

VI

EPILOGUE

The Japanese *blitzkrieg* southwards in 1942, in addition to temporally stunning Allied military power, carried in its wake the permanent destruction of the Western colonial system. As such the fall of the Dutch colonial empire in Indonesia was part of the general collapse of Western colonial power in Asia after 1945. Australia and New Zealand were also deeply affected by this change as their northern security cordon provided by the British, Dutch, and French colonial powers had disappeared.

Britain was forced to grant concessions to the powerful Indian nationalist movement, including promises of independence immediately after the war. Moreover, exhausted by the war effort and hovering close to national bankruptcy in 1945, Britain was no longer able to sustain a military-based colonial regime in India and Burma. The British decolonisation process was speeded up by the fall of the Churchill Conservative government at the hands of the basically anti-colonial Labour Party, while the influence was felt also of the Atlantic Charter and Roosevelt's anti-colonialist stance. India gained its independence in 1947 and Burma in 1948. As a result of this the traditional British protective umbrella extending over the Netherlands Indies, shattered in 1942, was never repaired.

The British dominance in South and South-East Asia was superseded by the United States, which pushed a policy of decolonisation and the creation of new free and democratic indigenous states and tried to keep the influence of the other

superpower, the Soviet Union, at bay. In 1946 the United States, keeping to its prewar promise, had granted independence to the Philippines. American policy in Asia, though basically anti-colonialist, was applied pragmatically as a function of the demands imposed by the Cold War. So in Vietnam, where the communist controlled regime of Ho Chi Minh was threatening to take over the whole of the country, Washington felt impelled to grant massive aid to the French colonial forces. In contrast in Indonesia an initial pro-Dutch attitude by the Americans changed to full support for the republic in 1948 after the communist Madiun debacle assured victory to the Republic of Indonesia. Thus, in December 1949, Indonesia achieved political independence, although the Dutch colonial economic hold on the country remained largely intact.

The continuation of Dutch and other Western enterprises was seen by the early Indonesian governments as an essential precondition for national economic rehabilitation and development. Against this an anti-Dutch mood in the country was gradually reaching a high pitch owing to a general fall in living conditions and the machinations of the ever more powerful political left. As a result, in 1957 and 1958, Dutch-owned plantations and firms were nationalised. Any vestiges of Dutch political influence were also obliterated and in 1960 diplomatic relations were broken off. The Dutch unwillingness to transfer sovereignty of West New Guinea to Indonesia played a role in the anti-Dutch campaign and speeded up the nationalisation process. On the other hand an earlier surrender of the territory to Indonesia would only have provided temporary relief to the Dutch economic sector, as the Sukarno and leftist controlled anti-Western upsurge could not be stopped.

The decision not to transfer the territory of West New Guinea was, in the first place, the outcome of the existing political configuration in the Dutch parliament where ultra-conservative forces insisted on their pound of colonial flesh. Without their support the RTC bill would have failed to reach the required

target of votes and to achieve the main objective of the creation of the independent Indonesian federated state. As a compromise the decision on the status of West New Guinea was temporarily kept on ice to be discussed during a further conference in 1950.

There is much truth in de Geus's assertion that the official Dutch policy regarding West New Guinea, during the 1950s, flowed on directly from the policies pursued during the revolution, which were characterised by a Dutch under-estimation of the fervour of Indonesian nationalism.¹ Until the bitter end in the Netherlands, the government, pushed by the conservative Protestant, Liberal, and Catholic parties, and a still strong and vocal colonial diehard mentality in parts of the nation, both at home and among most of the majority of Dutch expatriates and Eurasians in Indonesia, continued to object to rapid decolonisation. The ghost of the prewar powerful, neo-Calvinist colonial figure of Colijn still seemed to overshadow national deliberations on Indonesia. His emphasis on the need to protect the rights of the various peoples of the Indonesian archipelago that had reached different levels of socioeconomic development and modernisation continued to receive strong support in Dutch colonial circles. In 1918, Colijn had argued that, for example, New Guinea, considering its low degree of modernisation could as yet only be represented by Dutch colonial officials, and advocated that rather than centralisation of power a federal model should be used for an eventual autonomous Indonesia.²

It is pertinent that from its beginnings early in the 17th century the Dutch colonial venture had been largely Calvinist-controlled. Catholics and Socialists remained unrepresented in the colonial service and only provided few colonial experts to parliament. After 1946 this situation changed when the Catholic Party, as a major coalition partner with the Socialists in government, was forced to preside over the liquidation of the Dutch empire in Indonesia. This provided an important boost to the anti-decolonisation Protestant-Liberal minority in parliament, as the Catholic leadership was also moved by the principle of a

'moral vocation' in colonial affairs. Catholic ministers Beel and Sassen, and the party leader Romme, had strongly pushed for a predominant Dutch power role in the projected Netherlands-Indonesian Union and stressed the rights of self-determination of the various regions and peoples of Indonesia. It was the more flexible Catholic minister van Maarseveen who had managed to sell the RTC agreements to the KVP rank and file after pacifying Romme by agreeing to the separation of West New Guinea.

The New Guinea lobby initially based its case on the demands of Eurasian organisations which, from prewar times, had tried to establish agricultural colonies in West New Guinea, and now feeling dispossessed by the Indonesian revolution clamoured for the territory to be created as their new fatherland under Dutch rule. Generally the Eurasian population in fact showed very little enthusiasm for starting a new life by hacking out a living from the New Guinea jungle. Most of the few actual ventures attempted in fact had failed, causing this essentially colonialist dream to lose its gloss. The main emphasis was now moved to the Papuan population itself and its right of self-determination and eventual independence as a separate nation.

De Geus is on very shaky ground when asserting that the self-determination question was a contrived argument as it had been thrust forward firstly by Dutch politicians and officials and not by the Papuans themselves. He seems to ignore the fact that a Papuan nationalist sentiment was on the rise and that some of the small elite of Dutch-educated Papuans, such as Ariks and Jouwe, had been pushing on their own account the matter of self-determination during the RTC negotiations.³ A part of this book is devoted to exploring and analysing the rise of Papuan nationalism, a matter that has been neglected so far, including in the major works of Lijphart and de Geus.

The fundamental issue at stake was the question of whether the Papuans of West New Guinea constituted a separate people having, under the provision of the UN charter, the right to determine their own political future. There was no doubt on this

score among the Dutch-educated Papuan elite and the majority of Dutchmen and Australians.

Large parts of the Netherlands-Indies had been ruled indirectly with traditional rulers left in charge of internal affairs. During the 1930s a beginning had been made by creating autonomous *adatgemeenschappen*, that is, regions ruled under their own usages and customary law regulations. The Dutch did not see the indigenous population of the Netherlands-Indies as forming one nation, but rather consisting of a large number of separate political, cultural, and ethnic entities. An important element of Dutch colonial policy was to protect the cultural identity of these various peoples and tribes. Unlike the British and the French, who imposed European law on all their colonial subjects, the majority of Indonesians were left under their own *adat* laws which were felt to better serve the sense of justice in the community than Dutch law. An important drawback was that these essentially liberal ideas about human rights were also used by conservative colonial governments to maintain Dutch rule as long as possible.

The final Dutch decision to hold on to West New Guinea was also influenced indirectly by the activities of the first West New Guinea Resident, van Eechoud, who in 1949 presented The Hague with a largely independent separate colonial administration of West New Guinea. He was a great fighter for Papuan rights and had done much to encourage the rise of nationalism. He was well connected with the New Guinea lobby in the Netherlands and as a Catholic had the ear of the missionary hierarchy. He was also in contact with Romme, the great apostle of the self-determination principle who, after his debacle during the RTC, had put all his energy into having his ideas realised in West New Guinea. Romme's hold on the KVP proved to be a major obstacle to achieving a breakthrough on the West New Guinea issue in parliament, while his trust in the tenacious Catholic Foreign Minister, Joseph Luns, was well rewarded.

In addition the New Guinea cause was reinforced at least in conservative quarters by a feeling of Dutch patriotism and an

unwillingness to see their country reduced to insignificant proportions internationally as no more than a little market garden plot on the North Sea. Moreover, in colonial circles, a loud cry went up to take up again the Dutch civilising mission, interrupted by the Indonesian revolution.

Nevertheless, in early 1950 there was still opposition, mainly in Labour circles, to the Dutch retention of West New Guinea. This, however, was dissipating fast in response to the Indonesian destruction of the federal system, the armed suppression of opposition in Eastern Indonesia, and the increasingly anti-Dutch tone by the Indonesian political left and the media. So, by the end of 1950 Indonesia had also lost a deal of support from the Dutch left.

The most exhaustive work on the West New Guinea question is Arend Lijphart's, *The Trauma of Decolonisation: The Dutch and West New Guinea* of 1966. This undeniably important book is marred by rash assertions: that the Netherlands decision to remain in West New Guinea was motivated exclusively by subjective and irrational factors; that the Dutch concerns for the Papuans were: ... 'overlaid by selfish motives ...'; and that the Netherlands showed a pathological reaction to decolonisation.⁴

Firstly, the reaction in the Netherlands regarding the Indonesian question at the time was far less dramatic than is portrayed by Lijphart. The people traumatised by the Indonesian debacle were mainly returned expatriates who had been in Japanese camps and were later affected by the bloody *bersiap*, and Eurasians and Ambonese who arrived in the Netherlands, an unknown, unfriendly and cold place. Deeply affected also, of course, were the families of soldiers killed in action and many of the returned armed forces. In fact only a relatively small section of the Dutch nation was concerned directly. The reaction of the vast majority of the population to the loss of the Indies was rather muted, as knowledge and interest in the colony had always been low. In any case the average Dutchman had little time to reflect on colonial issues, being fully occupied in eking out a meagre

living during the depressed postwar economic conditions, and all attention was directed at the rehabilitation of an economy wrecked by the German occupation and the Allied invasion. Secondly, very much open to question, is the cavalier way in which Lijphart waves away as hypocritical the grave concerns expressed by politicians and thousands of citizens about the future destiny of the Papuan people. Thirdly, he pushes aside morality in politics and in international behaviour by the argument of convenience and 'reality', giving the impression of dismissing most Dutchmen as simple-minded do-gooders.

Whatever the Dutch motives were, whether pure or adulterated or a combination of the two, this still does not obviate the rights of the Papuans of the Western part of the island of New Guinea to an independent national existence. Why was an independent nation allowed to emerge in Papua New Guinea and not in West New Guinea? They are the same people ethnically. The ultimate blame for this must be heaped on United States policy, which completely ignored the right of self-determination for the Papuans of West New Guinea in favour of its political objectives in Indonesia. In the process, two of its staunchest allies, the Netherlands and Australia, were left in the lurch. This lesson was not lost on Australia as is evident from its stance on the East Timor question. But as recent happenings in Timor have shown, Australia's policy of appeasement and turning a blind eye to abuses and repression has also been a failure. As a small and militarily weak nation Australia's influence on South-East Asian affairs is very limited and any major action remains dependent on Washington's fiat.

In any case the sacrifice of the Papuans proved to be in vain as Indonesia continued its aggressive posture in the anti-Malaysia campaign and communist influence kept growing in strength.

Radical nationalism in Indonesia, in addition to political freedom, also demanded full control of the national economy and cultural independence, and the West New Guinea question acted as a useful lever to speed up this process, including the nation-

alisation of the Dutch business sector. Jakarta also remained obdurate regarding West New Guinea because it could not show any sign of weakness in view of the opposition in parts of Eastern Indonesia to the centralisation of power in Jakarta. Hence, the territory was considered to be a fundamental building block in the Indonesian nation-creation process. Indonesian nationalists were empire builders, who looked at West New Guinea in territorial terms and designated all people in the former Netherlands-Indies as Indonesians whether they wanted this or not. There were no referenda and in a number of areas the people were forced to comply at the point of a gun. The referendum held in West New Guinea in 1969 was a farce. The hostile reaction of the Papuan people to the Indonesian military occupation has not abated and the armed resistance of the Papuan freedom movement has continued to the present.

Notes

1. De Geus, 1984, p. 212.
2. Colijn, 1918, pp. 35-6.
3. De Geus, *op. cit.*, pp. 195 and 199.
4. Lijphart, 1966, pp. 286 and 288-89.