

The frequent intervention of the Powers and their nationals in Samoan affairs, conjoined with the divisive tendencies in the traditional Samoan political organization, made the last two decades of the century a particularly troubled period of wars and intrigues. In 1899, following a dispute over succession to the kingship, the three Powers sent a High Commission to Samoa. As a result, and with the acquiescence of certain Samoan leaders, the position of "King" was abolished. Then, on 16th February, 1900, by a series of conventions, the Powers partitioned the islands; the United States renounced all rights to the main (western) part, including Apia, which was then taken over by Germany, and in turn Germany renounced her rights in the eastern portion of the group (including the harbour of Pago Pago), which went to the United States. For giving up her rights in the group, Great Britain obtained rights in other areas of the Pacific.

The German administration of Western Samoa continued until 29th August, 1914, when the Territory was occupied by New Zealand troops. The military occupation lasted for six years.

On 7th May, 1919, the Supreme Council of the Allied Powers conferred the mandate for Western Samoa upon His Britannic Majesty, to be exercised on his behalf by the New Zealand Government. The terms of the mandate ("C" Class) were confirmed by the Council of the League of Nations on 17th December, 1920. A constitution for the Territory was provided by an Act of the New Zealand Parliament entitled the Samoa Act, 1921.

In the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the 1939-45 war, some preliminary steps had been taken by the New Zealand Government towards giving the Samoan people a greater voice in the management of their own affairs. Owing to war conditions, however, progress in this direction was halted until 1944, in which year the Prime Minister visited the Territory to learn at first hand the ideas held by the Samoan leaders themselves regarding political advancement.

Following the replacement of the League of Nations by the United Nations, a draft Trusteeship Agreement for Western Samoa was prepared by the New Zealand Government and submitted to the General Assembly of the United Nations late in 1946. This draft agreement replaced the original mandate and thus brought the Territory within the framework of the international trusteeship system established under the United Nations Charter. Under the new agreement the New Zealand Government assumed direct responsibility for the administration of Western Samoa. The agreement was approved by the General Assembly on 13th December 1946.

In the meantime, the Samoan people had been consulted as to the terms of the draft agreement. Their representatives, while declaring that they recognized that the agreement marked an advance on the mandate and stating their appreciation of the sympathetic manner in which they had been treated by the Government and of the progress made during the past ten years in developing social services, felt that their ultimate aim of self-government would not be furthered by accepting the agreement. They asked, therefore, that Samoa be granted immediate self-government, but that New Zealand should remain in the role of advisor and protector. A petition to this effect was transmitted to the Secretary-General of the United Nations through the New Zealand Government in January, 1947; the contents of the petition had also been communicated to the Sub-committee on Trusteeship by the New Zealand delegate on 23rd November, 1946.

The petition was considered by the Trusteeship Council on 24th April, 1947, when, on the invitation of the New Zealand delegate, it was resolved to inquire into the matter on the spot. A Mission for this purpose, composed of Mr. Francis B. Sayre