

APPEASEMENT AND WHAT COMES AFTER IT

It is strange that no warning from history, no shadow of Nemesis, seems to have touched those who now hail the success of appeasement and the frontier between west-armed aggression and triumph of interregional statesmanship. The preliminary agreement on West New Guinea was negotiated while one of the parties to it was subjected to armed attack by the other and threatened with full scale war yet it was negotiated under the aegis of the United Nations and with the blessings of the United States. Not for the first time in our generation the shameful slogan of "peace at any price" has been used to justify the betrayal of principles.

Surrey Episide

From this sorry episode only the Dutch emerge with honour. They stood not just as defenders of their territory and its simple people but as defenders of the principle that force shall not be the arbiter in international disputes. Yet they found none to stand beside them. The United Nations refused to intervene. Holland's great ally, the United States, exerted every pressure on her to aggression. The Australian Government with the threat of aggressive war on the northern approaches and national security involved, made haste to cry it was no affair of Australia's.

Just how much it is Australia's affair, just how far removed from reality the cowardly ostrichism preached and practised by Mr Menzies and Sir Gur Barwick has been, is little reason to suppose that the preliminary surrender to military blackmail will not be made a formal capitulation within a fortnight. There is reason to put any faith in the tarnished United Nations pledge to ensure that the Papuans are given after years of Indonesian rule—the right to determine their own political future. It is hypocrisy to pretend that such a pledge can be redeemed if that the Indonesians have any intention of allowing it to be redeemed. Why indeed, should they? They have demonstrated to the world and to themselves that the Charter of the United Nations is just another scrap of paper.

Threat To East

Australians must consequently face the prospect that within a year Indonesians will be their neighbours in New Guinea, and that the third-largest Communist Party in all the world will be entrenched there, too, with the full blessing of Indonesia's President. There may be no present intention of the Indonesian Government to interfere in eastern New Guinea. But the Indonesians have been shown that aggression is a paying policy; they have further been shown how sweetly the cry of "liberators from colonialism" sounds in the world's ears. The temptation to fulfil their manifest destiny by "liberating" not just half but all New Guinea will be strong, however honestly the Government now rejects the very idea.

There is a more insidious and a more immediate

Whatever the official policy of the Indonesian Government, the Party will not recognise the frontier between western and eastern New Guinea. Infiltration of Communist agents into Australian New Guinea is not a possibility—it is a certainty. Nor can it be pretended that the Papuans of the east, half-tutored or wholly untutored, offer anything but fertile soil for these evil sowers of discord. Every little flicker of racial hatred will be fanned into flame, every grievance will be encouraged, every opportunity taken to poison the minds of the Papuans against their Australian "exploiters," to extol the advantages of rejecting the white man and joining the brotherhood of the brown. This is not any more a remote situation; it is an imminent situation; it is a situation which will almost certainly confront us before a year has passed. The question which now has to be asked and answered is: What must Australia do to meet it? The Government has two clear responsibilities which it has long evaded but cannot longer safely evade. The first is to strengthen the defences of New Guinea to the point where any temptation to Indonesia to exploit its success over the Dutch eastwards will be discouraged. Such a deterrent cannot be effective without the physical presence of Australian troops on New Guinea soil.

Political Needs

Side by side with an increase in military strength there must be the establishment of sufficient police and coastguard forces to keep out or track down Indonesian infiltrators. Given the nature of the country this is a most formidable task; but it is a task upon whose successful discharge the political health of the territory will depend. The second responsibility which presses hard on the Government is to cast off the incubus of the Hasluck policy of gradualism and push fast and boldly on with the development of the Papuans.

There is no sure safety even in raising the level of political awareness among the native peoples the days of safety are running out for Australia—but there is certain disaster in not so doing. A Papuan people with a substantial share in their own government will be a people much more resistant to subversion from across the frontier; and this must now be accepted as the dominant principle determining Australian policy—a principle to which all the cautious hesitations and qualifications of current Government thinking will have to be subordinated.

To accept these responsibilities, to take these precautions, is not to treat Indonesia as an enemy. On the contrary, it must now more than ever be the concern of Australia to live on good terms with a neighbour who has moved into the next-door house. But those terms must be consistent with national honour and national security, and neither national honour nor national security can be safeguarded if the realities of the situation are not for the first time resolutely faced.