

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Violence in the Highlands has become an issue guaranteed to get headlines in the local press and even a column or two in newspapers as far away as Sydney, London and New York. Tribal fighting is exciting and exotic, so long as it occurs safely on the other side of the mountains from where you happen to be. It is less pleasant for the people of the Highlands. And it is becoming a distinct embarrassment to the central government which, as independence nears, would like to demonstrate to its people and the world that it is capable of running an ordered and peaceful nation.

Tribal warfare has existed for as long as men have lived in the Highlands -- and that is at least 10,000 years. Throughout the millenia before white men discovered and began to pacify the high valleys, the societies of the Chimbu, Asaro and Wahgi acted towards one another like miniature nations. In the Highlands, as in the world at large, war was diplomacy's last resort. And in the Highlands, as in the larger world, diplomacy was often considered much less heroic and considerably less satisfying than war.

Control and pacification by the Australian administration terminated most of the fighting. But the new rule did not alter the values of people who still see the warrior as the noblest of men and still see wrath and anger as the best answers to an insult. Nor did it find a satisfactory way for men to spend their lives, once they had given up guarding their villages and fighting their enemies. Traditionally, women in the Highlands did most of the work in the gardens and villages, leaving the men free to wage war. Today, except for coffee gardens which take little time, that pattern is virtually unchanged. But, where once the women worked and the men fought, now the women work and the men search, aimlessly, for something to fill the hours. Cards and drinking are poor substitutes for the glories of battle, but they are the handiest available.

Many observers believe that tribal fighting died down in the years immediately after the Australian incursion, only to flare up with renewed intensity recently. While there are no statistics to support this observation, it is certainly true that the psychological reasons for increasing violence have grown in recent years. For a long while, Highlanders believed the *kiaps* and plantation owners who promised them the cargo of development in return for their labour and submissiveness; time and increasing education have begun to demonstrate to them the hollowness of these promises. Further, whether rightly or wrongly, the Highlanders feared the white *kiaps*;

each tribe believed the whites powerful enough to keep the tribe safe from its enemies. Convinced by colonialism that blacks are weak and inferior, the Highlanders fear that a black government will not offer them the protection and security that the whites could.

The creation of political boundaries produces far-reaching changes. What was once war between nations becomes, after surveyor has declared New Guinea a unified territory, crime and lawlessness. When fighting breaks out between nations, it is settled either by the surrender of one party or by diplomatic negotiations. But when fighting breaks out between tribes, the police are sent in to toss tear gas and the magistrate called up to pass sentence. Thus, we have had in the Highlands the ridiculously futile situation in which hundreds of men at a time, are arrested and charged with any criminal provision that can be interpreted as covering the offense. Since tribal fighting is itself not illegal, magistrates have found it necessary to charge people with unlawful assembly, disturbing the peace or assault. All these provisions were invented to cover situations very different from tribal warfare, and their applicability to the tribal situation is tangential at best.

It ought to have become evident to everyone by now that legal sanctions alone are not going to stifle tribal fighting. Thousands of men have gone to jail and come out to fight again. All the tear gas, riot squads and court sessions have not convinced the people of the Highlands to put away their spears. Recognizing this, the Committee Investigating Tribal Fighting in the Highlands listed a whole panoply of recommendations for government action, ranging from increased legal penalties to social remedies such as better educational facilities. But the government seems unable to recognize that tribal fighting is anything is anything but a legal problem. On the advice of a seminar of concerned officials (which, interestingly, included district officers and police, but did not include representatives from the clans engaged in fighting or other Highlands spokesmen) Cabinet determined last December to end Highlands fighting once and for all. How? By increasing penalties, sending in more police and speeding up the court process. Needless to say, the intensity of fighting has not abated since the new policy went into effect.

There are many solutions to violence, if only those concerned will look for answers beyond the confines of the legal system. Since tribal fighting has long been an endemic and integral part of Highlands culture, its eradication must be accompanied by educational programmes, both to introduce new values and beliefs, and to train Highlanders in the skills that will produce significant development projects and a more

productive life. At present, less than half the children in the Highlands even attend primary school, let alone receive an education that prepares them to participate in development of their region. Children in the Highlands today are not taught useful skills, but they are taught that it is shameful to turn one's back on an invasion of one's land, one's women or one's honour. The code of revenge is as strong among Highlanders as it was among the Greeks who sailed to Troy or among the English whom Falstaff mocked at Agincourt. Riot-booted police and vegeful magistrates do not stamp out this kind of thinking; education may.

Many people in the Highlands want war to end, but they know that the violence will not cease until there is something better to put in its place. Highlanders are a courageous and self-reliant people; it is only the experience of colonialism that has grafted onto their psyches an overlay of timidity and self-doubt. It would take little capital and less effort to mount useful and sophisticated projects that Highlanders could manage and direct themselves. If the men of the Highlands are not to spend their days dreaming of the glorious wars of the past and their nights drinking, then satisfying jobs must be created. Highlanders must be given the opportunity to work at industries that benefit themselves and their people. Highland valleys could feed the nation, provided that government departments helped to start Papua New Guinean-owned plantations. Highland rivers could power small-scale village factories and workshops, provided government helped the clans to develop them.

Though these are long-range solutions, there are immediate ways to lessen tribal fighting as well, and many have been offered in a recent government white paper. The dense population of many Highlands areas excacerbates fighting, both by throwing enemy clans too often together and by decreasing available land resources. The government should consider a new kind of re-settlement scheme. Instead of settling individuals from a number of different backgrounds onto family blocks, the government should induce entire clans to move as a unit into sparsely inhabited areas, where they would be able to take up their old life as they had always lived it (except that their traditional enemy would no longer be within fighting distance) and to explore ways for improving their standard of living. When only a few people from a clan are moved, the friction between the clans remains alive. And the few pioneers find themselves in an alien environment, surrounded by strangers, and no longer bolstered by their community and its familiar customs. The movement of the clan as a whole separates traditional enemies, gives each adequate land on which to grow their gardens and try new enterprises. A number of Highlanders

have suggested that clans could be moved down to the plantations that now take up so many empty miles of the Markham Valley.

The definition of Highlands fighting as a legal problem has obscured the real issues. It is not criminality that makes Highlanders fight. They fight because there are enemies, because there is not enough land, because their culture impels them to do so, because colonialism has created tensions and anxieties in them, and, most important, because they have nothing productive to do. Tribal violence is, in sum, the result of under-development. The law can help -- for example, in providing new channels for community activities -- but it cannot solve the problem.