

INTRODUCTION

Anti-Colonialism, and Colonial Administration in Australian New Guinea

The 'colonial' nature of Australia's relationship with the Territory of Papua and New Guinea increasingly complicates her foreign policy because most of the governments of the world, and in particular those in south-east Asia, in whose hands to an increasing extent her vital interests lie, base their external policies on the assumption that this kind of relationship involves restraints on 'freedom', and denial of basic human rights. Anti-colonial principles are professed by both the United States and the Soviet Union; so that colonial administrations have been treated as expendable in the cold war.

The machinery for maintaining permanent diplomatic conference in the United Nations, on the basis of one nation one vote, has provided very effective means for application of the anti-colonial doctrine, for which support has increased with every new government admitted, as it has emerged from colonial 'bondage'. At the time of writing, the number of member states, swollen by the admissions over the decade of 'de-colonisation', has reached one hundred and eight. Anti-colonial pressure has reached such intensity that the problems of colonial powers in their remaining territories tend to be mainly those of disengagement. The spectacular French and Belgian withdrawals from Africa, and the pace of the British disengagement, illustrate realistic assessments of the strength of this pressure, combined with developments within the colonies now considered more or less inevitable. And to come closer to Australian New Guinea, the Dutch found to their cost that a colonial flavour and history were enough to deny them the support of their closest allies.

The impact of this pressure on Australia has so far been tempered, partly by the fact that in the world scene her relationship with New Guinea is relatively unimportant; and partly because the Australian press has been prone to emphasise the debates in the Trusteeship Council, where colonial and anti-colonial governments are about evenly represented, rather than those in the Assembly, where the climate and the resolutions have been far more condemnatory. The activities of the Committee on Non-Self-Governing Territories, and the debates in the Fourth Committee, have had little impact on Australian public opinion or political thinking. But the diminution of Trust Territories to three (of which Australia holds two) must result in a declining importance of the Trusteeship Council, if only because the only other full Administering Authority is now the anti-colonial United States. (The United Kingdom and New Zealand are still Administering Authorities, sharing responsibility for Nauru with Australia.)

2 *The New Guinea Villager*

The General Assembly, having issued its Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, established a special committee to hasten the process of 'de-colonisation'. This is likely to spearhead the attack on the colonial relationship wherever it exists. The difference between a Trust Territory and a territory held on the basis of annexation, like Papua, has become somewhat academic—a point which Australia seems to have conceded in the statement by Sir James Plimsoll to the Assembly in October 1961, that 'our objectives in both territories are identical—self-determination and a recognition of the right of the people to choose their own form of government and their own association'.*

In the background of international politics, such a choice by New Guineans seems inevitable within a few years. Yet the internal facts of Australian New Guinea are such that orderly control by a New Guinean government and administration, within a period of time likely to correspond with the demands made upon Australia, is doubtful indeed. The dilemma is the most serious yet faced by the Australian community in its external relations. For Australian security and trade are becoming more rapidly and clearly dependent on Australian relations with neighbours which are in the van of the anti-colonial movement. As a matter of doctrine, they assume that whatever the political, social, and economic hindrances in New Guinea, these are not to be solved by a 'colonial administration'; that they cannot be solved at all until such an administration is removed. The post-colonial situation in the Congo is attributed to the shortcomings of the Belgian colonialists—and, indeed, most of the handicaps felt by former colonies tend to be explained as results of colonialism. So the probability of chaos in New Guinea, if an early façade of independence is established there, is not likely to serve very well as an argument for delay. Such chaos, of course, invites political exploitation by all governments with interests in an area, with consequent dangers to peace. They are certainly exploitable by Communist bureaucracies as breaches in the 'imperialist' world which it is their mission to bring down. This is the other horn of the Australian dilemma—that the vital interests of both Australians and New Guineans require the avoidance of such chaos. Yet its avoidance depends on the solution of a mass of interlocking problems inside New Guinea, which cannot be solved quickly; and with which it is most difficult to come to grips, except through the techniques of that widely discredited system of government—colonial administration.

The point has been illustrated in an interesting way in the Congo, where the United Nations, to prevent worse things, has had to interfere directly in administration, attempting to promote order by bolstering and influencing what it decided to be the legal authorities. Even more interesting were the denunciations of this interference by some Congolese in terms usually applied to 'colonialists'. Perhaps 'indirect rule' by the United Nations is not so very different in practice from that of classical colonial theory. The future of such

* Statement on Australian Policies to the General Assembly, 13 October 1961: *Current Notes on International Affairs*, Canberra, October 1961.

a situation, once established, is as uncertain as that of the United Nations itself, and of the balance of power within it. This is the kind of 'solution' without a settlement which, in certain not impossible complexes of circumstances, could lie ahead in New Guinea. It is at least worth noting that the handing over of West New Guinea from the Dutch to Indonesia involved a period of direct colonial administration by the United Nations.

The intensity of the reaction against colonialism has largely resulted from the racial and cultural assumptions of superiority by colonial Europeans. The Asian colonies had been civilised states, with centralised governments, religions expressing the highest aspirations of humanity, written languages, codes of law, often with a longer history, and achievement, on any basis of assessment, at least comparable with those of the colonisers. The European was able to control them because of techniques which had developed from his curiosity and the application of his logic and energy to the material world. In Asian civilisation such activities had been given less emphasis than introspection and the refinements of social life. Leaders of Asian thought and politics form the spearhead of modern anti-colonialism; and their profession of the doctrine accord it something of the dignity of a moral precept. They are reacting against the indignity of being used economically in the development of the great wealth of the European nations; against the crudities of racial discrimination during the colonial era and since; against contempt, and ignorance, on the part of colonial rulers, of Asian cultural achievements and traditions. Their acceptance of the Western objective of the welfare state, alongside the present levels of *per capita* production, has strengthened assumptions that they have been the victims of 'colonial' economic exploitation; and resentment of exploitation is reinforced by the inter-racial and inter-cultural tensions.

As a background to all this there is an older, more comfortable, more doctrinaire anti-colonialism, mellowed by the time which has passed since the countries where it is part of the national myth began their separate histories with anti-colonial revolt. Of this the United States offers the most notable and decisive example; here the national myth gives to the details of the revolt against the King of England the significance of escape from bondage to 'freedom'. The republics of Central and South America hold to a similar political mythology; and on colonial matters have tended to vote as a bloc in the United Nations.

'Colonialism' as a term used in association with 'imperialism' has a special connotation in Marxist theory. Imperialism is the final stage of capitalism, with the capitalist states fighting for the control of the world. By the definitions approved in Communist countries, of course, 'socialist' states cannot be accused of imperialism or of colonialism; when they seize control of other countries they are liberating them from pre-capitalist, capitalist, or imperialist rulers. A basic assumption of Communists is that of 'unilinear development', from feudalism to capitalism, to capitalist imperialism; they claim to hasten inevitable transition to the next, socialist, stage. In the con-

4 *The New Guinea Villager*

text of this rigid orthodoxy no socialist 'liberation', even that in Hungary or Tibet, can establish a 'colonial' situation. Communist orthodoxy attacks the form of colonialism condemned in the Marxist texts, i.e. the colonialism of states which they define as 'imperialist'. Thus the United States is condemned as in the forefront of 'imperialist' powers.

'Colonialism', then, has different meanings and different emphases in different cultural, doctrinal and national contexts. Historically it developed a 'salt-water' component having special reference to control of overseas peoples. Expansion of national frontiers over land was commonly regarded as extinguishing the 'sovereignty' of the groups overwhelmed, like the indigenous peoples of North America and Siberia, who became subjects of the expanding state. In this sense, Australia has a 'colonial' relationship with New Guinea, but not with the Aborigines of the Australian continent. Something of this limitation has remained in the hostile use of the term. The general implications are of exploitation, of racial prejudice and injustice, especially where the government of a community of 'European' origin controls a community of non-Europeans overseas. In this special sense, control by the U.S.S.R. of the 'satellites' of eastern Europe is not colonial.

This is indeed a confused debate, with the varying views of what colonialism is tending to be emphasised in different situations. Into this political confusion and double-talk went as rebels some of the leaders of the anti-colonial revolt from areas which before they were colonies had been occupied by stateless societies; and into the same kind of international discussion, at the United Nations and elsewhere, go the new political leaders from these countries. They represent peoples which before the setting up of colonial administration lived in tribal or village communities, or in smaller groups of kinsmen; where there was no state, no institution for justice or the rule of law, no protection but that of kinship, no written language, no impersonal administration, no cash economy or means of saving or investment in raising living standards. They owe their very shape and boundaries, as we picture them in our map-conscious minds, and as they have been taught to do, to the colonial powers which grouped them into units for administration. The colonisers used them for their own ends. But they also in a sense created them, giving them unity.

Now such nations use patterns of government learned from former rulers; and plan for the increase of material welfare to which colonial administration in its later years had been committed. They almost inevitably accept one or other of the anti-colonial ideological mixtures; and express feelings of deprivation, and resentment of racial discrimination at the hands of the white man. People smarting from racial and cultural insult, where these things have been suffered (as was the case in colonies, no matter what the policy of the administrations) are only too eager to believe that they have escaped from exploitation, and that colonialism in any circumstances makes increases in welfare impossible. On this point all forms of anti-colonialism agree. In the context of world diplomacy and elsewhere their exponents find plenty of confirma-

tion, and swell the anti-colonial chorus. In the process of creating national sentiment through control of news and information they claim that their poverty arises from the period of colonial rule. In Ghana there is the attempt to create retrospectively the glories of a national pre-colonial past.

It would be comforting to believe that because attacks on the government of colonies are not always reasonable or just they are therefore groundless; that this is a passing fashion, or the result of Communist propaganda. But the colonial system has, for most of its history at least, been one of economic exploitation; so that the colonial powers are rendered vulnerable by history. After the last war most of them spent far more on colonial development than governments could expect in return; but such investment of the taxpayers' money was assumed to be in the taxpayers' interests.

There may be, then, some hypocrisy in the altruistic sentiments proclaimed by the Australian government to the world about New Guinea, though no more nor less than is usual in international justification of a national policy. But it would be dangerous to believe in its efficacy, even with Australia's allies. It is clear enough that what Australians try to do for New Guineans is also in their own interests. But this does not mean that the New Guineans would be better off without the Australian connection, or in dependence for assistance on other sources.

Possibly Australian policy has been most vulnerable in its reluctance to accept offers of assistance from international agencies for New Guinea. (United Nations Visiting Missions have stated that Australia lacks resources for an operation of this size.)

In the meantime, Australia must, for an indefinite time, maintain colonial administration in the background of growing pressures to relinquish it. It is in the interests of all immediately concerned that the surrender of political control be so managed as to maintain good relations between the two parties; and that whatever can be done to promote political unity and stability in New Guinea be done. For this, time is required; and the longer the time, the better the chances of success. Yet time which is paid for at the price of a permanent resentment is too expensive: and time will be limited by external pressures, especially if these find a point of entry (as will be inevitable sooner or later) into internal anti-colonial politics, through an ambitious anti-Australian leader. On the other hand a failure of nerve in the face of pressures from outside the country could result in the loss of everything which the Australian government and people have invested in New Guinea. If Australia succeeds in handing over the power of self-government to a New Guinean administration which is firmly in control; and particularly if that administration continues to look especially to Australia for the technical and other assistance required, once it is in the position where it may go to the whole world with requests, Australian policy will have proved itself skilled indeed, and the Australian community will have been most fortunate. It may well be that we will be glad to settle for less: and come to think

6 *The New Guinea Villager*

of indefinitely prolonged United Nations control as a fortunate outcome.

A good indication of the acceleration of change with increasing international pressures is the fact that in early 1962, when I began to write this introduction, the Dutch were in West New Guinea, and elections on a common roll were hardly considered in Australian New Guinea. By 1964 the whole power system in the area had been affected by the Indonesian takeover of West Irian. And in response to the suggestions of a United Nations Visiting Mission, a House of Assembly for Papua and New Guinea had been elected, with New Guinean and Australian candidates in open electorates on a common roll, and a New Guinean* majority.

The somewhat belated admission that the most fortunate outcome for Australia would be a friendly independent New Guinea has naturally stimulated special efforts for 'development'. Some of these have been basic in their importance although the effects are not really predictable. Others indicate the superficiality of official thinking; which is inevitable, since any government responsible for establishing another one will set out to create something in its own image. There has been emphasis on procedures in the manner of the Mother of Parliaments for new members of the House of Assembly—preceded by the procession of New Guinean politicians and others to Canberra to watch the ritual in the Senate and House of Representatives. A great stimulus of change has been the annual increase in the Commonwealth subsidy, to match the moderately increasing 'works potential' in the area. (Higher subsidies would probably have increased the cost of construction work rather than have got more done.) One side-effect of this expenditure (now comparable with that of the Sydney Water Board) will be to expedite the disintegration of traditional ways of living. The object, of course, is not this at all, but to bring to the people of New Guinea the welfare which marks the welfare state.

The House of Assembly has been established in the effort to find a short cut to democratic government: and a courageous effort it is. But it is easier to see the House as a means whereby New Guinean members may speak to the villagers and to the world, than as an enduring instrument of central government. The traditions and restraints on which government by an elected assembly depend not only have to be understood and fairly widely accepted in the national community, but embedded in compromise between the powerful conflicting interests in the state. In New Guinea the reality of political power is still vested in the official hierarchy of area administration, staffed almost exclusively by Australians. The District Commissioner is still an official of great power. Nor is it likely that the politics of discontent will be nicely channelled into the House of Assembly or expressed mainly in the forms of British parliamentary tradition. A riot in the streets of the capital,

* In this book I use the term 'New Guinean' for 'indigenous inhabitant of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea'. I do this with apologies to Papuans who may not wish to be so described, but the term 'New Guinean' has the wider reference which 'Papuan' lacks in the general Australian New Guinea context.

Port Moresby, might well prove more politically significant for the Territory and Australia than resolutions in the House.

The less one knows about the way other people live, the easier it is to assume that they are in the process of learning to be like ourselves. This comfortable assumption makes it easy for arm-chair political scientists to find short cuts to some future desired state of affairs. Thus the proposed Federation of Melanesia had its day, until reality burst in with Soekarno. The same kind of thinking has led some commentators, in view of the desperate need of New Guinea for modern skills, to berate the government for not having set out to 'train an élite', to lead New Guineans where it would suit the interests of Australians for them to go.

It is also easy and tempting to assume that the prevailing attitude to Australians is one of gratitude for favours received, and for the benefits of 'civilisation'. There is an assumption of common interests between the rulers and the ruled which is comforting. Official statements are reassuring because they imply that the New Guinean wants what we want. There has been a good deal of evidence quoted by officials and others that New Guineans want the Australian administration to stay, to help them build a national community. The developmental effort is portrayed as an educational one, with Australians the teachers, and New Guineans the students. When they learn properly how to work 'democratic' parliamentary institutions, they can be trusted to set up as a nation on their own. Yet recent events, in similar situations, have shown the error of such assumptions. Generally, among the early casualties of independence, have been the democratic institutions. Independence, at the last, comes in a rush, so that the fiction of 'learning' how to work the institutions has been forgotten in the pressure of events. The indigenous leaders impatiently take over as soon as they can.

But such events elsewhere have not had very much effect on Australian policy. One line has been that New Guinea is 'unique'. To some extent elected governments must reflect the views of the electors and taxpayers; and most Australians are very sure that Australian administration in New Guinea has been of outstanding quality, partly because governments have so often said so. In fact, of course, what we have done there is very like what other colonial powers did in their colonies; and the reactions of the people may be expected to be broadly similar.

The tasks of 'development' which since the last war have been seen as essential, first in the colonies, and then in the newly independent countries, are of extraordinary complexity, involving as they do problems of 'cross-cultural' administration, and economic and political growth which involve in their turn profound social changes. Much Australian criticism of government policy shows no informed appreciation of these complexities. On the other hand, there has been little attempt by government to indicate how great are the difficulties. The emphasis has rather been the other way. The general tenor is that all is going well in Australian New Guinea: that the real problem is to keep out those who would wreck Australian developmental activity

8 *The New Guinea Villager*

before it has come to fruition. There has certainly been no attempt to prepare public opinion for the possibility that, irrespective of outside intervention, things could easily go seriously wrong for Australia in New Guinea. One reason for this possibility may be that the task is simply beyond administrative 'solution'. But this is something which it is hardly good politics to admit. Public servants who advise politicians are likely to assume that administration which has been successful in Australia will also be successful in New Guinea. It is tempting to convey to others the feeling that one is achieving what one is supposed to achieve. As the New Guinean villager is generally inarticulate in the terms of Australian-type politics, and likely to remain so up to the very threshold of decisive action, it is not surprising that most Australians assume strong New Guinean attachment to the Australian connection.

New Guinea politics work very differently from those in Australia. People are concerned about different things, and express themselves in different ways; but ever since the first outsiders imposed their control over the villages, the reactions to the intruders have been significant; the effect of intrusion, and the attitudes to the intruders, of profound significance. What these seem to have been, the broad sweep of events over the eight decades of occupation, the process of social change, all have significance for the kind of society which is likely to emerge.

This book is an attempt to indicate just how complex the internal situation is. Such an attempt involves generalisations about New Guinean society which may well be criticised by specialists in particular fields of study, or in particular areas of New Guinea. New Guineans differ a great deal from place to place on the Island of New Guinea, and throughout the other islands of the Territory. They differ in their systems of belief, in religion, in the pattern of economic activities, in social organisation, and in many other ways. No general description of their common predicament can do justice to the range of these differences. When one generalises about their attitudes, the basis for this must be largely one's own impressions of what the evidence indicates. In spite of these difficulties, the time appears ripe for an attempt to outline the processes of change which have had such profound effects on the lives of New Guineans. Here they will be dealt with mainly as villagers: for even when they live in towns, most of them retain their village-conditioned attitudes.

As the material to be moulded by Australian administrative policy, as the future citizens of the welfare state, or as the future allies of Australians, villagers are worth study. It seems time to assess the likelihood of such developments: of the chances, in all the circumstances, of leaving more than an archaic bureaucracy in a poor police state, where the officials either co-exist with or control villagers. It is at least possible to argue that a strong army and police force, capable of holding the country together, and of withstanding the strong separatist movements which could well lead to chaos, are as important as a well-trained administrative service. It could well prove that

the only force holding the Territory of Papua and New Guinea together has been the Australian Administration. Most of the boundaries are on the map only; in practice (with the exception of the border with West Irian) the Administration tends to peter out as one approaches them. The very term 'New Guinea' is confusing, referring as it does to the big island, the whole Australian controlled area, or that part of it which does not include Papua. The Territory of Papua and New Guinea could prove one of those short-lived accidents of history; based on the illusions of a small nation which expanded into the area in a period when the realities of power were disguised by the colonial system. The new balance of power is now taking shape; and the boundaries may well be drawn again.

Here we will look back in retrospect at what has happened to the villager, and how he has reacted. We will not be mainly concerned with the detailed policies and practices of the last decade. Partly this is for lack of space. The details of current policy and practice in schooling and education; in the promotion of trade unions and of efficiency of employed labour, of new forms of land use; in dealing with the problems of land tenure as the cash economy develops; in the promotion of elected government assemblies and the extension of their powers; in the 'nativisation' of the public service; in the whole range of effort for economic development, all of which and others as important have concerned the Administration with a new urgency over the last decade, would require another book. Efforts in these fields have produced changes of profound significance, without, as yet, widespread effects. But our consideration of these new measures will be only as marking the last of the eight decades of colonial rule in New Guinea. Only the kind of thinking which easily assumes a common purpose between administration and villager will interpret the likely reactions of New Guineans in terms of the professed policies and intentions of the last decade. Those who concede that the villager, ill-informed as he may be, is likely to be as clever as we are, will not be surprised if he remains unmoved by the new flurry of developmental activity, suspecting that it is at least as much in our interest as in his.

Rather will his attitudes have been conditioned by all that has happened in eight decades, just as those of Australians in New Guinea have been.

