CHAPTER 3

OPM AND THE QUEST FOR WEST PAPUAN UNITY

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For at least 20,000 years, for the indigenous Melanesians of New Guinea, ‘foreigners’ were people of other language groups, even close neighbours. While there was some economic contact between different clans, and the formation of alliances, mainly through inter-marriage, there were also frequent abuses of traditional rights. These included the theft of property and natural resources, encroachments on land, and the infringement of taboos. Villagers dealt with perceived abuses in accordance with customary methods, notably compensation; failing agreement they engaged in retributive ‘payback’. These responses can still be seen in the eastern half of the island, Papua New Guinea, where some customary law has been incorporated in a modern legal system and inter-clan warfare remains a regular occurrence, especially in the highlands provinces. However in the western half of New Guinea, now the province of Irian Jaya, officials have exerted much pressure to secure obedience to the laws of the Indonesian state. From about the 7th century the local concept of foreigners was expanded by the arrival, on an increasing scale, of Asian traders, mostly Chinese and Indonesian. The coastal Melanesians were, of course, the first to sight and deal with the newcomers; it was 700 years before the interior of the island was also contacted by outsiders. The Asians sought natural products such as the scented masoi bark, used for traditional medicine, and bird of paradise plumes. While they were often prepared to trade for these, rather than simply plunder them, dealings were usually disadvantageous for the Papuans. But what angered the indigenes most was being taken as slaves, a ‘natural resource’ for which no payment was offered. Predictably, there was
strong local resistance to the foreigners.

From the 16th century European navigators came to the island; they found the Papuans generally unapproachable. In 1605 Captain William Janz commanded the first Dutch ship to reach the mainland; while fetching water, nine of his crew were killed by tribespeople and reportedly eaten. Eighteen years later the Dutch navigator Jan Carstensz wrote that the blacks of the western extremity of New Guinea were even more ‘cunning, bold and evil-natured’ than those around Australia’s Gulf of Carpentaria (cited in Willey 1979:18). Another European visitor of this time noted that Muslims from the Indonesian archipelago were in the habit of attacking the Papuans with what was then modern weaponry as well as trying to win converts to Islam.

The Dutch eventually gained supremacy over their European competitors in the race to gain permanent footholds on the New Guinea coast. The aim was to establish bases which would assist in the dominance of the spice trade, centred in the nearby Moluccan islands. Due to local opposition, Holland maintained minimal contact with the Papuans, even after the territory was proclaimed a Dutch possession in 1848. However the Dutch, unlike the clan enemies of old, attempted to exert lasting control over the peoples’ land (and waters). This was much resented. So too was the Papuans’ lack of participation in the slim bureaucracy developed by Holland prior to the second world war. Those civil service positions not occupied by the Dutch were offered to trusted Asians from nearby islands of the Netherlands Indies.

As a result there was initial enthusiasm upon the arrival of Japan’s imperial forces which promised, as they had elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region, a liberation from white colonial rule. In fact, the Japanese showed that they were more concerned with consolidating an empire of their own. There were outbreaks of resistance in various parts of West New Guinea, including resurgences of the millenarian, cargo and messianic cults which portrayed rebellion in religious terms. Japanese reprisals were often savage, whole villages sometimes being eliminated (Wilson 1975; Worsley 1957).

The most obviously nationalistic opposition to Japan was the

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1 Holland had earlier ‘administered’ the New Guinea islands through the sultan of Tidore, an Asian involvement that was later used by Indonesia to support its claim of historical links with the area. But it is clear that the sultanate did not enjoy unfettered control. See letter from First Secretary of Tidore in Whittaker et al. (1975:208).
revolt of the Geelvink islands people, which culminated in 1942 in a proclamation of independence and the raising of a national flag. The standard’s design featured the ‘Morning Star’ which was personified in local mythology.

In 1944 the Allies ousted Japan and handed West New Guinea back to Holland. After the war, when the Dutch realized they would lose their Indies to the Indonesian nationalists led by Sukarno, they decided to ‘hold the line’ at New Guinea. The transfer of this westernmost territory was excluded from the agreement of 1949 which gave the rest of Indonesia its independence. The Dutch felt that New Guinea could be a suitable base for a re-entry to Indonesia in the event of a collapse of the republican government. They were also interested in the territory’s resources potential, especially oil.

Holland was realistic enough to accept that the colonial days were ending. Thus it decided to prepare the territory for independence in the hope that a Papuan leadership fostered by Holland would be generous to Dutch business interests. The proposed deadline for independence was 1970.

Holland launched a programme aimed at rapidly educating a Papuan elite. Administrators, technicians, police and army received training and encouragement from the Dutch (Savage 1978a). The local elite was also urged to think politically. Not all members, however, endorsed the Dutch-sponsored independence plan. Some denounced it as a ‘neo-colonial ploy’ and felt that Pauans’ best hopes lay with Indonesia, which had become a vocal leader of the world anti-colonial movement. This group, in the words of one Papuan writer, ‘saw Indonesia as a potential partner to get the Dutch out of West New Guinea’ (‘West Papuan nationalism: an inside view’ in May 1979b:134). Most of its supporters were from Biak Island and many joined two pro-Indonesia political parties that had been formed by Indonesians who settled in New Guinea earlier in the Dutch occupation.

This split in the independence movement, along both tactical and geographical lines, was to hamper the Papuan cause for the next twenty years. Only since late 1983 have there been signs that the divisions are healed.

The anti-Indonesia forces were led by the New Guinea Unity Movement, which managed to gain some defections from the opposite camp. Another movement, the Christian Workers Union of New Guinea, came to represent the rights of Pauans employed mainly
within the government. This organization was responsible for the founding of Parna (Partai Nasional - National Party) in 1960. As Savage has noted, Parna's demands - localization, education, access to credit facilities - were indicative of its petty bourgeois orientation (op.cit.:983). There was little concern for, or liaison with, the rural villagers who comprised the majority of the population.

In early 1961 national elections were held for the newly-formed New Guinea Council and twenty-two out of twenty-eight seats were gained by Melanesians. In the next year, ten Regional Councils were established. Holland's aim was to dampen pro-Indonesian sentiments among the educated elite.

Soon, five of the Papuan members of the Council had formed the National Committee (Komite Nasional) and convened a meeting at which some seventy people chose a flag, an anthem and a name - Papua Barat (West Papua) - for their country. Again there were no real links with the common people. However the Committee's work received widespread publicity through the distribution of leaflets, and Dutch cooperation. On 1 December 1961 the Morning Star flag was raised beside the Dutch tricolour. It was to have 'the briefest life of any emblem in the history of colonial heraldry in Asia' (Lockwood 1982:263-264).

During this period of Dutch activity the Indonesian government was similarly active. President Sukarno made it clear through fiery speeches that Indonesia's determination to incorporate 'West Irian' was irreversible. As a clear sign that his international lobbying might soon be backed by military force, he approached the US and then the USSR for weapons. From the latter he received a $US450 million 'soft loan' for a variety of arms, including tanks, rockets, fighter planes and bombers. A 'liberation force' was assembled under the command of Major-General Suharto, specially promoted from colonel to head the 'Mandala' force. He was later to become Indonesia's president.

There were naval engagements with Holland and in 1962 Indonesian paratroops began dropping onto New Guinea. This latest wave of newcomers received a hostile reception, not only from the Dutch but from the Papuans, including villagers in remote areas. Of the 1,419 troops dropped on New Guinea, 216 were killed or never found and 296 were captured (McDonald 1980). After much pressure from abroad, notably the US and Australia, the Dutch conceded that West Irian was a lost cause. On 15 August 1962 it was announced that Indonesia would take over the territory after an eight-month interim
period supervised by a United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA). A national congress of ninety Papuan leaders accepted the decision, agreed to cooperate with both UN and Indonesian administrations, and asked for a plebiscite as soon as possible after the UNTEA’s mandate ended. From this time, sentiments among Western-educated Papuans began to shift to a pro-Papuan, rather than a pro-Indonesian or pro-Dutch viewpoint (van der Veur 1964). To further this aim they placed their faith in the UN peacekeepers; but they were to be disappointed, an outcome which came as no surprise to the pro-Dutch Papuans who had joined in the colonials’ exodus back to Holland.

Soon the Indonesian military outnumbered the UNTEA officials and began to strike savagely at expressions of resistance. This policy accelerated after the UNTEA’s departure and continued in the following years. The Papuan elite’s last hope rested with the referendum which, as part of the peace accord, Indonesia had promised would be held before the end of 1969. Again the UN came in to supervise, but it clearly lacked both the will and the resources to ensure a genuine poll.

Although the report of the UN’s representative, Fernando Ortiz-Sans, expressed reservations about the so-called Act of Free Choice, it supported the outcome which was a ‘unanimous’ vote by the ‘representatives’ of the Papuan people to continue as a part of Indonesia. The Ortiz-Sans report was accepted by the UN General Assembly, thus giving Indonesia international approval to remain in control. This marked the end of the resistance’s domination by the Papuan elite:

The history of the national liberation struggle in West Irian is to a large extent the story of the misfortunes of the educated petty-bourgeoisie: their successive attempts to make linkages with a variety of foreign elements: the Dutch colonialists, the Indonesian ‘middle strata’ colonisers and political exiles in Dutch New Guinea, the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (U.N.T.E.A.) and the Indonesian pre-1969 administration. It is the story of the successive failures of this category, and of the divisions that emerged within it. Finally, left with nowhere else to turn, elements of the educated petty-bourgeoisie have turned inwards and have sought to make linkages with the peasant and proto-peasant masses and have chosen the road of organised armed struggle (Savage 1978b:143).
That this struggle was being called by the name ‘OPM’ (Organisasi: Papua Merdeka) at the time of the Act of Free Choice was noted by journalists who covered the polling. The title apparently had been coined by supporters of the self-styled ‘president-in-exile’, Markus Kaisiepo, amongst the Arfak people of the Manokwari area. One witness of the Act has recalled being told that the ‘organization’ was more in the manner of a general movement. ‘We are all OPM’, a Papuan pastor was quoted as saying (B. May 1978:182). However there were several well-coordinated underground groups which lent their weight to the OPM. A prominent one was the Lovers of the Motherland (Pecinta Tanah Air) which had a youth wing (Pentana Muda) and produced journals such as Melanesian Triumph and The Voice of Liberty. These groups arranged demonstrations against the Act, including one on 11 April 1969 in front of the Office of the UN representative, Ortiz-Sans. Indonesia reacted strongly to this opposition. One demonstrator, Celsius Wapai, now living in Papua New Guinea, has said that during interrogation he was beaten, given electric shocks and burnt with lighted cigarettes.

The OPM

Indonesia regarded the UN’s endorsement of the Act of Free Choice as a green light to crack down on rebelliousness. Military and intelligence officials were given greater powers to harrass alleged dissidents and many detainees were subjected to harsh interrogation and imprisonment. Instances of anti-Indonesian activity were countered with strong reprisals. These, combined with the rising number of immigrants from other parts of Indonesia, further alienated the local population. But they encouraged an alliance between different strata of Melanesian society and also fostered cooperation between the two main factions, though past animosity often overrode the importance of uniting against the common enemy. Proper coordination was further frustrated by claims to control of the movement by some of the leading Papuans who had gone overseas. Among the better-known emigres were Nicolaas Jouwe and Markus Kaisiepo, who lobbied on behalf of the West Papua cause from Holland and Herman Womsiwor and, later, Ben Tanggahma, based in the African state of Senegal.

The epitome of factional opportunism, and a good illustration of the difficulty of proper liaison with supporters abroad, was the decision of the OPM’s Biak group to declare West Papuan independence on 1
July 1971. Not the least of its goals was to beat the other main group, also centred in the Jayapura-Papua New Guinea border area, in the propaganda stakes and so to legitimize its claim to the leadership of the whole movement. It failed on both counts. The news that independence had been proclaimed did not travel from the New Guinea jungle to the waiting supporters in London at the appointed time. Nor did the entire movement fall into line behind the new president, ‘Brigadier General’ Seth Rumkorem, whose proclamation was broadcast over a short-wave radio captured in the Indonesian outpost of Waris. The proclamation read:

To all the Papuan people, from Numbay Jayapura to Merauke, from Sorong to Baliem Star Mountains and from Biak to the isle of Adi: With God’s blessing, we take this opportunity today to announce to you all that... the land and the people of Papua have been declared to be free and independent (de facto and de jure). May God be with us, and let it be known to the world that the sincere wish of the Papuan people to be free and independent in their own country is hereby fulfilled.

But whatever other Papuans might have felt about the former Indonesian army officer turned guerilla, and the bloc he represented, they decided to endorse his proclamation and have done so ever since. In addition there has been consensus over the use of the Morning Star flag, the national symbol of the crested goura pigeon, the anthem ‘O, My Land of Papua’, and the 129 articles of the Provisional Constitution of the Republic of West Papua which have been printed in a handsome blue booklet. The motto of the resistance is ‘One People, One Soul’ although over the years there have been numerous occasions when this expression of unity has been ignored in favour of pursuing factional vendettas. Mostly the in-fighting has been done with words but sometimes the two main arms of the OPM have come to blows.

The years from 1971 to 1976 were marked by improved links between the OPM’s founding elite and village supporters. Instead of destroying the OPM, Indonesian reprisals served to increase the strength of the resistance, especially in rural areas. Many villagers joined the regular guerilla groups in the jungle, meeting there the urban elite for whom town life had become impossible. The most suitable area for such activity was the jungle along the Papua New Guinea border. From there, relatively safe sanctuary could be found in the
neighbouring country. But the mid 1970s also saw the development of an anti-Indonesian consciousness among Papuans throughout the land. Attacks on government outposts and patrols increased. Modern light arms, mostly of US origin, were seized from Indonesian soldiers and added to the existing supply of rather ancient arms and traditional weapons.

In 1976 the subject of arms supply - or lack thereof - sparked off a dispute between two of OPM’s military commanders, Rumkorem and Jacob Prai. The former said that the movement should break with past practice and seek weapons abroad, if necessary from socialist countries. Prai, however, insisted that self-sufficiency be adhered to. An angry confrontation followed, during which the pair also argued over who was entitled to keep a batch of written records relating to the West Papua Liberation Front (Front Komando Pembebasan Papua Barat) formed in 1969. The showdown resulted in Prai’s leaving the camp and heading for his home area of Ubrub in the border area. A few months later one of Prai’s guerillas led an attack on the Rumkorem group at a sago-gathering camp called Suhampa, on the Papua New Guinea side of the border. Some hostages were taken and the news reported back to Rumkorem who, with many of his Biak Island supporters, had established a permanent camp near Bonay beach, on the north coast.

Attempts to heal the rift failed and the two groups began to operate independently of each other. The pro-Prai faction called itself 'Pemka' (an acronym from Pemulihan Keadilan), Command for the Restoration of Justice. Its political organization was the de facto Government of West Papua and its military wing the Liberation Army (Tepenal, or Papenal). The originally-Biak group was known as the Provisional Revolutionary Government and its army the TPN, or Liberation Forces. The latter’s main overseas supporter was the Senegal-based Ben Tanggahma. The sympathies of the Papuan emigres in Europe lay mostly with the Pemka force although these Holland-based leaders had become somewhat out of touch with the realities of the distant ‘field of struggle’.

The role of the overseas supporters was mainly propagandist, ranging from lobbying members of the UN through to the running of a ‘South Pacific News Service’ which disseminated regular releases to the foreign press. There was no channelling of arms, although printed material, letterheads, seals and even some badges of rank were smuggled into the guerilla areas, often through Papua New Guinea where there were groups of sympathetic Papuan emigres.
Border marker number 1, Wutung. Photo—R. J. May

A section of the Trans Irian Jaya highway near one of the points of incursion into the Western Province, 1983. Photo—Times of Papua New Guinea
OPM field commander, James Nyaro (standing, centre), with some of his forces. Photo—Niugini Nius

Border crossers' camp at Komopkin, Western Province, August 1984. Photo—Times of Papua
New Guinea
While OPM’s internecine rivalry continued, the movement did not lose sight of its real enemy. Clashes between fulltime guerillas and pro-OPM villagers on the one hand, and the Indonesian forces on the other, intensified as Indonesia’s national election, set for May 1977, approached. Government troops, backed by aerial support, struck back against Papuan communities in several areas, including some located far from the border area. One focus of intense fighting was the central highlands, particularly the Baliem valley and the site of the Freeport copper mine at Tembagapura.

The bloody events of 1977-78 have been well documented (Sharp 1977; May 1980; TAPOL 1984). It was clear that, despite Indonesia’s claims to the contrary, the fighting was not a protracted outbreak of tribal fighting but an acceleration of the nationalist resistance. The ferocity of Indonesian reprisals became so intense that the OPM had no time to concern itself with rival factions, ‘enemies under the same mosquito net’. As a result of the conflict, perhaps as many as 3,000 Papuan villagers crossed the border into Papua New Guinea seeking temporary asylum.

Among the refugees were Jacob Prai and his deputy, Otto Ondowame. Although only 34 years old, Prai had been fighting for a decade and was in poor health. The pair were arrested by Papua New Guinea authorities and after complicated legal and diplomatic moves deported to permanent exile in Sweden. By sending Prai far from the battle front both Indonesia and Papua New Guinea hoped to cripple the resistance. What they failed to recognize was that a nationalist movement is unlikely to be destroyed by the loss of one military commander. Still in the jungle was the Tapenal force which Prai had developed. In addition, Rumkorem remained active.

After Prai’s departure the OPM-Pemka group reorganized its command structure. The new leader was Marthin Tabu. Before falling into Indonesian hands, Tabu would become best known for his followers’ destruction of an Army helicopter, killing of its crew and the abduction of its passengers, who included the speaker of the local assembly. It was not long after Prai’s departure that a Papua New Guinea-based journalist could write that the ‘initial euphoria (felt by Indonesia and PNG) was... evaporating rapidly’ (Age 31 January 1979).

After the demise of Tabu came ‘General’ Elky Bemey but he too disappeared in 1981. The military leadership of OPM-Pemka passed to James Nyaro who continued to command Tapenal in 1984. Nyaro is a
highly educated Melanesian who studied agriculture in the Netherlands. He was formerly married to a German, who is reportedly still living in Jayapura, but now has a local wife. He went into the jungle only in about 1982, leaving behind his life as a senior public servant.

When the widespread uprisings of the late 1970s subsided, and Indonesian reprisals were scaled down, the OPM again turned its attention inwards. In July 1981 Papua New Guinea officials announced that there had been a major clash between rival factions near Wutung, on the border. Several deaths were reported after members of the Bemey-led Pemka group attacked a camp of Rumkorem's guerillas, using automatic weapons. Eleven hostages were taken and imprisoned in harsh circumstances. A Papua New Guinea newspaper said that seven of them had died after being housed in metre-wide cages resembling pig-pens. Several were apparently murdered (Niugini Nius 9 July 1981, 24 February 1982).

The factional struggle was reflected in splits in the emigre community in Papua New Guinea, particularly in Port Moresby. Each group made public statements denouncing the other. Their attention was diverted temporarily by news of a bold attack by the Genyem section of OPM which attacked a timber camp near the capital. Eighteen Indonesian hostages and a Malaysian-Chinese were led off into the jungle. A ransom demand was made for $US2 million and an air-drop of 100 machine guns. Eight months later the hostages were freed as a result of intervention by a Papua New Guinea official who crossed alone into Indonesia and made contact with the guerillas. Because of their ordeal the hostages were in poor health; some had died (although one had married a guerilla, another example of the so-called ‘Stockholm syndrome’). The affair was a public relations disaster for the OPM which was seen by many outsiders as having maltreated innocent civilians. It was also an embarrassment for Indonesia which, unable to locate the guerillas, had insisted that they were sheltering in Papua New Guinea. The hostage debacle, and the continuing factional problems, caused alarm among West Papuan nationalists. In February 1982 the underground West Papuan Students League sent a memo to other pro-OPM groups expressing concern about the frequent public differences between the two main blocs. It said the fighting was ‘not beneficial to our revolution’. Three months later, in Oegsteest, Holland, a summit of all the main West Papuan leaders took place. A resident of Papua New Guinea, who supported the Pemka group, returned from the meeting saying that there were strong pressures for unity but a
genuine reconciliation had not yet occurred.

In September 1982 the leader of the Victoria group, Seth Rumkorem, was arrested by Papua New Guinea authorities off Rabaul, having left Irian Jaya with several followers in a motorized outrigger. The party was bound for Vanuatu where they believed the Lini government would grant them sanctuary. (Later, while visiting Papua New Guinea, Fr Lini said that his country could not accept any more West Papuans than the few who had previously been granted residency.)

The Papua New Guinea representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) found Rumkorem a difficult person to resettle abroad. All the countries in the region turned him down, as did several European countries. It was felt that he could not be sent to Sweden because of the risk of his clashing with Prai. After more than a year in Papua New Guinea Rumkorem was accepted for temporary asylum in Greece. Before he boarded his flight at Port Moresby airport he was greeted cordially by local representatives of the Pemka faction. Cynics might suggest that Pemka was being friendly to Rumkorem because it was glad to see the end of him. However feelings of solidarity were expressed and the next day a prominent (if somewhat individualistic) West Papuan, Henk Joku, told the Papua New Guinea press that previously warring factions were now united under a single field commander, Pemka’s James Nyaro (*Times of PNG* 2 December 1983).

Given the OPM’s history of factionalism, this announcement was treated with scepticism by the press, the government (in private) and foreign observers. However the events of February-May 1984 seemed to give support to OPM’s claim of emerging unity.

In early 1984 Indonesian intelligence received information that OPM members in the Jayapura area were planning a large-scale uprising. According to Papua New Guinea’s Justice minister, Tony Bais, the tip-off had been given to Indonesia by Papua New Guinea intelligence. The resistance has since said that the uprising was provoked by ongoing Indonesian policies, particularly the transmigration programme which has been most intensive in the border area. The OPM explained that it was also angered by the detention, in the previous November, of about thirty Papuans suspected of OPM sympathy. The most prominent of the detainees was Arnold Ap, curator of the ethnology museum at Cendrawasih University and director of the Mambesak cultural troupe. Ap, along with two or three friends, was shot dead by the Indonesian military in late April 1984, allegedly after escaping. (It
is likely that he was killed by a military death squad from the Kopassandha (Red Beret) unit which was involved in the street executions in Java and had earlier been holding him *(National Times 11-17 May 1984).*

Pre-emptive action by Indonesian security averted the uprising but did not stop a series of minor attacks in Biak, Sorong, Manokwari and Jayapura. The best publicized incident was an OPM flag-raising attempt outside the provincial government building in the capital.

The attacks in and around Jayapura involved both main OPM factions. They were led by O. Joweni (Victoria group), Y. Hembring (Pemka) and J. Awom who was formerly second-in-command of a Mobile Brigade unit of the Indonesian army.

In response to the uprising attempt Indonesia launched a security crackdown on suspected OPM supporters in both urban and rural areas. The focus was the border area and in time over 11,000 Pauans had crossed into Papua New Guinea as refugees. This was the largest flow of border crossers since the Indonesian arrival in 1962-63. Of particular relevance is the fact that both of the OPM's main factions were in action, sometimes together, against the Indonesian military.

The refugee crisis, and the concurrent visit of Pope John Paul II, attracted much media attention to Papua New Guinea. Journalists who visited the refugee camps reported meeting numerous people who felt that their involvement with the OPM would endanger their lives if they returned to Irian; the UN representative estimated that 10 per cent were in this category. Included in their number were supporters of both Pemka and Victoria factions. Some were members of the urban elite from Jayapura-Sentani, others were villagers.

Descriptions of camp life seemed to indicate that the proximity of the different factions had not led to serious clashes, verbal or physical. (This was not the case in the late 1970s when refugees at the Wabo and Yako camps created separate living areas and often engaged in faction fights.) According to reports by both the UNHCR representative and *The Age* (30 April 1984), in 1984 the refugees in Vanimo had segregated in accordance with a 'social pecking order' rather than factional or even clan allegiances. At one end of the camp, near the water, the middle class was grouped together; Papuan deserters from the Indonesian military lived in another spot while villagers and fishing families were living in the most inhospitable part of the camp.

Of the journalists who visited the border zone during this period, two - an Australian (Damien Murphy) and a Papua New Guinean
(Neville Togarewa) - managed to walk into Irian Jaya and interview OPM-Pemka leaders. Both found the OPM's leadership greatly lacking in resources. The Australian wrote that the movement was 'on an ultimately quixotic quest'. When asked the size of the guerilla force along the border, the leadership was said to have spent some time calculating figures before estimating it at 5000. Papua New Guinea intelligence believed that at that time there were about 1000 full- and part-time guerillas in the kabupaten of Jayapura (Sydney Morning Herald 2 May 1984). Rumkorem has since said that his Victoria group has 500 guerillas, and the Pemka group about 1,600. Around the Freeport mine site and Enarotali, Paniai Lakes, another 2,000 were in place. In all, he claimed a total force of 30,000-50,000, admitting they greatly lacked modern arms (TAPOL Bulletin 62, March 1984).

The Papua New Guinean journalist Togarewa interviewed the leadership of the West Papua Senate, a twenty-minister underground cabinet which has taken over the function of the former de facto government. The Senate's chairman, Fisor Yarisetouw, explained the movement's goal:

Our dream is to have one parliament, one government for all Melanesians from Sorong in the west of Irian to Samarai in the east of mainland Papua New Guinea where you don't need a passport or identification card to travel from one end of the island to the other. You have a house with two rooms, one represents West PNG, the other East PNG. If the house is burning, it is foolish for the occupant of one room not to help the other to put out the fire and save the house and both rooms (Times of PNG 15 March 1984).

Yarisetouw, unlike so many resistance leaders before him, is not an intellectual but a coastal villager who went into the bush in 1973 after completing high school. He told Togarewa that OPM stood for democracy and Christianity, an orientation that is emphasized in the preamble to the West Papua Constitution. He insisted that help would not be sought from communist nations, a policy that may however be ignored by Rumkorem who said on leaving Papua New Guinea for exile that arms would be accepted from any donor regardless of its politics. Oddly, Yarisetouw told his interviewer that Indonesia itself was communist; the Indonesian Communist Party was a strong advocate of the Irian takeover and active in the military operations when Yarisetouw was only a young teenager in 1962 and doubtless he heard
his christian relatives speaking of the communists' involvement. Another OPM leader interviewed recently by journalists was the president and military commander, James Nyaro. In an interview with ABC-TV's 'Four Corners' programme, which caused some controversy before it went to air in late May 1984, Nyaro admitted that his followers were short of modern arms and said that though, as a christian, he regretted the killing of his Indonesian enemies,

...in the revolution time we must kill them - against another nation that makes us harm:...my heart feels so. I'm not afraid of them. I will fight so long as I live. When I get my independence I can stop it. Until they're out of my country, then I will stop it.

During the recent refugee crisis two Indonesian military jets were reported to have crossed the border and caused a panic when they flew low over Papua New Guinea's Green River settlement. On receiving Papua New Guinea's official protests, Jakarta officials remarked that their neighbour was being overly sensitive; after all, they suggested, Papua New Guinea had done little to inhibit the OPM's cross-border movements. While essentially true, this statement implies that sanctuary in Papua New Guinea is the OPM's lifeline. In fact the majority of OPM supporters, active or covert, never enter Papua New Guinea: even in the unlikely event that Papua New Guinea could muster the political will - in the face of public sentiment - and the logistic support to effectively seal the border, the OPM would continue to operate. This was shown in May 1985 when 200 Papua New Guinea soldiers and riot police were despatched to the border station of Bewani in response to the detention of a Posts and Telegraphs Department helicopter which had mistakenly landed near an OPM camp. The troops did not manage to trace any guerillas and succeeded only in destroying some deserted huts. As has happened so often in the past, on both sides of the border, the OPM had melted back into the bush.

Despite the harshness of jungle life, the OPM remains effective there and in early 1985 was showing signs of uniting its long-feuding factions. In the Netherlands, too, West Papuan emigres had begun to develop a new solidarity, largely due, they said, to their exclusion of the old-timers such as Nicolaas Jouwe, who they felt could not appreciate the current state of play. The West Papuan People's Front, formed in 1984, comprised the sons (and, less actively, the daughters) of the leaders who had moved to Holland in 1962-63. Among the mem-
bers of the front were Victor Kaisiepo, whose father, Markus, was well known in earlier years, Eliezer Bonay, the former governor of Irian Jaya who had fled to Papua New Guinea, and four younger Melanesians who had gained sanctuary in the Dutch embassy in Jakarta, and asylum in Holland in 1984. Like the guerrillas in the bush, these OPM were strongly critical of the factionally-inclined emigre community in Port Moresby, feeling it was hampering the cause.

The first major initiative of the Front was the raising of funds amongst emigres in Holland to buy air tickets so that OPM faction leaders Seth Rumkorem and Jacob Prai could travel to Vanuatu to attend the ruling Vanuaaku Pati’s annual congress, scheduled to be held in mid July 1985 on the island of Tanna. However, when Rumkorem tried to collect his Qantas ticket from an Athens travel agent he was told that the Australian government had refused him a visa to transit at Sydney airport for three hours prior to connecting with his flight to Port Vila. Undeterred, he rerouted through USA and Fiji and in due course reached Vanuatu where he met his former comrade for the first time since 1976. After lengthy negotiations the pair vowed to bury past differences, co-authoring a pact dubbed the ‘Declaration of Port Vila’. They remained in Vanuatu for a month, hosted by the government and liaising closely with local OPM representative Rex Rumakiek. Rumkorem appears to have been more flexible regarding his exclusive claim to the title of OPM ‘president’, an insistence that had prevented him gaining permission to migrate to Vanuatu in 1983 when he was living in temporary asylum in Rabaul, Papua New Guinea.

Conclusion

From earliest times the Melanesians of West New Guinea have shown their willingness to fight outsiders when they felt their rights were threatened. Indonesian policies in modern Irian Jaya present a greater threat than any yet encountered and this awareness has spread throughout the indigenous population. Even observers sympathetic to Indonesia’s presence in Irian have estimated that 80 per cent of Papuans would vote against integration if given a genuine plebiscite.

An attempt at a military takeover by the OPM could not succeed. As in past years, however, it is likely to have some victories against Indonesia, both on the battlefield and in the propaganda war being waged in the foreign media.
The tenacity of the movement has so far won no concessions from Jakarta officialdom. However in mid 1984 there was a sign that the government was considering the ‘softening’ of its stance in Irian Jaya. Advocates for more humane development policies included non-governmental organisations in Jakarta and some officials (Feith 1984). Peter Hastings has written that even Irian’s military commander, Gen. Sembiring Meliala, has strong doubts about Transmigration to the province. Given the population’s propensity for exacting ‘payback’ it seems likely that past actions would be forgotten if Indonesian policy were to moderate at this stage.