

DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, CANADA.

DESPATCH

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR  
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, OTTAWA, CANADA.

FROM: THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR CANADA,  
CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA

Reference: My despatch No. 308 of August 22,  
1962

Subject: The Impact of the West New Guinea  
Settlement

Y	TO: <i>M. Stansfield</i>
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REGISTRY	

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In my despatch under reference, I mentioned the interest and concern there had been at the recent South Pacific Conference in Pago Pago over the West New Guinea settlement.

2. Mr. Stansfield has just returned from his trip to Papua and New Guinea and has reported in more detail the misgivings felt by the people there. I attach the pertinent section of his report.

3. Reports from other sources that we have seen and that are available to you seem to confirm Mr. Stansfield's observations.

4. No doubt Indonesia will make a big effort to dispel the fears and apprehensions of the West New Guineans, and possibly in time the sentiment may change. It occurs to us, however, that it would be salutary if the United Nations could in some way be made aware of the consensus of native opinion. This may not be easy to bring about, since the peoples in the South Pacific have no direct voice in the United Nations, and it is obvious that neither Australia nor any other white country would gain much of a hearing if it were to report the reaction. Nevertheless, if some way could be devised to get the facts into the public domain, either at the 17th UNGA or later, if current sentiment persists, it might well give food for thought to Africans and Asians who lent their moral support to Indonesia and believed that this was simply an Indonesian-Dutch dispute and therefore an anti-colonial issue.

Internal Circulation

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*Sept 21/62*  
*K*

*Ames*  
High Commissioner

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The Impact of West New Guinea

by *Stansfield*

It has been generally accepted that although Australians were worried and humiliated by the West New Guinea settlement, there would probably be less concern among Australian Papuans and New Guineans: tribal isolation and natural barriers to intercourse would prevent any direct awareness of what happened on the other side of the border. To my surprise, these ideas proved to be completely wrong.

2. Among Administration personnel and expatriates I found that events in West New Guinea had done little more than increase the general unease, insecurity and uncertainty about the future. Few of them thought that the Australian side would face any early threat, and quite a number failed even to draw any conclusions with respect to the timetable of political advancement in the Australian territory. (One District Commissioner was delighted that the Dutch had got what they deserved - he had been told, and devoutly believed, that the Dutch were using West New Guinea to support armed insurrection in Indonesia - and thought the Indonesians had got what they deserved, since West New Guinea was a total liability in every way and they could not possibly make anything of it; despite a genuine devotion to the natives on the Australian side, he appeared to have given no thought to the wishes or welfare of their cousins across the border.)

3. Native opinion was another matter entirely, and I was struck everywhere by the extent to which native leaders (even completely illiterate ones) were conscious of, and upset by, what was happening in West New Guinea. I was struck even more by the extent to which the United Nations had suffered loss of face.

4. The nature of the impact differed considerably from place to place. At points remote from the West New Guinea border there was naturally less personal concern for the West New Guineans, and sometimes less specific fear of Indonesia as an imperialistic threat; but this was generally balanced by a conviction that a somewhat similar fate although not necessarily at the hands of the Indonesians, could and quite likely would befall Papua and New Guinea. Rather surprisingly, in the Sepik district, which adjoins West New Guinea, there was the most confidence in Australian assurances that the Indonesians would be held at the border; but there was still the belief that some other power, which the Australians could not stand up to, would some day take over. No one believed Indonesian assurances that they had no interest in the other half of the island.

5. On both the north and south coasts the natives proved to be far better acquainted with their relatives across the border than I had expected. (Natural divisions run east and west rather than north and south.) It appears that many of them have made journeys of perhaps hundreds of miles along the coast - occasionally, it appears, mainly for the purpose of being able to drink in public, which they still cannot do on the Australian side - so that everyone either knows West New Guineans or has friends who know West New Guineans. These people are unanimous in their assertions about what the West New Guineans think of the situation. So far as they are concerned, relatives and friends of theirs have been sold into perpetual bondage to strangers whom they hate and fear, and they are appalled.

6. The United Nations - probably because the natives feel they know it well through its intimate interest in the welfare of the Trust Territory - is held almost solely responsible for what has happened. Perhaps I can best convey their thoughts by describing my meeting with a group of leading natives in Port Moresby, whose views were fully representative, although more ably expressed than those of groups I met elsewhere.

7. This group of community leaders in various fields had been assembled so that I could question them about their views on the future of their own territory. In fact, I was unable to do so. They started at once to question me about West New Guinea and about the United Nations' part in the settlement. They accepted my protests that I had nothing to do with the United Nations, but they were so reluctant to talk about anything else, and so avid for answers to questions and for opinions from someone from the outside world, that I finally gave up and let them run the discussion.

8. Why, they wanted to know, had the United Nations handed the West Papuans (as they called them in that part of the country) over to Indonesia? Why had they not consulted the wishes of the West Papuans? Did they not know - as everyone in their part of the country knew - that the West Papuans hated and feared the Indonesians more than anyone in the world? Why had the United Nations, which was so concerned about early self-government and self-determination on the Australian side of the border, abandoned these principles entirely with respect to three quarters of a million of their cousins on the other side of the imaginary line? (They brushed aside my observation that the settlement did in fact provide for eventual self-determination. They had been listening to their radios, and they informed me that even before the agreement was signed, President Soekarno was boasting that West Irian was now Indonesian soil and would remain so to the end of time. (Anyway, his promises were worth nothing, and he had never seriously pretended that this was a promise he meant to keep) What would Soekarno do when he arrived? How would he keep the West Papuans under control? What would he use for money? Wasn't it true that his country was bankrupt? And so on.

9. The disillusionment of these people with the United Nations was so deep, and had clearly been so shattering to them, that I tried to provide some explanation for what they saw as bewildering inconsistencies. I told them that the United Nations was not a world government, and it had only the powers which its members had been prepared to entrust to it, and that it had, for example, the right to concern itself with the internal political regime in only a very few special areas of the world, one of which happened to be the quarter of New Guinea which lay to the north of them. It had no such powers in West New Guinea. (Several people nodded at this point and one of them volunteered that Sir Hugh Foot had emphasized, in Papua, that his mission had no right to concern itself with internal political matters there.)

10. I continued that the United Nations did have the duty, when a situation threatened to develop into war between two countries, to try and bring the opposite sides together and encourage them to reach a peaceful settlement. This had been the United Nations' role in the West New Guinea situation. Indonesia had regarded West New Guinea as part of its own territory, being wrongfully kept from it by Holland, and had been prepared to go to war to enforce this view. The United Nations had helped to bring the two parties together and a settlement had been agreed. The United Nations was not an impartial authority which decided upon the just solution and enforced it upon the contending powers. On the contrary, the solution was agreed upon by the powers themselves, and it was not too surprising if it favoured the party which had the most arms and the most troops in the area and was ready to use them to get its own way.

11. All this appeared to be accepted and understood, but it clearly did little or nothing to reassure these people, who had felt that the United Nations guaranteed justice and concern for the welfare of people everywhere, and who had now had it brought home to them that their confidence was unjustified.

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12. One of the group asked if the United Nations would prevent Indonesia from taking over West New Guinea. I said I thought the United Nations was pretty clearly committed to seeing that the wishes of the New Guineans themselves would be respected. Furthermore, Australia had treaty guarantees from powerful friends, and such guarantees had not been available to the Dutch. One of the group then asked if he had understood correctly that West New Guinea had not been a direct responsibility of the United Nations. I said that was so. And Papua was equally no direct responsibility of the United Nations? I agreed. He then said: "So when someone comes along with a lot of troops and a lot of arms and says 'I want Papua', will the United Nations bring him and the Australians together and see that we are handed over to him?"

13. This is probably enough to give an idea of the general tenor of the discussion. It went on for more than an hour. It was repeated, along essentially the same lines, although in somewhat less sophisticated terms, everywhere that I talked to native spokesmen. In view of the comparative complacency of the Australians in the territory, I have no suspicions whatever that anyone had been coached to express these ideas to me. On the other hand, I did meet a number of people who had been delegates to the South Pacific Conference at Pago Pago, where they had been exposed to indoctrination by the West New Guinea contingent. They have now returned home and are unquestionably spreading alarm and concern among their fellows. At the most, however, this can only be regarded as the effect of Dutch propaganda at third hand. It is nothing that the Australian Administration has fostered.

14. It might be noted that the New Guineans appear to take very little account of the Dutch in this connection. They think of the Dutch only as people who were leaving shortly, and who would have given the West New Guineans their independence. That this has been frustrated they regard as a matter affecting only the United Nations, Indonesia and - as the victims - the West New Guineans themselves.