicts are with synthetic countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, and Australia who have been their mortal enemies prior to WWII.
As in other parts of the world, these synthetic nations are mere robots for the Grand Manipulators of the West pursuing their self-righteous imperialistic and genocidal actions against these Pacific Africans. But our Pacific Sisters and Brothers are confident these forces can be repelled—they have time, terrain and, they hope, us on their side.\textsuperscript{80}

Donaldson had been informed that these “Survival/Liberation forces” in Oceania viewed the struggles of black people in the United States “in quite a different light from many of our own misguided rightist Brothers and other assorted enemies.” Photographs and documents demonstrated how they had derived inspiration and direction from the black symbols and nationalist heroes of the era. Now, wrote Donaldson, “these Pacific Africans” had asked for material support from the black world. Their greatest needs were “weapons and ammunition, medical supplies, technicians, and other technical necessities for the continuation and escalation of the war.” While they had time, they needed help. Donaldson had been asked to solicit airfare of approximately $1,200 dollars for a technician to go to one of the islands under siege. This technician, wrote Donaldson, was “known to all of us, but for obvious reasons” could not be referred to by name. The person was “a medical specialist with expertise in organizing, ecology, drafting, carpentry, botany, and other useful skills.” For twenty-five years, the letter continued, “this technician had worked for our common good on four continents,” as well as the island in question. Once there, the “Brothers and Sisters in the Pacific” would provide his accommodations and subsistence.\textsuperscript{81} This covert reference to both Kamarakafego and Vanuatu acknowledged broader concerns about the surveillance of the Oceania’s black freedom struggle.

Donaldson himself contributed and implored others to provide at least $20 each. Of course, this was “not a tax-deductible contribution,” but the rebate could help the freedom struggle of a “little known and acknowledged part of the African world.” He promised that the person would keep them abreast of developments in Oceania, that he would personally be involved in purchasing the ticket, and that he would give each person an accounting of the funds received. He also attached a copy of Sope’s 6PAC speech to the letter.\textsuperscript{82}

Donaldson successfully secured funds from at least sixteen visual artists, writers, poets, and activists—Gwendolyn Brooks Blakely, Arthur Monroe, Val Gray Ward, Lerone Bennett Jr., Joan Brown, Bobby E. Wright, Mari Evans, Leslie Richards, Don Coleman, Florencia Arnold, Eric Stark,
Samella Lewis, Harold Bradshaw, Elizabeth Catlett, C. L. R. James, Ade-mola Olugebefola, and Jacqueline Cole. James and Evans contributed $100 each. Arnold, an art teacher at Illinois Teachers College, mailed Donaldson a twenty-dollar check “toward liberation.” Based in El Garambulo, Mexico, Catlett received Donaldson’s letter over a month after he sent it. She mailed back $20 the next day, hoping it was not too late and wanting to know about any other concerns. In addition to her contribution, Brooks filled Donaldson in on the health of both Dudley Randall and Broadside Press.83

Kamarakafego had become a conduit for how the black Diaspora was engaging Oceania as a “Black Pacific.” In March 1976, Gayleatha Cobb interviewed him in Black World about the liberation struggles of Oceania. He discussed how he had first met Pacific Islanders as a petitioner to the United Nation’s Committee of Twenty-Four. He talked about his appropriate technology projects in Vanuatu. Cobb’s informed questions led him to discuss colonialism, imperialism, and racism across the region, including in New Caledonia, Tahiti, Guam, Hawaii, and Samoa. Kamarakafego also referenced blackbirding. The interview included Kamarakafego’s personal photographs of himself, Korowa, and Bob Maza, and a member of the Australian Aboriginal Legal Service. He described Melanesian people as being “very much like African people” in terms of pigmentation and physical features (such as hair and nose structure). He talked about the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Fretilin), which, inspired by Mozambique’s FRELIMO, was fighting against Indonesian imperialism in the former Portuguese colony. He also discussed the Vanua’aaku Nasional Pati, Black Power in Australia, and Maza and the National Black Theatre.84

A contextual article written by Black World’s managing editor, Carole A. Parks, followed his interview. According to Parks, blacks in Africa, the Americas, and the Caribbean who despaired of Europe’s racially geographic classification system would be appalled by its impact in Oceania. The mass media and allegedly scholarly literature had obscured the fact that the majority of people in the region were “negroid,” even by the standards of European racial terminology.85

Kamarakafego described “full-blooded” Melanesians as having “dark skin, broad features, and generally wool-like hair.” In this light, Parks denounced reference works, such as the 1964 edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, that referred to Polynesians as being more advanced than Melanesians, Micronesians as having once had “superior intellect,” and Melanesians as showing “little instinct” for social order, lacking seafaring skills,
and being addicted to magic and totem worship. Such books claimed that European colonialism curbed Melanesia’s affinity for cannibalism and tribalism. For Parks, this is why Kamarakafego’s account was important. While reference texts also asserted that Oceania “needed” colonialism, his work demonstrated how the Pacific Islands no longer wanted to be “impoverished pawns” in the superpowers’ quests for “military security, natural resources, and captive consumer markets.” Parks finished her piece with small briefs of “mainly black islands”—American Samoa, Australia, Gilbert and Ellice Islands, the Moluccas, Nauru, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Portuguese Timor, Vanuatu, and the Solomon Islands.

By February 1976, Kamarakafego was ready to return to Vanuatu. His six-month ban from the condominium should have expired by then. He wrote to Griffen and Slatter, stating that he was coming to Suva in March or April. He also asked Slatter to contact Lini and Sope. Griffen relayed all this by telephone to Slatter, who was in Papua New Guinea at the time. Concerned that any letters to the Pati would be intercepted by the colonial state, Slatter preferred to contact the party directly through intermediaries or through “cryptic cables.” She wrote to Lini and Sope from the office of Papua New Guinea’s prime minister, Michael Somare. Signed “Seli Hoo,” she also hoped to see Mataskelekele back at the University of Papua New Guinea.

“Seli Hoo” was the call and response cry of the NHNP. A popular phrase in Vanuatu, it was often used when persons were collectively performing physical labor together. It loosely meant “uniting together, working together.” Sometimes called while raising a fist, it was naturally reminiscent of a Black Power salute.

Griffen and Slatter were former students at Suva’s USP. In 1973, they attended the South Pacific Action for Development Strategy conference; this conference in Vila was called for by Lini and sponsored by the WCC. Central figures in the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific movement, they formed the Pacific People’s Action Front in the aftermath of its 1975 conference in Fiji. Griffen edited the Front’s newsletter, Povai, a “Pacific people’s struggle paper.” Given all of this, they had extensive contacts with the freedom struggles of Oceania. This is why Kamarakafego reached out to them.

Slatter and Griffen hosted Kamarakafego in Fiji when he arrived in April. They were somewhat skeptical about doing so; only weeks before, they had hosted a rather “unfriendly” Carlos Moore. The Afro-Cuban journalist was traveling from West Papua, where he was investigating the guerilla struggle of the Revolutionary Provisional Government of West Papua against Indonesian imperialism. He had been dispatched there from Dakar, Senegal,
where the Revolutionary Provisional Government’s Ben Tangghama had established a base with the support of Léopold Senghor.90

But to their delight, Kamarakafego was different. In Fiji, he awaited a response from the NHNP. Through Slatter, he wrote Donaldson, stating that he still had to “be cool as ever” but expected to reach Vanuatu in late May. Attached to the letter was information about Oceania’s liberation struggles, including an essay about the party’s political battles, and a March/April 1976 copy of *Povai*. This issue contained reports of political struggles across West Papua, Australia, New Zealand, Timor, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Hawaii, Micronesia, and Fiji. It also included information about the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement and the PWC. Kamarakafego followed this with a Fijian post card, asking if Donaldson had received the information.91

Donaldson wrote back to the group of sixteen contributors, whom he thanked for having “a sense of the larger dimensions of the world-wide struggle for the independence of Afrikan peoples.” He also confidentially attached a copy of Kamarakafego’s résumé, which he felt was testimony to his longstanding work for the development of the Africana world. Kamarakafego expressed his appreciation for their support.92

However, Donaldson had incorrectly remarked that Kamarakafego had made it to Vanuatu. The latter eventually did hear from Sope in early May. Wishing him revolutionary greetings, Sope apologized for not having contacted him earlier. Party member and poet Grace Mera Molisa had told Sope directly that Kamarakafego was desperately waiting for a letter. The NHNP had repeatedly pushed the British residency to allow him back in the island. Yet British officials—despite the fact that his ban of six months had expired—refused to let him in. As such, Party members felt it would be “a waste of time and money” if he was stopped at the airport.93

The Executive Committee of the party had decided that the time was not ripe for Kamarakafego to come. It stressed that he should wait until called upon. The struggle had become increasingly more difficult and was possibly going to require underground work in the future. Yet the longer they could freely move around “to mobilize the masses, the better for the struggle.” The committee felt that Kamarakafego’s presence would inflame the suspicions of the colonial administrations and make the secret police even more watchful for the party’s growing “militant plans.” This included participation in a representative assembly in the hopes that peaceful pathways to self-determination could be achieved. If this did not work, then force would have to be used against the colonialists—this possibility the Executive Committee had
never ruled out, despite publicly proclaiming that independence needed to be achieved by peaceful means. It saw Kamarakafego as being a part of these plans.\textsuperscript{94}

As such, Sope did not want Kamarakafego to think that the NHNP was rejecting him. They did not want to become “a white puppet government” like those in Africa or the Caribbean that had denounced organizers like him. It was their tactical judgment of the present political situation that they had asked him not to come.\textsuperscript{95} Yet as they themselves had clearly stated, it would have been a fight to even get him through immigration.

Still, Kamarakafego was disappointed. He had sacrificed much and worked hard to return. He certainly did not want to disappoint his material and ideological supporters. As disheartening as this was, all was not lost. Unbeknownst to him, he would soon be in Papua New Guinea, where his contributions to decolonization in the Oceania would flourish in perhaps some unexpected means.