WEST NEW GUINEA: THE UNCERTAIN FUTURE

JUSTUS M. VAN DER KROEF

On April 5, 1967, Lord Ogmore of the Liberal Party demanded in Britain's House of Lords that the English government take steps to initiate a United Nations' investigation into the reported killing by the Indonesian military of some one thousand rebellious tribesmen in the Indonesian-held territory of West New Guinea (or Irian Barat, as Indonesians call it). Ogmore, a Southeast Asian specialist, termed it "scandalous" that for three years no representative of U.N. Secretary General U Thant had looked into the position of the Papuan inhabitants of West New Guinea, although in 1962 the U.N. had helped to arrange the transfer of the disputed West New Guinea region from the Netherlands to Indonesia and under the terms of the Dutch-Indonesian Transfer Agreement has supervisory responsibility for the exercise of an act of political "self-determination" by West New Guinea Papuans by the end of 1969.

In the Netherlands, at about the same time, increasing pressure was being generated by a national "West-Irian . . . Not a Colony" action committee inspired by such groups as the "Faithful Through the Ages Foundation" (Stichting Door de Eeuwen Trouw), an organization of political conservatives, many of whom are oriented toward the two principal confessional Protestant political parties in the Netherlands and who heretofore have been primarily concerned with the interests of the exiled Ambonese minority from Indonesia residing in the Netherlands. In the background of both this foundation and the action committee are two or three score of vocal dissident Papuans in the Netherlands, led by Nicolas Jouwe and Marcus Kaisiepo, both of whom held positions of political leadership at the close of the Dutch administration of West New Guinea, and who were active in the nascent Papuan nationalist movement. On September 19, 1967, Jouwe's Holland-based Vrijheidscommite West Papoea ("West-Papua Freedom Committee") declared in a letter to U Thant that more than 3500 Papuans in the Bird's Head Peninsula area of West New Guinea had been killed by Indonesian forces the previous February, and that a hundred men and boys had been executed in the Balem Valley in the central highlands.

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1 The Djakarta Times, April 8, 1967.
3 See De Stem van Ambon (Arnhem, Holland), Vol. XVII, No. 212 (1967), pp. 1, 3, 4-5. This publication is the chief organ of the Stichting Door de Eeuwen Trouw.
Indonesia's Foreign Minister, Adam Malik, flatly denied any mass executions, although he admitted to "isolated incidents." In Indonesia, meanwhile, increasing concern was being voiced over the influx of hundreds of Papuan dissidents into Australian-held East New Guinea, and Indonesian press reports noted that Papuan rebels in the territory were expecting arms and food from a "foreign submarine."

These developments have refocused attention upon the dispute, now decades long, over the future of West New Guinea, and particularly upon reports of continuing Papuan resistance to the Indonesian regime since its formal establishment on May 1, 1963, after a one-year U.N. interim administration. Since Indonesia took control, the scarcity of information about the territory (already serious in light of its undeveloped state and dispersed population) has become even more of an obstacle to meaningful analyses of West New Guinea's development and problems. Only a few non-Indonesian reporters have been permitted to enter the area in recent years, and the restrictions on movement and news dissemination—which had already become extensive in the rest of Indonesia under "Guided Democracy" since the beginning of this decade—were even more vigorously applied under the "political quarantine" imposed by Indonesia when it took over the territory. Access to the area remains difficult today, even for Indonesian journalists from other parts of the country. Still, sufficient information has come out of the troubled territory to form a pattern of tentative impressions which, if nothing else, confirm the fact that West New Guinea's future still plagues the international scene.

It may be recalled that West New Guinea was the one segment the Dutch retained when they transferred sovereignty over their East Indian colonial possessions to the new Indonesian Republic at the close of December 1949.

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4For the text of the September appeal to U Thant, see Freedom Committee West Papua/West New Guinea, Cry of Distress from West New Guinea (Mass Killings in New Guinea/"West Irian"). Most Urgent Appeal to: H. E. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, from The Papuan People of West Guinea (s.a.e., 1967?), pp. 2-10. See also The Straits Times (Singapore and Kuala Lumpur), September 30, 1967. On November 15, 1966, and February 15 and March 13, 1967, the Freedom Committee West Papua/West New Guinea had also appealed to U Thant, complaining of political repression and allegedly inhuman treatment of Papuans by Indonesia in West New Guinea. During U Thant's visit to the Netherlands in early April 1968, the committee addressed yet another petition to him, demanding restoration of "human rights," including freedom of political opinion, in West New Guinea, and calling attention to yet another alleged instance of summary execution of three Papuan political rebels by the Indonesian military. Suara Papua. Orgaan van het Vrijheidscomité West Papua/West Nieuw Guinea (The Hague), Vol. III, No. 24 (1968), pp 3-4.

The committee was founded by Nicolaas Jouwe and other Papuan exiles in the Netherlands on August 1, 1964, after a rupture between Jouwe and another prominent Papuan political leader, M. W. Kaisiepo. The latter, with Jouwe and others, had in April 1963 founded the Front Nasional Papua in the Netherlands. Differences over leadership—Kaisiepo allegedly proclaimed himself President of West Melanesia/West Papua—led to a split in the movement. Of the two Papuan exile groups, Jouwe's committee, which numbers about 60 active members among Papuans in the Netherlands, is currently the most active.

5Sinar Harapan (Djakarta), August 20, 1967.
At first moderately and through diplomatic channels, but later with increasing vehemence and repeated though futile attempts to get the U.N. to support its claim, Indonesia sought recovery of its presumed irredenta, ultimately resorting from 1960 onward to paratroop landings, commando infiltration by sea, an international press campaign, and other political and psychological pressures in the context of its anti-Dutch "confrontation." At the same time, as the Dutch enlarged their economic and educational development efforts, promoting establishment of elected local councils and ultimately of a semi-legislative body for the entire territory (the Nieuw Guinea Raad, or "New Guinea Council"), the Papuan political awakening produced a plethora of small, indigenous parties and other interest groups, all of them in different ways expressions of a belated but unmistakable Papuan nationalism. To be sure, in the western coastal area of the territory there remained a significant pro-Indonesian current dating from the early years of the Indonesian revolution against the Dutch (1945-1949). But certainly by the time Indonesia assumed control over the area there had emerged a growing, modern-educated, Papuan lower middle class, among many of whose members longstanding ethnic animosities toward Indonesia provided added impetus to aspirations for an independent state of Papua Barat (West Papua).

The significance of this nationalist spirit among the territory's 700,000 Papuans with their often sharply divided tribal loyalties should not be overestimated: West New Guinea even today remains one of the least developed and internally most isolated areas of the world; it is a region where the writ of government issued in the coastal towns penetrates only with difficulty up river or into the mangrove swamp or the equally inaccessible forest interior. Yet when one notes that the total number of Papuan students in the more than 1300 schools in the territory (from village schools to college preparatory, vocational and technical secondary schools) rose from 26,417 in 1952 to 40,615 in 1961 (the last complete year of Dutch control over the area), or that territorial budget expenditures under the Dutch grew from about 36 million florins (about $11 million) to more than 120


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million florins (about $37 million) with a corresponding increase in the Dutch government’s budget subsidy (from $4.5 million to $18 million), or that there was a steady “Papuanization” of government services in the territory (in 1961, 4950 of the 8800 government service positions were filled by Papuans, not just in the preponderantly lower but increasingly also in the middle and executive levels), one sees that well before the transfer of the territory to Indonesia an accelerating and often deeply incisive social and political transformation was taking place in which new conceptions of a Papuan national identity and development were playing an increasingly important role.8

Abroad, the importance of this transformation was not always appreciated at the time of the transfer of the region to Djakarta’s control. One Australian specialist on Indonesia, who visited the area in 1964, noted the occasionally exaggerated claims of some anti-Indonesian Papuans, but admitted: “I was jolted nevertheless. The Papuan nationalism of West New Guinea was clearly a more genuine and full-blooded thing than I had expected. Every subsequent conversation with Papuans confirmed that conclusion.”9 Even erstwhile Indonesian-oriented Papuans tended to shift toward the Papuan nationalist position. At the time of the transfer of the territory from the Dutch to interim U.N. control, an American specialist had already observed that “By 1962, several pro-Indonesian Papuans admitted that their followers were becoming charmed with the ‘pro-Papua’ trend and one prominent pro-Indonesian acknowledged to the author that he ‘would be happier with an independent state of Papua Barat if such was only possible.’”10 In many politically articulate Papuan circles the relatively sudden accession of the Dutch (under heavy U.S. pressure) to the Indonesian claim on the territory came as a deeply traumatic disappointment, mitigated only in part by an explicit provision (article 22, clause 1) of the Transfer Agreement that both the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA) and Indonesia would “guarantee fully the rights, including the rights of free speech, freedom of movement and of assembly of the inhabitants of the area,” and by the equally explicit provision that the Papuan population would be given the opportunity not later than the end of 1969 for an “act of free choice” as to its political future. It was evident, however, that existing Papuan disappointments and aspirations would in no small measure be influenced by the character of the future Indonesian administration and that there still remained a pro-Indonesian Papuan group of indeterminate size that could serve as a basis for a policy of winning the Papuans over.

8These statistical data are from the Ministry of Interior, Government of the Netherlands, Rapport Inzake Nederlands—Nieuw Guinea over het Jaar 1961 Uitgebracht aan de Verenigde Naties ingevolge artikel 73E van het Handvest (Staatsdrukkerij, s.l., 1962), pp. 22, 79, 139, and table XXXIX.
It quickly became apparent, however, that Indonesia had its own interpretation of the eventual “act of free choice” and of the first clause of article 22. By November 1962 Indonesian spokesmen had already indicated that the formal Indonesian takeover from UNTEA should occur before the agreed date of May 1, 1963, that there was really no need for a Papuan plebiscite, and that, in the words of Sukarno, West Irian would have “internal” but not “external” self-determination (i.e., would not be permitted to vote itself free from the Indonesian flag). Indonesia’s tactics soon became clear. When questioned in January 1963 about the Papuan “act of free choice,” Max Maramis, the Indonesian representative in West New Guinea, asserted on the one hand that “it will be carried out, according to the law,” but on the other hand, that “when the people decide much earlier that it is no longer necessary to have the aforementioned plebiscite isn’t that also the people’s voice?” Moreover, Djakarta’s representatives—with promises, “veiled threats and clear intimidation”—set about to urge the Papuans to express themselves against the holding of any plebiscite. While the formal take-over date was not moved up, UNTEA representatives in the territory proved unwilling or unable to thwart Indonesian pressure—not least because they had to rely from the start on hundreds of Indonesians to carry on daily administration, since the Dutch officials, most of whom refused to serve under U.N. auspices, moved out as rapidly as possible. Shortly after May 1963 and the withdrawal of the last UNTEA officials, Indonesia instituted a “political quarantine” in West New Guinea: partisan political activity was banned unless officially approved, controls over the press and all public gatherings generally equalled—but in some respects outdid—those under the authoritarian system of “Guided Democracy” in the rest of Indonesia, and severe restrictions were imposed on the movement of persons within, into, and out of the region. The theory behind the quarantine, as one sympathetic commentator put it, was that Indonesia was faced with “an exceptionally difficult and delicate task,” and that this would not be made easier if “negative criticism” could be freely heard. Whatever the justification, under these circumstances the Transfer Agreement’s guarantees of “free speech, freedom of movement and of assembly of the inhabitants of the area” soon became illusory.

By late 1964, anti-Indonesian Papuan leaders outside the territory (most of them living in Holland) claimed to the author that minor clashes between Papuans and Indonesian civil and military personnel were becom-

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11 For a perceptive analysis of these developments, see the reports of John Shaw in Sydney Morning Herald, October 26 and November 16, 1962.
ing an almost daily occurrence. The heart of anti-Indonesian sentiment, it soon became apparent, is perhaps the most developed part of West New Guinea, i.e., the area around the Geelvink Bay, including the islands of Japën and Biak and such towns as Waren, Ransiki and Manokwari. In the Bird’s Head area, anti-Indonesianism ran strong in and about the town of Ajamaru and the Arfak range (elsewhere in the Bird’s Head—e.g., the town of Sorong, and south around MacCluer Gulf—pro-Indonesian feelings have been more common). Some, but by no means all, of the anti-Indonesian leaders seem to be Papuans who were formerly in Dutch military service or who have held middle-level civil positions in the territory, e.g., in local legislative councils, during both the Dutch and the present Indonesian periods.

It was not until 1965, however, that reports of major disturbances began to appear regularly in the press outside Indonesia (the heavily controlled Indonesian press issued only sporadic reports, and then only under the authorization of the national Antara news agency, until well after the September 30, 1965 coup). In early January 1965, Jouwe and his associates directed a plea to British Prime Minister Harold Wilson, asking for aid in stopping Indonesia’s alleged campaign of terror and repression in West New Guinea.15 According to Jouwe’s plea, (1) Indonesians were resorting to the “forcible conscription” of some 20,000 Papuans to fight against British and Malaysian forces in Borneo in the context of Indonesia’s anti-Malaysia confrontation, (2) all Papuan political parties had been suppressed, (3) “Gestapo style midnight arrests, beatings and shootings of Papuan nationalists” were now taking place, and (4) Indonesia had in effect repudiated her agreement to arrange for a Papuan act of self-determination by the end of 1969.

By May 1965, Indonesian authorities reportedly had arrested several scores of Papuans connected with the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (“Independent Papua Organization”), or OPM, which had recently been founded in the Ajamaru area. Attempts had been made in several locations to hoist Papua’s national flag, but two pro-Indonesian local rajahs who had been invited to OPM meetings were said to have denounced the organization to the authorities, and arrests of OPM leaders followed.16 Almost simultaneously, Sukarno was reported to have remarked in an interview with a Dutch correspondent that a plebescite in West New Guinea had become “superfluous” because “the whole people of West Irian are in favor of the Indonesian Republic.” In June 1965 a beginning was made with the lifting of the “political quarantine” of the territory, to the extent at least that political organizations would be permitted to proselytize. The Indonesian Communist Party, by then the most powerful party in the country, was the first to announce, in August, that it was establishing a regional headquarters and organization in West New Guinea. In announcing the intended lifting of

16Warta Bhakti (Djakarta), May 25, 1965.
the “political quarantine,” Hardjanto, a spokesman for the Indonesian Coordinator’s Office of West Irian Affairs, declared that the quarantine had originally been imposed “to eliminate the remnants of colonialism in the province” and that now West New Guinea would begin to participate “in the symphony of the revolution.” Hardjanto also noted that the lifting of the quarantine was “a clear contradiction” of the allegations of political repression made by West New Guinea Papuan refugees in Eastern New Guinea, and in this connection he particularly excoriated the Australian press for allegedly misreporting conditions in West New Guinea, which was “not in the least in accordance with a good neighbor policy between Australia and Indonesia.17

By this time foreign press accounts that all was not well in the territory had indeed begun to multiply. For example, in mid-May 1965, Creighton Burns reported from the capital of West New Guinea (Sukarnapura, formerly Hollandia) that:

In the two years since the United Nations handed over administrative control of West New Guinea Indonesian rule there has drifted, perhaps subconsciously, into something very like nineteenth century colonialism....

If one remarks on the absence of political rights and administrative responsibility for the West Irian people the classical colonial riposte comes pat: they are uneducated, inexperienced, immature. And the Dutch, of course, are to blame....

There were signs that the local population is shrinking protectively from contact with their new Indonesian administrators. Around the main towns, fields that were once cultivated have now gone back to kunai grass and weeds, as the West Irianese continue to retreat to their jungle villages. Occasional indiscretions support rumors of growing West Irian resentment and sterner reprisals. Students have been forbidden to discuss, even among themselves, Indonesia’s decision to abandon its agreement to allow the West Irian people ‘an act of self determination’ before the end of 1969.18

Occasional foreign defenders of Indonesian policy in this period concentrated on the various development plans for the territory (from expansion of the cattle industry and vocational training facilities, to establishment of an effective coastal and communications network and broadening of missionary health and educational services) projected by Djakarta, usually in conjunction with U.N. agencies; it has been claimed that the school system in particular expanded rapidly, with West New Guinea even opening its own state university in November 1962.19 It should be emphasized,

however, that Indonesia’s generally rapidly deteriorating financial position in the period following the UNTEA administration (and its subsequent departure from the U.N.) left little for actual implementation of most of these schemes, while the expansion of the school system, virtually unrelated to the significant development and broadening of job opportunities in the territory, could only serve to aggravate the area’s—and Indonesia’s—problem of the educated unemployed.

New eruptions of Papuan dissatisfaction were not long in coming. On August 24, 1965, a few Djakarta news media began to publish guarded reports of “unrest” and a new “subversive plot” in Manokwari and on Biak island in the northern part of West New Guinea, where Papuan dissidents, unnamed but believed to be OPM remnants, were said to have been planning to blow up all oil installations after having managed to destroy thousands of gallons of aviation fuel in one sequence of raids. Irregular clashes with the police and military were said to be continuously taking place. Brigadier General Sutjipto, the Indonesian “Coordinator” of West New Guinea, termed the plotters “neo-colonialists, imperialists and colonalis”; the Indonesian news agency, Antara (at this time heavily infiltrated by the Indonesian Communist Party), accused American missionaries of having been involved; but still other Indonesian sources were reported to be attributing the planned revolt to the “discontent” of local Papuans over “the behavior of Indonesian officials.” Eventually, contingents of Indonesian paracommandos and marines reportedly had little difficulty in putting down the incipient revolt and in either arresting the ringleaders or chasing them into the forest interior. But there is little doubt that the Manokwari revolt further alerted the foreign press that Papuan resistance to Indonesian control was continuing and that although censorship precluded publication of further details of the Manokwari affair, Indonesian claims of accelerating the development of the territory were evidently falling short of Papuan aspirations.

The abortive September 30, 1965, coup in Djakarta and parts of Java, which led to a radical alteration of Indonesia’s political climate and to the eventual de facto removal of Sukarno from the presidential office, initially had but slight effect on Papuan discontent. The OPM remained active and in December 1965 was even reported to be finding followers in the Fak-Fak area, while in early March 1966 an Indonesian security official in West New Guinea was quoted by the Port Moresby press as saying that Papuans continued to seek asylum in Australian New Guinea and that the “dream of a Papua state and the notion that the Papuans are citizens of such a state

20The Straits Times, August 25, 26, and September 13, 1965. Sutjipto subsequently denied reports that the town of Manokwari had actually been held for four days by armed Papuan dissidents. “Some trouble” had broken out in the nearby Arfak area, he admitted, but it had lasted “for two hours only” and had been started by a former sergeant, “who deliberately had been planted in the area as a ‘time bomb’ by the Dutch when they left West Irian.” Some of the same Manokwari rebels rose up again in the town in early 1967.
and not of Indonesia were still clearly being nourished in Irian Barat.”21 Subsequently the same organ reported on the arrival of other Papuan refugees in Australian New Guinea and on their claims that many young West New Guinea Papuans had either been imprisoned in Sukarnapura or, with their entire families, had crossed the border into the eastern part of the island and were presently in hiding in the forest areas around Wutong, the Tami River and Sekotchiau.22

Such reports would soon find substantiation in the Djakarta press as a measure of press freedom began to return in most of Indonesia and as Indonesian journalists themselves began to visit West New Guinea. By mid-November 1966, for example, the Roman Catholic Djakarta daily Kompas began to carry a series of articles by a special reporter sent to the territory which emphasized that both politically and economically conditions in the area were becoming critical. “Fights often break out between the local people and government officials and it is not surprising that anti-Indonesian feelings are raging among the natives,” Kompas said.23 At about the same time the first of a number of Papuan delegations arrived in Djakarta to complain about Indonesian policy: On November 24 a delegation led by N. L. Suwage told Foreign Minister Malik that the West New Guinea economy was stagnating and that people were complaining about the dire lack of basic necessities. A month later yet another Papuan delegation, led by N. Ohey, met with the Cabinet Presidium Chairman, General Suharto, and urged that Papuans be allowed to run their own territorial administration. This delegation also voiced concern over the deteriorating economy. Suharto reportedly replied that current difficulties in West New Guinea had been caused by the former government and solicited Papuan help in overcoming them.24

Suharto’s appeal evidently found little response, and Papuan political leaders continued to warn Djakarta that it was rapidly losing whatever Papuan following it once might have had. On March 10, 1967, F. Karubuy, a member from West Irian in Indonesia’s highest policy-making body, the Madjelis Permusjawarataan Rakjat (“Provisional People’s Consultative Chamber”), or MPRS, demanded not only that Indonesia remove its rocket bases and all other military installations from the territory, but also stressed the economic plight of his fellow Papuans, warning that the territory’s inhabitants were taking up arms to rebel because of lack of food and clothing and not necessarily because of political motives. He also excoriated rapacious Indonesian officials who were going to West New Guinea “for business and not to build the territory” and the general lack of development experts.25 Two days later, another MPRS deputy from West New

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21South Pacific Post (Port Moresby), March 7, 1966.
22Ibid., April 29, 1966.
24Reuter’s dispatch, Djakarta, December 23, 1966.
Guinea, Silas Papare, appealed to the government to end Indonesian strafing and rocket attacks on Papuan villages, claiming that as many as one thousand Papuans had already been killed in such action. Papare's appeal was the first official report of new Papuan-Indonesian altercations, and on March 16, 1967, in an interview with Indonesia's chief armed forces newspaper, Foreign Minister Malik admitted that Indonesian troops had recently been forced to open fire on rebellious tribesmen in the northern Bird's Head area of the territory. He denied, however, that a thousand Papuans had been killed, saying "it is not as many as that," and adding that "when our troops were attacked they had to fire." A month later, when questioned again about the continuing Papuan uprising, Malik again dismissed reports that as many as two thousand Papuans had been killed, stating "I think the number was exaggerated, the troops might have killed two hundred."

As reports of further Papuan clashes with the Indonesian military persisted through April and May, Indonesian spokesmen began to reveal, bit by bit, some of the circumstances of the rebellion. An April 27, 1967, the West Irian Military Commander, Brigadier General Bintoro, admitted that the Indonesian air force had recently been forced to strafe the town of Manokwari, killing 40 persons. Difficulties in Manokwari began on January 3, when a dissident Papuan there, one A. Awon, proclaimed himself the leader of the "Free Papua State" on the island and virtually won control of the town. After warnings, according to Bintoro, Indonesian planes strafed Manokwari for two days, beginning on January 18, and despite a brief lull, fighting continued, necessitating further air action.

A greatly increased influx of Papuans into Eastern New Guinea in the weeks prior to Bintoro's announcement seemed to substantiate refugee reports of serious unrest, and even the Djakarta press now reported the remarks of the Australian Minister for Territories, C. B. Barnes, in the Australian lower house in mid-April, that large numbers of Papuans from Indonesian New Guinea were crossing the border into Australian territory, but that their reason for doing so was not clear. "The general indication seems to be that these people believe they have better economic opportunities [in East New Guinea]," the Minister surmised—somewhat disingenuously, perhaps, in view of the fact that the Australian press had carried extensive reports on the events in Manokwari and had also printed the demand of Lord Ogmore in London (cited at the beginning of this paper). Save for cases where "humanitarian considerations" were involved, the West Papuan refugees were being persuaded to return to their own territory, according to David Hay, Administrator of Australian Papua/New Guinea. The Australian government was evidently not anxious for a dispute with Djakarta over the Papuan refugees. Meanwhile, when Malik was asked to comment on the demonstration by West New Guinea Papuans in Port Moresby on the occasion of a recent visit there of the Indonesian Am-

26The Straits Times, March 17, 1967.
27The Djakarta Times, April 14, 1967.
bassador, Major General Kosasih, he mildly remarked that the demonstra-
tors "were misinformed." At about the same time, a report on West New
Guinea's economic and security problems read by a Suharto cabinet spokes-
man to the Indonesian Lower House was couched in such general terms as
to preclude intelligent discussion. Clearly, the Indonesian government was
as little anxious for the spotlight of publicity to shine on the West New
Guinea rebellion as were the Australian authorities.

Still, in the aftermath of the Manokwari uprising the Suharto govern-
ment did attempt to increase the supplies of consumer goods to West New
Guinea. However, most of the imported items were so expensive as to only
sharpen discontent (the cost of a shirt reportedly was the equivalent of
more than two months wages for the average worker). Djakarta also
undertook a military offensive against the dissidents in West New Guinea
and a political offensive against their representatives in the Netherlands.

West New Guinea Military Commander Bintoro reported toward the close
of June 1967 that continuing security operations had led to the capture of
a principal band of Papuan rebels, that the rebel leader (the earlier-named
Awon) had been shot, and that the rank and file of the dissidents were now
returning to their villages. Bintoro also accused Nicolas Jouwe and Marcus
Kasiepo, now staying in the Netherlands, of leading the Papuan "rebellenl and
subversion" from abroad. There was little question that by this time
Jouwe's West-Papua Freedom Committee, in conjunction with the Faithful
Through the Ages Foundation, was indeed attempting to stir Dutch and in
fact world opinion into a "demonstration of conscience" on behalf of the
Papuans. On August 16 Jouwe published the contents of a letter supposedly
written by a Papuan from "the interior of West New Guinea" detailing
various alleged "atrocities" recently committed by the Indonesians—the
killing of scores of Papuan villagers; the imprisonment and torture in
February 1967 of the former Governor of West New Guinea, Eliezer Bonay
(first appointed and then removed from office by the Indonesians after he
resisted Djakarta's "Indonesianization" policies), and of such leading
Papuan nationalist figures as Johan Arikis; the leveling of whole Papuan
villages in an Operasi Tumpus (Operation Destruction), and so on. Within
the conservative Protestant confessional parties such as the Anti-Revolu-
tionnaire ("Anti-Revolutionary") Party and the Christelijke Historische
Unie (Christian Historical Union"), where a dwindling number of mem-
ers has never been reconciled to Holland's loss of its East Indian posses-
sions, there was a measure of sympathetic response to Jouwe's appeal. But
there has been no indication that the Dutch government is inclined to fol-
low the West Papua Freedom Committee's demands, not least because under
Suharto Dutch financial investment opportunities in Indonesia are once
again full of promise and Djakarta has even become sympathetic to long-
standing Dutch demands for compensation of Dutch properties lost through

expropriation and nationalization under Sukarno’s “Guided Democracy.”

In New York, late in September 1967, a group of self-styled “exiled” Papuans, traveling on Dutch passports and affiliated with the West-Papua Freedom Committee, presented the committee’s earlier-mentioned letter to one of U Thant’s aides, asking that the U.N. investigate alleged Indonesian massacres of Papuans in West New Guinea. The letter claimed that (1) more than 3500 Papuans had died the previous February when “Indonesian troops, planes and naval guns” attacked Papuan settlements in the Bird’s Head area, (2) that more than 100 men and boys were executed in the Baliem valley of the central highlands and additional dozens in towns throughout the territory, and (3) that the Indonesian military authority was guilty of murder, pillage and rape. Shortly after the letter had been presented, Foreign Minister Malik was queried about the appeal. He denied that thousands had been killed but subsequently admitted to “isolated incidents” and held that former Governor Bonay was in jail because he was “corrupt.” The appeal to U Thant was given added weight, however, by reports of new unrest in the territory, this time involving the operations of a well-organized rebel band led by a former army officer, Lodewijk Mandatjan. Mandatjan reportedly heads a resistance group of some 2000 Arfak tribesmen and some Biak natives, who, according to Djakarta, had recently been foiled by Indonesian forces in their attempt to cross into Australian New Guinea. Subsequently, Mandatjan’s force was reported to be reorganizing itself in the Rouffaer River valley in the East-Central part of the territory. While Mandatjan’s operations are not likely to bring Indonesian control down, they have had the effect of increasingly drawing attention to the weaknesses of Djakarta’s hold on West New Guinea. “Three to five thousand Indonesian troops have barely kept control in West Irian since 1965,” one knowledgeable reporter recently noted, and “if the Indonesians give no real choice in 1969, distort the results or even refuse to conduct a plebescite, then they may face a secession rebellion.”

It is now virtually certain, however, that by the end of 1969 Djakarta will permit the Papuans some kind of “act of free choice.” But it is perhaps doubtful that Indonesia will interpret the clause (Article 18) in the Dutch-Indonesian Transfer Agreement providing that “all adult males and females, not foreign nationals,” are to “participate in the act of self-determination to be carried out in accordance with international practice,” as necessarily meaning “direct” participation on a “one man, one vote” basis, even if communication problems did not stand in the way. Moreover, the extent of present Papuan dissatisfaction suggests that in all probability both the mechanics of exercising the right of self-determination—whatever

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80 The Straits Times, September 30, 1967. Although this petition was covered by UPI, the U.S. press was virtually silent on the matter.
81 Sinar Harapan, August 20, 1967; Reuter’s dispatch, Djakarta, August 20, 1967.
these in the end may turn out to be—and the eventual results will be subject to continuing controversy. For whatever Djakarta's intentions may be in the future, its record thus far has given legitimate grounds for suspicion that the eventual expression of self-determination may be less than what many articulate Papuans desire. In light of the present pattern of unrest in West Guinea, this Indonesian record on the question of the future Papuan "act of free choice" should be briefly examined.

It has already been indicated that even before the UNTEA administration came to an end, Indonesian officials were seeking to cut the ground from under the "act of free choice" provision in the 1962 Transfer Agreement. When Indonesia formally announced its withdrawal from the U.N. on January 2, 1965, the Djakarta English-language daily, Indonesian Herald, which at the time closely reflected the views of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, declared that among the "great number of advantages" derived from this move was the fact that Indonesia was now "freed from all commitments made under the auspices of the United Nations. Holding of a plebescite in West Irian in 1969 is one of them." As noted above, on May 24, 1965, President Sukarno in a broadcast interview with a Dutch correspondent declared that a plebescite in West New Guinea was no longer necessary, since all Papuans now presumably favored the Indonesian Republic, and to the question of how he intended to prove that the Papuans wanted to remain part of Indonesia he replied: "Have you seen any reports to the contrary?"

Indonesia's departure from the U.N., its increasingly anti-Western foreign policies, and its accelerating "confrontation" campaign against Malaysia, all tended to reflect the growing prominence of the Indonesian Communist Party in domestic Indonesian policies as well as the marked influence of Communist China on Indonesian foreign relations. The abortive September 30, 1965 coup, which led to the demise of the Communist party and of the Sino-Indonesian diplomatic partnership, gradually also produced a new orientation toward the West and the U.N. and toward the question of a plebescite in West New Guinea. The diplomatic change was slow in coming, however: for example, for months after the September 30 coup Suharto and other top Indonesian military men kept repeating that "confrontation" against Malaysia had to continue, and while Sukarno's accelerating fall from power was generally expected to produce a more moderate attitude toward the Papuan "act of free choice," Indonesia's new leadership seemed at first to have difficulty in unequivocally endorsing the plebescite principle. On September 30, 1966, when Malik came to the U.N. headquarters in New York to facilitate his country's return to the organization, he declared that although on a recent visit to West New Guinea he had been handed a petition saying that all Papuans "wanted to remain in Indonesia," there nevertheless would be a plebescite. But on December 7 the Indonesian

Home Affairs Minister, Lieutenant General Basuki Rahmat, was quoted as saying that a plebiscite would not be held in West New Guinea and that this was in line with the wishes of the Papuan population. Rahmat’s remark led to a demand by the Dutch government for an “immediate explanation” (the Dutch had kept silent when, a year and a half previously, Sukarno had stated that a plebiscite was no longer necessary), and to a new affirmation on December 12 by Malik—evidently to counter Rahmat’s remark—that Indonesia would definitely hold a plebiscite in 1969 as previously agreed (“This is not just a local agreement with which we can do as we wish. We shall carry out the wish of the West Irian people, and if they want a plebiscite we shall hold a plebiscite”). But within days the Provincial Council of West New Guinea—the area’s proto-legislative body, the membership of which had been “reconstituted” under Indonesian supervision during 1963–64—adopted a resolution rejecting a plebiscite. Concern arose that effective Indonesian control over or manipulation of the territory’s representative institutions or spokesmen would continue to prevent an untrammeled expression of Papuan opinion, even if Djakarta now once again seemed prepared to abide by its earlier agreement on the future of the region.

As if to lay such fears to rest, Indonesian officials in following months reiterated over and over that the Papuans would be given a chance to express their political wishes, but then also continued to qualify such promises. For example, the chief Indonesian delegate to the U.N., Ruslan Abdulgani, declared early in 1967 that Indonesia would permit the inhabitants of West New Guinea to decide whether or not they wished to remain in Indonesia via the 1968 general elections. Simultaneously, he also asserted that the agreement with the Netherlands did not provide for a “referendum” in the territory, but only that “the wishes of the population must be heard.” Indeed, Ruslan went on, “What is the use of holding a referendum when the people have already expressed their wishes through general elections?” Shortly after Ruslan spoke, however, Indonesian cabinet spokesmen indicated that due to “technical difficulties” the planned general elections in Indonesia would be postponed from 1968 to 1969, and in early February 1967 Indonesian Information Minister B. M. Diah merely asserted in general terms that the government would hold “the plebiscite in West Irian province,” a statement he was to repeat substantively at the end of May, noting somewhat confusingly at that time that “elections” would be carried out in West New Guinea in 1969, even if the Papuans did not want them.

These assurances, however, by no means stilled all questions concerning Indonesia’s bona fides, in large part perhaps because other Indonesian of-
officials also persisted in interpreting the concept of self-determination. For example, in mid-April 1967 Indonesia's Ambassador to Australia, Major General Kosasih, declared at a press conference in Port Moresby (where he was greeted by anti-Indonesian West Papuan demonstrators at the airport) that while Indonesia would "fulfill every agreement made with other countries and the United Nations" in regard to the West New Guinea question, the word "plebescite" did not appear in the Dutch-Indonesian Transfer Agreement. The relevant phrase actually used in the Agreement, according to Kosasih, was: "...to ascertain the real feelings of the people of West Irian." Kosasih seemed to imply that the "ascertainment" process when and if it occurred would be a good deal less direct than a plebescite.

Concern over Indonesia's intentions rose enough to cause U Thant to send a special emissary, José Rolz Bennet, to Djakarta late in July 1967. Malik reiterated to Bennet that Indonesia "is committed to ascertain the wish of the West Irian people by 1969," adding at once, however, that the Indonesian government also "would consider the demand of the West Irian regional legislative council that West Irian remain in the Republic." The Suharto government, well aware of its own precarious political position and reflecting on the long time volatility of the West New Guinea issue in domestic Indonesian politics, thus seemed increasingly to be formulating the kind of deliberately ambiguous policy toward the plebescite question which it had followed with some success toward Sukarno's official position and toward diplomatic relations with Communist China (which are "suspended," but not officially broken). The same ambiguity was apparent in Suharto's August 16, 1967 general policy message to the Indonesian parliament, which in one and the same paragraph spoke of Indonesia's "obligation" to provide a "free choice" in West New Guinea in 1969, yet asserted: "But we ought to help the people in that region in their effort to realize their resolve, affirmed many times in their statements, to remain part of the Indonesian nation and territory, inseparable from the territory of the unitary Republic of Indonesia." Just what kind of "help" Indonesia meant to give the Papuans in this connection was not spelled out.

Demonstrating youth groups in the Indonesian capital in the past two

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40Reuter's dispatch, Port Moresby, April 13, 1967. The writer has been unable to find the phrase cited by Kosasih in the text of the Agreement. The nearest in thought to it appears in Article 18, clause a, where, among other arrangements for the exercise of "the act of free choice," Indonesia is to hold "consultations" with representative councils "on procedures and appropriate methods to be followed for ascertaining the freely expressed will of the population." The other arrangements incumbent on Indonesia include the determination of the data for the "exercise of free choice," "formulation of the questions in such a way as to permit the inhabitants to decide (a) whether they wish to remain with Indonesia; or (b) whether they wish to sever their ties with Indonesia," and "eligibility of all adults, male and female, not foreign nationals" to participate in "the act of self determination."

41The Djakarta Times, August 1, 1957.

years have played a major role in bringing about decisive changes in the
structure and policies of the Indonesian government. Therefore, few in-
formed observers felt ready to ignore the demonstration of several hundreds
of students before Suharto’s office on August 23, 1967, demanding that no
consultations be held with the Papuan population regarding West New
Guinea’s future since the “West Irianese people want to stay in the Indone-
sian Republic.” This demonstration, significantly, occurred at the same time
that Malik was explaining to a closed session of the Indonesian parliament’s
foreign affairs committee how the government intended to proceed with
the ascertainment of Papuan political wishes in 1969. On September 19, in
a carefully leaked address to the cabinet, Suharto again declared that while
the Papuans would be given an opportunity to express themselves on their
future, he was convinced that “the people of West Irian will choose to remain
within the Republic of Indonesia.”

In the Netherlands—from where the West Papua Freedom Committee is
continuing its agitational and informational campaign, interspersed with
periodic “consultations” by its representatives at the U.N.—whatever offi-
cial qualms still exist have at least for the moment been mitigated by the
joint Dutch-Indonesian communiqué issued in Amsterdam at the end of
October 1967 at the conclusion of Malik’s visit to the Netherlands. The com-
muniqué states that the Indonesian government is ready to implement the
1962 Transfer Agreement and will see to it “that arrangements will be made
for the people of West Irian to express their wish in 1969 to choose whether
or not they will remain part of the Republic of Indonesia.” Dutch press re-
action to the communiqué was generally favorable, and it is apparent that
The Hague is not about to jeopardize its newly acquired major role in
Indonesia’s current financial stabilization efforts or the new Dutch invest-
ment opportunities in the country in order to revive the whole West New
Guinea issue, which, in terms of the bitter internal dissension and frustra-
tion it produced, was for Holland approximately what the Vietnam question
is for the U.S. today.

Holland, then, will be content with the face-saving formula—even if
Papuan irreconcilables in The Hague, in East New Guinea and Australia,
at the U.N., or in West New Guinea itself, are not or will not be. In mid-
May 1967 the Dutch government extended a $30 million grant through the
U.N. for the development of West New Guinea, and by the end of 1967
Djakarta, in conjunction with U.N. agencies, was embarking on a minor
trash development program for the territory, especially in the extension of
air communication and land transport facilities. The Indonesians still have
on their side the better part of two years (and the disinclination of most
world capitals to raise the West New Guinea question again), as they try
once more to convince the Papuans that continued incorporation in Ind-

nesia will be more advantageous than independence. Certainly Indonesian officials are becoming aware of the urgency of their West New Guinea problem. Earlier assertions that reports on West New Guinea's current difficulties have been exaggerated have given way to sharp warnings by Papuan representatives in the Indonesian parliament that corruption, economic hardship and general maladministration are alienating the Papuans and that it is by no means to be taken for granted that the Papuan population if given the chance would opt for continued Indonesian control. In May 1968 Djakarta admitted to the eruption of new but unspecified “disturbances” in West New Guinea, allegedly arising from a “scarcity of daily necessities,” and Suharto reportedly assured the Papuans that his government was making “serious efforts” to improve economic conditions. Meanwhile as other Indonesian spokesmen are reaffirming that “an act of free choice” will be held as scheduled in the first half of 1969, and have approved U Thant's appointment of the Bolivian Ambassador to the U.N., F. Ortiz Sanz, as supervisor of the forthcoming plebescite, Papuan exiles, particularly Jouwe's Freedom Committee, have been stressing the “Negroid” character of the Papuans in an effort to win support from African states for Papuan independence. African response to such appeals appears rather muted, however, and there seems little doubt that Indonesia is in a commanding position to influence the shape of Papuan choices in the crucial months ahead.

45Cf. The Djakarta Times, April 22, September 22 and December 7, 1967; Reuter's dispatch, Djakarta, November 12, 1967.
47On January 19, 1968, Jouwe, by invitation, attended the Third Conference of the OCAM (l'Organisation Commune Africain et Malgache) in Niamey, capital of Niger, where he emphasized “the historic ties between the African Negroes and the Pacific Negroids,” and appealed for assistance in the cause of Papuan independence. See also the publication of the Freedom Committee West Papua/West New Guinea, A Negro Race Is Being Murdered (s.a.e.l., 1966?). Anti-Indonesian Papuan appeals for African support were prominent even before Indonesia assumed control over the territory. In March 1962, for example, Jouwe and Kaisiepo, on behalf of a Hollandia-based Papuan National Committee, appealed for support to “all fellow-tribesmen of the Negroids throughout the World.” Voice of the Negroids in the Pacific to the Negroids throughout the World (s.l., Hollandia? 1962), p. 26.