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## LETTER TO THE EDITORS

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Dear Editors,

In the introductory section of Michael Goldsmith's *The Colonial and Postcolonial Roots of Ethnonationalism in Tuvalu* (JPS 121 :129-50) there are a couple of oversimplifications which, if left uncommented on, may well contribute to the perpetuation of significant inaccuracies in the depiction and understanding of the details in question concerning the attaining of independence by Vanuatu.

The first oversimplification is the claim (p. 131) that Vanuatu "had the added burden of enduring two parallel systems of colonial administration". The implication here is that any attempt to gain independence in what in those days was The New Hebrides Condominium had merely to deal with two colonial governing powers rather than one, with those powers operating in parallel as unfettered entities.

The situation was considerably more complicated than that, as in the Condominium the indigenes were confronted not simply with two unfettered colonial powers, each of which could do whatever it wanted to, but with two would-be colonial powers, locally termed the "metropolitan powers", each of whom was uniquely constrained by the Condominium Protocol from unfettered unilateral action.

The consequent manoeuvring between the metropolitan powers, a manoeuvring which affected their dealings both with each other and with the indigenous population, had both negative and positive consequences when the notion of independence came on the scene after the Second World War.

On the negative side any moves towards attaining independence were certainly made more difficult by having to deal with a unique colonial administration in which two metropolitan powers with markedly differing attitudes to aspirations for independence on the part of their colonies were yoked in a relationship as complex as that of the Condominium.

On the positive side the complexities of joint government by the metropolitan powers unintentionally provided a significant political education for emergent young indigenous radicals, education which contributed to the political sophistication and tactical know-how that marked the campaign for independence which developed during the 1970s.

I first became aware that this political education was occurring when in Auckland during 1966 and 1967 I had the opportunity for frequent informal conversations with the young Walter Lini, future leader of pro-independence activity and future first Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu. He was at that time completing his clerical education at St. John's Theological College, and he and I were collaborating on some study of narrative texts in the Raga language.

When our conversations touched on matters political it was apparent that his thinking had benefitted considerably from observation of the interaction between the metropolitan powers and of the ways in which this interaction affected their dealings with the indigenous population.

Further discussions with Walter and others at various times between the late 1960s and 1980 on matters relating to the attaining of independence confirmed my earlier impression of the value of the political education unintentionally provided by the Condominium.

From around 1970 onwards Walter and several like-minded politically educated contemporaries guided the formation of The New Hebrides Cultural Association which soon became The New Hebrides National Party and then The Vanuaaku Party, and the political lessons involuntarily provided by the Condominium powers were applied by that Party with considerable success.

The second oversimplification consists of the implied acceptance by Goldsmith of the views of Pareti (p. 131) and Jourdan (p. 132) that Vanuatu had to “fight” for its independence.

Unless the contrary is indicated the notion of “fighting” for independence implies armed struggle. The American colonies, Ireland, Algeria, Kenya, Southern Rhodesia and Vietnam all had literally to fight for independence from their colonial masters, but in the Vanuatu case it needs to be specified that the “fight” was metaphorical, that it did not involve armed conflict.

The people of Vanuatu, organised and led by the pro-independence activists of the Vanuaaku Party, certainly had to engage in a decade of sophisticated, and often intense, political struggle in order to attain independence, but armed conflict with the metropolitan powers was not part of the agenda.

The only armed confrontation in Vanuatu in 1980 was not between Ni Vanuatu and the colonial powers, but occurred in response to an attempt at secession from the newly created Republic of Vanuatu by factions on the northern island of Espiritu Santo.

After independence had been negotiated through political struggle, and was in the process of formal implementation, this confrontation, detailed by Walter’s Press Secretary, John Beasant (1984: 109-48), began when, shortly before Independence Day, 30 July 1980, crack British and French troops were deployed in Santo township but, because of the Condominium Protocol, characteristically were not substantively activated.

Soon after Independence Day the British and French troops were withdrawn and the secession crisis was resolved by the exemplary deployment, and judicious activation in a few very minor skirmishes, of troops from PNG brought in at the request of the new Vanuatu government.

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Beasant, John, 1984. *The Santo Rebellion: An Imperial Reckoning*. Honolulu and Richmond, Victoria: University of Hawaii Press and Heinemann Australia.