CHAPTER 9

PROSPECTS: ‘A STATE OF MIND’

Peter Hastings

For close Indonesia watchers, the arrival of five anti-Indonesian Irianese on Thursday Island, Australia, on June 26 1985 did not come as a surprise. Some have long anticipated it: Merauke is only 250 kilometres northwest and adjacent to Wenda-Kumbe settlement camp which houses around 10,000 (mainly Javanese) transmigrants and 2,000 Irianese co-settlers.

The five Irianese, who are Indonesian citizens, originally from Merauke, came by canoe from Papua New Guinea by way of Boigu Island. Earlier the five had crossed into Papua New Guinea at Morehead patrol post, and prior to their departure for Australia had spent six months in southern Papua. At first, the five made a request for political asylum, but when the meaning of that was fully explained to them in Indonesian, they changed their request to one for permission to ‘preach’ to Australians on the rights of the Irianese to independence from Indonesia. All five were suffering severely from malaria and agreed that on recovery they would return to Papua New Guinea. Papua New Guinea, however, has since refused to accept them back, since technically they are illegal immigrants.

These five are the first of many ‘canoe people’ that Australia may expect to arrive at Thursday Island and other northern ports in the future to claim asylum in one degree or another and for one reason or another. Many who come are likely to be ‘economic refugees’ and sorting them out from those genuinely qualifying as refugees under the Geneva Convention may prove difficult. But whether genuine refugees or not, and whether seeking asylum or not, many human rights activists in Australia, already involved in protesting the activities
of the Indonesian administration in East Timor and Irian Jaya, will insist they stay in Australia. The future therefore promises new strains in Australian-Indonesian relations and it may be safely assumed that the Australian government will seek to minimize damage to those relations by returning ‘canoe people’, where possible, to Indonesia.

The five arrivals have claimed membership of a fairly new Irianese nationalist organization, MUFGAS, an English language acronym for *Melanesian Union from Gag to Samarai*. (Gag is a tiny island west of the Bird’s Head and Samarai an island off the tail of Papua.) The acronym reflects the earlier slogan, espoused by Papuan leaders of the former Volksraad in seeking to promote a one island federation, *From Sorong to Samarai*. This in turn was a play on the Indonesian slogan of the 1950s, *From Sabang to Merauke*. According to the five, MUFGAS represents a new political movement which rejects the OPM’s ‘armed terrorism’, seeking to promote one-island unity through means of peaceful propaganda and example.

Their arrival in Australia coincided with reports of the arrival in Papua New Guinea of at least another 1,000 border crossers from Irian Jaya. About 1,000 were said to have come across at Skotiau, and, it is thought, a further 1,500 Min-speaking people came across at Yapsiei, west of Telefomin. The Skotiau arrivals contained a fair number of returnees from the results of a Papua New Guinea military exercise, Operation Rausim Kwik. This had involved six weeks planning and two days execution; according to one ironic observer in Port Moresby, its failures became apparent within a week. The troops certainly forced a number of Irianese settlers near Skotiau to return to Irian Jaya, but as soon as the troops went back to Port Moresby the border crossers, augmented by others, returned to Skotiau. The Yapsiei crossers represent the northernmost extremities of the Min-speaking people, and they come from a mountainous area about 50 kilometres west of the border, which is only lightly administered; available evidence points to OPM propagandists being able to induce the people to cross the border to avoid an alleged Indonesian/OPM clash. This brings the total number of border crossers in Papua New Guinea once again to about 12,000.

**Definitions**

While many, especially in Papua New Guinea, refer to the 10,000 or so border crossers in Papua New Guinea camps, prior to the most
recent crossings, as refugees, the description is not accurate except in so far as it applies to perhaps 400 or more of the 1,000 residents in Blackwater camp. These are primarily Irianese teachers, police, soldiers, two university lecturers, and small-time bureaucrats, who represent the growing number of Irianese evolues. They left Jayapura after the February 13 flag raising incident and subsequent events last year. They are certainly refugees by any definition because they would be in danger of life or liberty if they returned to Irian Jaya. They cannot return. Between 80 and 100 of the remainder have in fact returned.

There are three main camps in the north: Green River, Kamberatoro and Blackwater. Until a year ago the northern border was the main centre of OPM operations and of Indonesian military incursions either in hot pursuit, in error, or to intimidate. Following the flag raising incident the OPM became much more active, virtually for the first time, in the south under the leadership of Gerardus Thomy whose raid in early April 1984 on the Indonesian administrative centre at Waropko, about 30 kilometres northwest of Ningerum, precipitated Indonesian military reaction and led to the large number of crossings later that month.

Eventually more than 8,000 Irianese crossed the border, at least 6,000 in various stages of exhaustion and hunger which for some time the Papua New Guinea government did little to alleviate. The majority were Roman Catholic and with the exception of 1,100 people, now at Tarakbits camp, all were Yonggom-speakers (some from as far west as Mindiptanah, a largish centre 25 kilometres west of the border) as are most Papua New Guineans around Kiunga. For this reason, all but the Ningerum-speaking Tarakbits people were able to get land from the locals, a difficult matter in Melanesia. They have thus been able to plant traditional food to supplement UNHCR food rations; as well they get clothes, drugs and medical treatment. As a result the camps have taken on a semi-permanent character. The Yonggom-speakers are accepted, the Ningerum-speakers are suffered.

The crossings

It is difficult to sort out all the reasons for the crossings. Heavy-handed Indonesian administrative practices, or unsympathetic ones; over-reaction (including shootings) by military patrols, to raids such as that on Waropko, and genuine fears of land alienation through transmigrasi settlements, are among them. But I believe the main problem
to be the ineradicable cultural dislike of the Malay and Melanesian races for each other. This was pungently expressed in August 1984 at an Australian-Indonesian conference in Brisbane, by a senior Indonesian delegate, Brigadier-General Soebyakto, who said that Indonesia could not keep Irian Jaya as a 'zoo' or 'museum' and even more succinctly a hundred years earlier by Alfred Russell Wallace who said that ‘... if the tide of [Malay] colonization should be turned to New Guinea, there can be little doubt of the early extinction of the Papuan race’ (Wallace 1869 vol. 2:448).

By the same token it would be unwise to ignore the increasing effectiveness with which the OPM, despite factionalism and small numbers, has been able to exploit Irianese grievances to promote fear among Irianese villagers, and to influence them to cross the border and to remain there. And like the Indonesian forces it opposes, it is not averse to burning villages. Observers of the southern border crossers, including Warren Dutton, the member for North Fly, and most border kiafs (especially the few expatriates remaining), believe that the OPM is 80 per cent responsible for the crossings. This in itself is a signal achievement.

The missions, especially the Catholic missions, are notable dissenters from this view and have been an important element in the decision of border crossers to remain in Papua New Guinea. They have been active also in supporting Dutton’s proposal to resettle the crossers permanently in Papua New Guinea (see chapter 5 above).

In a long interview in Kiunga on 9 February 1985, the bishop of Daru, Bishop Deschamps, a French Canadian Montfort missioner, told me that he was inclined not to accept information from the bishop of Merauke which cast doubt on stories carried by the border crossers. These stories alleged that within Merauke diocese Indonesian soldiers had wantonly killed teachers, catechists, villagers and children, had raped nuns and had shot up the church at Ninati.

The bishop also said that he was disinclined to accept assurances from a Dutch priest, who had made a special visit from Merauke diocese, that it was the experience of priests working in Irian Jaya that ‘by and large the Indonesian Army behaved with consideration of the Church’ and that the Bishop should be careful of stories of church desecration. By the same token the following day a senior Montfort mission nun at Kungim camp told me that a number of border crossers had arrived ‘in fair health, accompanied by teachers, catechists and all their pots and pans’, showing all the signs of a carefully planned exodus.
rather than sudden flight in fear.

The camps

All eight camps on the border, especially those at Kuiu, Komokpin and Tarakbits, are within easy walking distance of the border. The majority of inmates comprises women, children and old people. Young and married men tend to live on the Irianese side of the border, visiting the camps by night or for some days on end and returning with food to Indonesia.

While crossers tend to deny open OPM affiliations, hard core OPM members clearly have access to the camps at will. An old man told me that, in any case, ‘the OPM is a state of mind’. This is a more than accurate description to the extent that the vast majority of camp dwellers north and south along the border are strongly anti-Indonesian in sentiment. All strongly resist any suggestion they should return.

The OPM

The former panglima, Brigadier-General Sembiring, maintained that OPM hard-core numbers, as distinct from sympathizers, do not exceed 300 to 400 and are very poorly armed. They have few firearms, between 30 and 40, mainly old Dutch and US rifles and a few Indonesian firearms, and very little ammunition, mainly because Indonesian troops carry only five rounds per man for fear of ambush. Most OPM carry traditional weapons, mainly bows and arrows. Intelligence sources in Papua New Guinea and Australia believe this an accurate description of numbers and weapons.

While OPM members at Blackwater camp tend to represent Irianese evolve, those in the south, including OPM members operating a few years ago around Tanahmerah and as far west as Akimuga and Tembagapura, are regarded as discontented village types. Even so, they include a number who have worked in Merauke, Mindiptanah, Agats and Timika in unskilled and semi-skilled occupations. Most leaders, however, are ‘elite’ and literate.

1 It is well to remember in this regard that Indonesia has only three battalions, 735, 736 and 737 in Irian Jaya, that more than 400 of its total strength of 2,300 are Irianese, mostly christian, that many of the officers are christian, and that the former panglima, Brigadier-General Sembiring Meliala, a Batak, was a strict christian and Baptist lay preacher. He has been succeeded by another Batak christian in Brigadier-General Hasudungan Simandjuntak.
As an insurgency force the OPM amounts to little away from the border where it relies on being able to seek sanctuary in Papua New Guinea when the going gets tough. It is less effective in the far west, although it operates in Biak, the Bird’s Head, Paniai (Wessel Lakes) and Akimuga.

**OPM organization**

The border area is divided into five KODAPs (*komando daerah pasukan* or troop command areas). KODAPs 1 and 3 operate around Kamberatoro, northern border; KODAP 2 around Wutung - probably the most contentious OPM group; KODAP 4 around Merauke and possibly the Freeport Indonesia copper mine at Tembagapura; KODAP 5, under Thomy, around Ambotweng, a tiny village on the Indonesian side of the northern section of the Fly River bulge.

Despite impressive sounding command structures, and official letterheads to match, KODAP numbers are small. KODAP 3, for example, has eight or nine central highlands Wamenas who operate around Bewani and Skotiau. The OPM is not only small in hard-core numbers but is badly factionalized by leadership, clan and linguistic rivalries. Two rival OPM groups - including one under Prawar who deserted in mid February with fifty to ninety followers from Blackwater camp - operate around Wutung, not only against Indonesians but against each other. On 28 February 1985 Prawar’s group in fact moved south and attacked the small group operating under James Nyaro, self-styled OPM commander-in-chief. On the orders of Papua New Guinea’s foreign secretary, Paulius Matane, seven leaders from Blackwater, with their families, were moved recently to Telefomin as a means of defusing internecine rivalries.

**Propaganda**

Despite factionalism and small numbers, the OPM groups on the border nevertheless show a greater talent for organization than one might have predicted several years ago, if we judge by their success in manipulating the large-scale southern exodus of Irianese into Papua New Guinea. This is especially true of the group under Thomy, who has shown organizational capacity.

Propaganda, written and oral, has taken several lines. First, there have been ceaseless allegations of Indonesian atrocities throughout the province of the sort I have already mentioned: allegations of capri-
cious, motiveless killings by the Indonesian military, or future genocidal operations planned by them. Secondly, there have been accounts of (mostly fictitious) engagements with Indonesian forces, alleging high Indonesian casualties; invariably there are no OPM casualties. The places mentioned are usually too far away for those to whom the propaganda is directed to be able to check. These accounts are mostly written. Thirdly, verbal propaganda has been spread in the camps. This plugs several themes: that Indonesian doctors forcibly sterilize Irianese women so that ‘we will have no children and the Javanese will take our land’; that Javanese settlers take over Irianese villages for settlement in areas scarcely able to support sweet potato and yam subsistence farmers, let alone rice eaters; that Irian Jaya has all but achieved independence and that therefore those who have crossed the border must remain there ‘until the final battle is fought’; that any border crossers returning to Irian Jaya will either be killed by the Indonesians or beaten up by the OPM for disobeying orders. Fourthly, special events are covered by written communications typed on special letterhead paper bearing the Papua Barat (OPM) flag, the PAPENAL (freedom force) emblem and the legend, MARKAS PASUKAN PEMBEBA-SAN NASIONAL MERAUKE or National Independence Group Headquarters, Merauke. Communications of this sort may be in Bahasa or English and are signed ‘Gerardus Thomy, Panglima OPM Divisi Merauke’. The English version of several such communications which I have received recently are nevertheless authorized by ‘Henk Joku, OPM Spokesman in PNG’. They are almost certainly printed and typed in Port Moresby, not in Merauke where it would be difficult for a clandestine printery to operate undetected. Communications are addressed among others to UPNG’s Student Representative Council; the Papua New Guinea government; Vanuatu’s Fr Lini; Warren Dutton; Ramos Horta; Yann Uregei, Noumea; UNHCR, Port Moresby; Bernard Narokobi; West Sepik Students Association; Mr Somare.

Dilemmas

There is increasing evidence to suppose that OPM supporters in Port Moresby are responsible for trying to coordinate the uncertain activities of the OPM on the border, including terrorism. I have referred above to the attack by Prawar on James Nyaro but not its bizarre sequel. Fighting between the two became sufficiently serious for a leading OPM light, Melky Salosa, who runs a small group near Kam-
beratoro, to visit Port Moresby in an attempt to get help in resolving factional problems. Salosa is a violent, unstable man twenty-three years of age who last year was responsible for the capture of Swiss pilot Werner Wyder and, according to Wyder, for the murder of two plane passengers and three Sulawesi timber cutters in the same exercise. The occasion caused prime minister Mr Somare to condemn OPM terrorism; more recently Vanimo’s pro-OPM bishop, John Etheridge, has sounded a further warning.

Sometime in February 1985 Salosa is alleged to have walked 250 kilometres through extremely rough country from Amanab to Wewak and thence travelled to Port Moresby. A more credible alternative story maintains he flew from Amanab to Wewak by MAF (the Mission Aviation Fellowship) and onwards by Air Niugini. Without doubt, however, he stayed in Port Moresby with well-known Irianese dissidents - all but one of them permissive residents under strict obligation to refrain from political activity - from 27 February to 5 March when he returned to the border. There are various stories as to the purpose of his visit. The one accepted by DFAT says that he came to persuade Henk Joku, Bas Fairio, Martin Kambu and other OPM sympathizers in Port Moresby to withdraw support from James Nyaro as OPM commander-in-chief. He was arrested on the border in early June and taken to Port Moresby.

Separate OPM groups on the border seem to have better contact with Port Moresby than with each other. Contact generally is maintained by couriers, letters, and, increasingly, by use of STD phones made available by some obliging mission stations and by equally obliging Melanesian kiaps from time to time in Vanimo, Amanab, Green River and Bewani in the north and Tabubil, Kiunga and possibly Daru in the south. It is hard to believe that the Indonesian embassy in Port Moresby is not aware of links between OPM sympathizers on the border and in Port Moresby or of the Papua New Guinea government’s failure or reluctance to do much about them.

Problems and options for Papua New Guinea

In essence Papua New Guinea’s problems boil down to two: what to do about border crossers already in Papua New Guinea, and what to do about future crossers? Papua New Guinea has consistently refused Indonesian requests for Sarawak-type ‘hot pursuit’ rights, on two grounds: (a) it is politically impossible; any Papua New Guinea gov-
ernment agreeing to such a request might well lose office; (b) chasing Chinese communist terrorists around a Borneo swamp is one thing, they are easily recognizable because they do not look like Malays; Indonesian troops in hot pursuit over the Irian border could not distinguish between Indonesian Melanesians and Papua New Guinea Melanesians.

' Closing the border' Port Moresby often talks of, but knows it is impossible on both geographical and political grounds. There are insufficient disciplined forces, and too many of them are pro-OPM in sentiment, to close all but tiny sections of the border.

A third option is returning the camp dwellers. But how? They show no signs of going and there is little chance they can be forced back at the point of a Papua New Guinean police bayonet, no matter what Matane says. If they are forced back they will possibly return again in greater numbers, as happened in June 1985 with the Skotiau crossers. There are, in any case, possibly constitutionally sanctioned legal restraints on the Papua New Guinea government's capacity to force them back against their will. Moreover forced return would damage Papua New Guinea's international image, not least in Australia. Yet their return one way or another may prove crucial.

There is every inducement at this stage to border crossers to stay in Papua New Guinea. In addition to UNHCR food, drugs and clothes, all but 1000 have land. Dutton, supported by the Catholic mission at Kiunga and other interested bodies, has proposed resettling all 8,000 on land suitable to future rubber, sugar and oil palm planting, to be purchased from customary owners in an area 75 km east of the border between the Eevala and Kaim rivers. Dutton has a sincere interest in the welfare of the border crossers, but it is fair to point out that he has also invested considerable capital in the Kiunga-Tabuil area and in economic development in the general Ok Tedi mining area.

Government objections to resettlement are three in the main. First, the camps could become permanent OPM sanctuaries and invite an Indonesian attempt to 'sanitise' the border by way of limited military action. Secondly, near border settlement will invite further groups of crossers. Many dispute this but Department of Provincial Affairs estimates that a properly organized OPM campaign from Wutung to Weam could force another 25-30,000 Irianese across the border. Thirdly, resettlement costs in Western Province, in terms of roads, schools and crops, would prove formidable and resettlement further east, even if land were available, prohibitive and politically undesira-
ble. There are few in Somare’s cabinet, Fr Momis excepted, who disagree on the necessity for repatriation.

**Indonesian options**

In a change from earlier attitudes, Indonesia is currently showing a great deal of restraint, almost verging on indifference, over the border crossers, especially those in the south. The camps cost it virtually nothing; they are a charge on Papua New Guinea and the UNHCR. However if the camps become effective bases - inviting more crossings - for OPM sympathizers to mount anti-Indonesian operations in Irian Jaya the present mood of forebearance will change. Two worst case scenarios offer themselves. One, much talked of in Papua New Guinea, is outright Indonesian invasion of Papua New Guinea. The other is one, two or a series of swift punitive military attacks on the border camps.

I discount utterly the possibility of invasion. Papua New Guinea is not a colonial vacuum like East Timor. An Indonesian attack on Papua New Guinea, with a view to subjugation or virtual annexation, is an attack on a sovereign, independent country, a member of the UN, the Commonwealth, the South Pacific Forum and an associate state of ASEAN, as well as a country with a special relationship with Australia. Invasion, a Security Council matter, would not be in any of Indonesia’s perceived regional interests. For what ultimate benefit?

If Papua New Guinea is perceived as in any way conniving at anti-Indonesian activities from Papua New Guinea sanctuaries, or as being unwilling or unable to control them, then limited cross-border raids are entirely possible. This would particularly be the case if the OPM were able to obtain any of the several thousand shotguns estimated to be in Papua New Guinea’s possession along the border area or other weapons. To date there is no evidence of Papua New Guinea shotguns or ammunition crossing the border or being used in the camps.

Even limited strikes, few in number, would be extremely serious in their effects. They would tend to destabilize government in Port Moresby, place great strains on the Jakarta-Canberra relationship, thoroughly antagonize Forum states, including a Lange type government in New Zealand, raise questions in the UN, and not least in countries like Singapore, the most reluctant ASEAN state to accept East Timor’s incorporation into Indonesia.

Under the border agreement each signatory expressly undertakes
not to allow its territory to be used for hostile purposes against the other. Papua New Guinea’s seeming inability, or reluctance, to do anything about the 90 Irianese who deserted Blackwater camp with Sergeant Prawar - now operating around Wutung with the avowed purpose of attacking installations at Jayapura - is a case in point where Papua New Guinea is clearly in breach of the agreement. A series of such breaches may well be seen ultimately by Indonesia as a threat to sovereignty and invite action. To date Indonesia has been restrained and seems determined to remain so.

Australia’s options

On close examination, I believe these to be few. In the event of invasion I would simply point out that while Australia has no ground force capability, eastern Indonesia is extremely vulnerable to Australian air and sea power - the most formidable in the region - should Australia’s government decide to go down that track. But would it? The consequences of such an action would be extremely grave. In the event of Indonesian cross-border attacks on camps believed to harbour Indonesian rebels operating against Indonesian forces in Irian Jaya, Australia’s choices seem few indeed.

It would be very difficult for Australia to support, and be seen to support, Papua New Guinea in a deliberate or uncontrolled policy of encouraging, tacitly or otherwise, subversive operations against Indonesia. It would be difficult even if Australians were aroused and Australia’s Papua New Guinea constituency - an increasingly unknown quantity as time goes by - agitated for it.

We should not underestimate the difficult political problems facing Papua New Guinea in the border issue. Nor should we ignore, as friends, the dangers inherent in apparent drift. It may be that a majority of the border crossers will return in small numbers over time. How perfect a solution. But there are as yet no signs of it happening. Until it does our proper role as friend may be to urge Indonesia to more acceptable policies in Irian Jaya and to warn Port Moresby, however unpopular it makes us, that if the present border camp situation is allowed to continue unchecked then sooner or later PNG may find itself looking straight down the barrel of an Indonesian gun.

Changes in Irian Jaya

To a large extent the OPM is only as strong as the Irianese resent-
ment it feeds on. A major cause of Irianese fear generally, and an underlying cause of the record number of crossings in 1984-85, is more than likely the effects of the transmigrasi programme.

Between 60,000 and 70,000 transmigrants, mainly Javanese, are in numerous settlements in the Bird’s Head, the north coast and around Jayapura and Merauke. One settlement, Koya-Arso, is right on the border.

At the end of the fourth Five Year Plan in 1989, Indonesia hopes to move 136,000 transmigrant families, about 544,000 people, into mixed settlements in Irian Jaya. On past performance, the goal of half a million is unrealistic. But even if half that number is settled in the province during the next four to five years, the impact on Melanesian culture and the Melanesian land tenure system will be shattering, no matter how much expert care is taken implementing the programme.

Land alone poses problems enough. About 3,000 hectares are required for every 500 people. About 700,000 hectares have already been alienated from Melanesian owners without compensation. In 1989 this will amount to between 1.5 to 3.2 million hectares. Given Irian Jaya’s generally poor soils, steep slopes and swampy terrain this is a far larger area than the figure suggests. Moreover, Melanesian landowners are not paid compensation and the Indonesian view maintains that development of roads, schools and crops is compensation in itself. The failure to pay compensation, even if a reasonable case can be made, must nevertheless create severe tensions in a traditional Melanesian society.

The main purpose of transmigration is, allegedly, to help relieve pressure on Java’s huge population of 92 million. This is largely delusory because at least 20 million would have to move to have any real effect. Transmigration certainly makes a difference to the individual peasants who move: for the first time in their lives they own their land, even if in the Melanesian view it is not theirs to take.

Transmigration’s positive aspects are clear. It improves Irianese living standards, teaches them technological farming skills and furthers their national integration, creating in them the sense of being Indonesian, of belonging to the great and varied Indonesian family. But questions can be asked about the effectiveness of transmigration programmes. In the first place transmigration settlements are designed to integrate non-Irianese (mainly Javanese) and Irianese. President Suharto has directed that each farming settlement must contain 25 per cent Irianese. But where do they come from? It will take a generation
to make rice farmers or fruit growers out of subsistence, shifting agriculturalists like the Melanesians.

Moreover, under the Five Year Plan 81,000 families, about 324,000 people, will be moved during the next four to five years into new settlements in Jayapura and Merauke districts, both of which are close to the border. The political implications of so many Javanese, or even half the number, being settled close to Papua New Guinea are alarming, even allowing for the positive aspects of transmigration programmes.

It must be asked whether the rapid growth of the settlements and their culturally distorting effect on the Irianese will not prove counter-productive. Many Indonesians working in Irian Jaya, including the commanding general, Sembiring Meliala, think so and have called for a rethink of the programme.²

The increasing number of settlements, with their implied threat to land and culture, leads to increased sympathy for the OPM, to acts of civil disobedience, and to the growth of Irianese nationalism - such as the murdered Arnold Ap represented - rather than to a sense of being both Indonesian and Melanesian, which is the most desirable end from all points of view, and not least Papua New Guinea’s and Australia’s.

If border pressures and increasing numbers of border crossers cause Papua New Guinea to become politically destabilized, it would have political and defence implications for Australia. It would, in fact, affect the whole region. It would concern New Zealand, whose new Labour government will take a far more radical view of neighbourhood events than Sir Robert Muldoon’s. New Zealand has considerable influence in Papua New Guinea and in the South Pacific Forum and its views will carry considerable weight with the small Forum countries which, although mini-states, have votes in world and regional organizations and already view Indonesia’s Irian Jaya policies unfavourably.

Potential anti-Indonesian feelings are not restricted to the independent island countries. New Caledonia’s Kanaks, bargaining for their independence with the French, might follow the lead of Vanuatu’s Melanesian leaders and come to see Irian Jaya in terms of a colonial struggle.

²‘The Irianese are still unable to accept the transmigration program whole because most do not understand the purpose, objective and benefit of transmigration. They watch and think on the basis only of what they believe, that their land is being taken from them and their forests cleared by strangers who look different from them in many ways.'
One should not underestimate the capacity of Indonesians to rethink policies and, when they have to, change them. I believe Jakarta is rethinking its Irian Jaya strategies and programmes. But, as an old Indonesian friend put it, this will take time like an ocean liner takes time to change course. But by reason of its contiguity, size and resources, Indonesia knows it has a constructive role to play in the southwest Pacific, not least in relation to its Melanesian neighbours.

The course that relationship takes depends to a large degree on how it handles its relations with Papua New Guinea. This in turn depends to a large degree on the course of events in Irian Jaya. Jakarta is nevertheless well aware that Irian Jaya is not East Timor. The Timorese people must eventually accept their future as part of the Republic; they have nowhere else to go. The Irianese can ‘vote with their feet’ by crossing the border into Papua New Guinea and, as the five in Thursday Island have shown, by entering Australia as well.

‘Despite the world of enlightened field workers the Irianese are not convinced of the need for transmigrasi. That’s why they so often ask for a share of transmigrants’ harvests, believing that the land still belongs to them. Unrest develops as a result of their unreadiness to accept this reality ... they feel strangers in their own land ... they are the ones who need help first ... it is not necessary to mix the Irianese with the newcomers (to provide development) but to bring development to their villages first. Assimilation will occur when the Irianese have acquired a sufficiently high level of consciousness’ (Melaila 1983).

General Sembiring received no firm answer to his submission but the debate on the best way to handle the Irian Jaya problem, including transmigration, continues in Jakarta.
BETWEEN TWO NATIONS