

CHAPTER 7.

CONCLUSION.

This thesis has presented an analysis of the political economy of Irian Jaya with particular attention to the current rapid economic growth there and to the phenomenon of West Papuan nationalism. A detailed look at the history of the province explains the emergence of local nationalist sentiment, and its political manifestation: the OPM.

West Papuan nationalism is not a lightly held or fickle feeling. It is ingrained in the consciousness of many Irianese people and shows no signs of dying out. On the contrary, the violent confrontation with the Indonesian state which has been waged since the early 1960's continues. Even though the nationalist movement has been riddled by factionalism, suffered from poor coordination, and communications, and failed to find an external sponsor, it persists. One of the factors that has fuelled resentment is the economic exploitation of Irian Jaya's natural resources. The rate of resource extraction is rapidly expanding, especially in the mining and forestry industries. This expansion is occurring in the midst of an inflow of migrants from other parts of Indonesia which is changing the racial make up of the society.

However the migrants are not evenly spread throughout the country, but are concentrated in either urban areas or transmigration settlement. This means that different areas have very different racial complexions, with many rural areas still being overwhelmingly populated by Melanesians.

The combination of increasing resentment due to economic exploitation and transmigration, coupled with the fact that large areas of the province are still predominantly 'black', is likely to lead to greater support for the OPM. This trend will be reinforced by an official OPM which is exhibiting a more unified front than in previous years, supported by the international environmental movement. If the campaign to save Irian Jaya's rainforests gains momentum, the alliance between the OPM (perhaps under a different name) and the environmentalists could strengthen, for they have a commonality of aims, but complementary skills and resources. The OPM needs funding, publicity, communications equipment and logistical support. The

environmentalists need people on the ground that can interfere in logging or mining operations, and act on behalf of the local people. The domestic environmental groups are weak, facing as they are companies working in collusion with the military, and will also need the assistance of their international colleagues.

Even without the support of international environmentalists the OPM will continue to confront the ABRI. There is a likelihood of obtaining funds from either the 'taxing' (extortion) of companies in PNG or Irian Jaya, or from becoming involved in the drug (marijuana) trade that is currently flourishing in western PNG. With funds, modern communications equipment and weapons can be acquired, which would immediately improve the effectiveness of the organisation.

Analysis of the 1990 government census of Irian Jaya shows that some 40,000 men between the ages of 19 and 29 are 'missing'. There is no adequate explanation as to the whereabouts of these men, and the figure is too great to be merely a statistical aberration. It can be assumed that at least some of these men are with the OPM, which adds weight to their claim of numbering many thousands.

For a guerilla force to be effective it does not have to be vast. The Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Gareth Evans, recently commented on the size of the Khmer Rouge forces in Cambodia. He put the number of combatants as being in the range of 5,000 to 8,000, but, "because of the nature of guerilla warfare" this was a large enough force to create havoc and require the provision of additional military assistance to Cambodia ¹. The OPM probably number at least several thousand, and if properly armed and co-ordinated could represent a considerable force.

While even an OPM of this strength would not be able to win a military victory over the Indonesian forces, it could create havoc. Such a situation holds grave consequences for Australia, PNG and Indonesia itself.

The conflict in Irian Jaya is deep seated, and based on ethnic differences and profound grievances and misunderstandings. In Cambodia the divide between the Khmer Rouge and the

general population is ideological. A Khmer Rouge soldier can defect and blend in easily with the broader society. But an OPM soldier does not have this choice. To defect is to surrender and live in an increasingly alien society under suspicion, or else in exile.

The dream of an independent West Papua remains alive for many Papuan Irianese. They reject Indonesian sovereignty over their traditional lands and Indonesian control over their lives. The fight for an independent West Papua will continue because the OPM can neither win nor lose. But, as the economic pressure on Irian Jaya grows, so too will West Papuan nationalism, and its corollary; the OPM. Conflict between the Irianese and the Indonesians is, therefore, likely to increase in the years to come.