Vot Long Pati Ia! (Your vote, our party). Writer: Jo Dorras; Directors: Peter Walker and Dale Hermanson; Producers: Wan Smolbag Theatre, Pasifika Communications. 108 minutes, VHS (PAL and NTSC), color, 1999. Distributor: Pasifika Communications, Suva, email: pasifika@is.com.fj. US$19.95.

This film, made by Wan Smolbag Theatre in Vanuatu with the assistance of several overseas aid organizations as well as government agencies, is a fascinating dramatization of political and developmental dilemmas in the South Pacific. While based on actual issues and incidents, the themes it explores are of wide relevance. (The nation-state of its setting is unnamed, perhaps for legal reasons, but its anonymity accentuates the "universality" of the story.) These themes include the growing gap between urban and rural lifestyles and between elites and non-elites, the difficulties of maintaining sovereignty in face of international carpetbaggery, the demands of kinship and wantokism versus the need to allocate employment and political office on the basis of skills and probity, and the tension between tradition as a source of renewal and its abuse as a justifier of oppression and gender-based inequality. *Vot Long Pati Ia* is particularly effective at illustrating and suggesting solutions to the problem of male domination.

Its central character, and the one who best exemplifies all these tensions, is George, a driver for a cabinet minister, Harold Stevens. He takes the rap for his boss's dalliance with a young woman after a journalist takes a compromising photo. The minister sends George back to the village to allow things to cool off. There George's wife, Olivia, sees the published picture of her husband but does not reveal to him that she knows about the scandal (though it is already the subject of hurtful gossip). George discusses politics over kava with a number of men and also gives them beer, paid for by the minister, who wants to soften up voters for the forthcoming election. A subplot soon emerges concerning the dismal state of the local school, due mainly to underfunding but compounded by the teacher's over-readiness to give up and blame the central government. When Olivia tries to instigate action by the local custom chief, he resents her interference.

Back in town, the photographer-journalist, Nick, tries to take pictures of the minister with a European man, who is not keen to be caught on camera. Bodyguards rough up the reporter and confiscate the film. When Nick tries to lodge a complaint with the police, they are not interested. He tries to recruit his female colleague, Eva, to the investigation, but she refuses. Later, however, they go to a party where local and expatriate elites mingle, and she approaches the minister to inveigle information. Eventually, she accepts an invitation from the minister to dinner at a restaurant, where, after uttering the classic line, "My wife doesn't understand me," he tricks her into drinking a powerful cocktail. Saved from a fate worse than death by a compassionate taxi-driver, she reveals to Nick that the mysterious white man, whose name is Thompson, has proposed a get-rich-quick scheme for

the country. Nick finds out that Thompson has a criminal record.

In the meantime, George begins to realize that development is passing the village by. There are no telephones, the teacher has given up, and the water pump does not work. When he goes to the provincial government office for help, the chief official is away tending to his own business. George and a supportive government worker find evidence of waste and corruption. However, the man responsible is a friend of the prime minister. Olivia argues that George should go to the police, but he is certain that he can blackmail the offender into doing something for the village.

At a cabinet meeting in the capital, the prime minister reveals the parlous state of the country's finances. Though one government minister urges restraint and cutting back on the perks of office, Harold Stevens arrives to announce a different solution. His white friend has a scheme to double the country's money in a year if it is given to him for investment. Thompson joins the meeting right on cue. Though the prime minister wants to amend the contract slightly, it seems that he is on the verge of signing. The government is caught off balance, however, when the newspaper's normally cautious editor publishes the story, after Nick and Eva convince him that Thompson's criminal record is proof enough of a scam.

Meanwhile, George has almost had enough. A village boy has suffered serious injury. When he is evacuated to the main hospital, his treatment is jeopardized by the incompetence of a kinsman appointed by Stevens. But the minister is still able to placate George with cigarettes and beer. "What's right? What's wrong?" warbles the sound track as George gets drunk. Olivia is disgusted.

The prime minister calls an election. Harold Stevens appoints George to run the local campaign. He finds himself in competition with a women's campaign to elect none other than his own wife, Olivia. The ensuing drama revolves around the conflict between the tradition of male dominance and the constitutional right of women to participate in national politics; and the corruption of Harold Stevens, with his superior resources used to blatantly "treat" voters, versus Olivia's honesty and frankness. It would spoil things to reveal the outcome.

This film may be too long and too slow-paced to find a slot in a conventional course on Pacific politics. Most students in media-drenched societies are used to jumpier rhythms and glossier production values. Also, the English subtitles were not always clear on our copy of the video, which reduces its effectiveness among non-Bislama speakers. But the film would probably come into its own as a vehicle for consciousness-raising in parts of the Pacific where the audience could identify with the actors and their lives. And, if metropolitan students were to watch it with adequate preparation, it should generate good questions about the role of film in political education. Moreover, it gives a valuable sense of the realities of everyday existence among Melanesians in a society caught between modernity and tradition.

MICHAEL GOLDSMITH
AND KEITH BARBER
University of Waikato