

# GOUGH WHITLAM: THE TRUTH ABOUT TIMOR

*East Timor remains an area of potential friction between Australia and Indonesia and the friction is fuelled by occasional reports of atrocities and famine in the one-time Portuguese colony. Former Prime Minister GOUGH WHITLAM, writing exclusively for The Bulletin, tells of his search for the truth about Timor.*

THE CONDITIONS of the people of East Timor are much better than before the civil war of 1975 and the famine of 1978. The Indonesian authorities, with the advice of international bodies, have committed themselves to thorough development programs for the province.

Although this is not the impression which Australians would have gained from their media, it is the clear verdict to which I must come after a visit in the company of Cedric Neukomm, the delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Indonesia since 1979, and Peter Hastings, foreign editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

Two months ago there were reports of renewed famine in East Timor. On January 11 the front page headline in the *SMH* declared "Famine looms in East Timor." The source was a letter to the chairman of Australian Catholic Relief, Bishop John Gerry, from the apostolic administrator in Dili, Monsignor Martinho da Costa Lopes, known locally as "the Bishop." In *The Australian*, Mr B. A. Santamaria cast doubts on the allegations.

At the end of last month I learnt that, if I could get to Jakarta, I could survey East Timor on Cedric Neukomm's rounds in an ICRC helicopter. I had discussed the Timor situation with his predecessor, Andre Pasquier, and the secretary-general of the Australian Red Cross Society, Leon Stubbings, on September 25, 1975. On September 18 my government had given \$100,000 for ICRC programs in East Timor and on November 2 it gave \$150,000 for its programs for the 40,000 people who had taken refuge from Fretilin in West Timor. On Friday, February 26, this year, I arrived in Jakarta via Darwin and Peter Hastings via Singapore.

On Saturday we were briefed by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). My previous association with CSIS had been in January, 1980, at its seminar on Pacific co-operation, which I attended with Richard Boyer (Industries Assistance Commission), Robert Furlonger (Office of National Assessments), Owen Harries (speech writer to both Malcolm Fraser and Andrew Peacock) and Brian Scott (W. D. Scott & Co.).

On Sunday, February 28, Hastings and I had a three-hour briefing in Bali from the ICRC team on its way back from East Timor — David Delapraz, the regional director for South-East Asia, Neukomm, Dr Armin Willy and Mlle Romaine Tissieres.

On Monday, Neukomm, Hastings and I flew by Garuda's daily Fokker Fellowship flight to Dili. We had sessions with government secretary Paul Kalangie and deputy Governor Francisco Xavier Lopes da Cruz and with "the Bishop." On Tuesday, we flew to Ermera, Suai and Maliana, over Balibo and to off-shore Atauro. On Wednesday, we flew to Natarbora, Dilor, Lospalos and Luro.

We walked and drove around Dili as we wished. We called on two parish priests; one has lived there since 1947 and the other since 1954. We arranged to see Joao Pedro Soares and Liandro Isac, members of the Regional Assembly who were reported to have been arrested in December and January; they are now on the Golkar (ie, ruling party) list of candidates displayed throughout the province with the other two party lists for the national and provincial elections next May.

On Thursday we flew back to Jakarta. On Friday, March 5, I was

received by acting Foreign Minister Pangabbean, by the apostolic pro-nuncio, Archbishop Pablo Puente, who spent 10 days in Timor last June, and by President Suharto; Australian Ambassador Rawdon Dalrymple accompanied me. Hastings and I lunched with Secretary-General for Foreign Affairs Soedarmono and gave a Press conference at CSIS headquarters.

Throughout East Timor there are new schools, including secondary schools, new and reconstructed hospitals and dispensaries, new houses and community facilities. Asphalt roads are being extended. For the first time there are some broadcasts and publications in Tetum, the predominant language in West and East Timor. We found new fish farms in Dilor and a new irrigation system in Maliana. Nowhere were there signs of a security problem, famine or epidemic.

The international bodies which have helped to transform the situation in East Timor are the ICRC and Catholic Relief Services, the official overseas relief and development agency of the American bishops. The former returned under an agreement made with President Suharto in December, 1978; the latter was invited in January, 1979. ICRC and CRS missions visited the province in April, 1979. By July, both organisations had massive food and medical programs in operation. By April, 1981, the emergency period was over. In June, 1981, Delapraz visited Australia to plan buffer stocks of food. CRS has been turning to aid projects; I saw four tractors in their compound in Dili.

Thus the letter from "the Bishop" was without foundation. Moreover, he knew it. He had sent it in November from Jakarta, where he attended an



Episcopal conference. Before he left Dili he had been told by Neukomm that ICRC had arranged for a buffer stock of 500 tonnes of corn and was confident of a further 500 tonnes. In Jakarta on November 13 he was told at the episcopal conference that the buffer stock had been secured. Famine was not among the matters he raised with President Suharto at a reception for the bishops on November 19.

As recently as February 1 CRS Indonesia program director Patrick C. Johns wrote to executive director Bishop Edwin B. Broderick that "a famine situation does not exist in East Timor." He reported that he had "met with Monsignor da Costa, the author of the famine reports," who "has not visited any of the areas in question." On March 1 "the Bishop" himself told me "1000 tonnes will be enough." At a Press conference at CSIS headquarters on Thursday, March 4, Delapraz reported that "the ICRC mission did not see any signs of famine." At the Australian embassy and apostolic nunciature I heard nothing to modify these judgments.

In this instance it has been possible to sheet home the responsibility for an adverse story about East Timor in the Australian media. Most such stories are attributed by stringers in Lisbon, pamphleteers in London and progandists in Australia to "church sources." It is difficult to understand why clergy should be discontented with a regime which has done much more for their flock than any of its predecessors. Indonesia is the most populous Moslem nation in the world. Probably more than any other Moslem nation it allows Christian denominations to worship and proselytise as and where they wish. Top men in the Indonesian Government and services are Christians, not least in East Timor. East Timor is one of several provinces which are predominantly Christian. The monument to Henry the Navigator still stands in front of the government offices in Dili and the new street signs bear the old Portuguese names.

"The Bishop," who is of predominantly Timorese blood, was the deputy for Timor in the National Assembly in Lisbon in Salazar's heyday. I am driven to the conclusion that he and up to half his clergy resent and lament the departure of the Portuguese. They were educated in the Portuguese language. They were part of the Portuguese system. They inherited the Portuguese tradition. They must be distressed that their pupils and worshippers will find less and less relevance in the Portuguese language, system and tradition. I must emphasise that at least a third of the clergy are encouraged by the government's development programs and their own freedom.



Gough Whitlam with Francisco Xavier Lopes da Cruz, deputy governor of East Timor

In the interests of charitable activities by Christians and others and in the interest of good relations between nations the Australian media and welfare agencies should in future be more sceptical about some of their church sources. In the latest case, damage to the nations and agencies concerned would have been avoided if a check had been made with the Australian Red Cross Society in Melbourne, or the apostolic pro-nuncio in Canberra, or the Catholic Relief Services in Washington or the International Red Cross in Geneva.

Leading the crusade against Indonesia has been the Australian Council for Overseas Aid, which forged links with Fretilin in October, 1975. Its chairman, Richard Alston, had the gall to state that "independent observers" should have gone to East Timor rather than Hastings and I. ICRC observers have been there since April, 1979. The ICRC quarterly situation reports have received no publicity in the Australian media. Leon Stubbings spent four days there with Neukomm in December, 1979. His Press conference and report were not covered by the Australian media. Would ACFOA claim that the International and Australian Red Cross officials are not independent observers?

The Red Cross was among the founders of ACFOA in 1965. ACFOA's political posturings compelled the Red Cross to withdraw in December, 1975. ACFOA can be judged by its treatment of the Traill report. In December, 1977, ACFOA set up "an independent commission to inquire into developments in and concerning East Timor since the beginning of 1975 as they relate to humanitarian aid and refugees." The chairman was John D. Traill, QC, and

the other members were associate Professor Kenneth Rivett and Miss Joyce Shewcroft, OBE.

ACFOA tried to have the commissioners alter their report and then did not release it. In September, 1981, Traill and Rivett told ACFOA that they were taking steps to have the report made available to the public, the United Nations and governments, as originally agreed. At last Alston, in a letter to *The Canberra Times* on December 4, 1981, announced that "copies of the report, together with a critique, will be available on request at the ACFOA office." I bought a copy that day. A week later, Bob Whan, ACFOA's executive director, wrote to me that the report was unofficial. On December 14 he asked the vice-chancellor of the ANU to discourage staff members from quoting it.

ACFOA has been stung by an addendum to the report by Traill and Rivett, who pointed out the folly of aid agencies denouncing a government whose co-operation was necessary for the distribution of emergency relief. They added: "Emergency relief will be much more effective — and in some cases only possible at all — if conducted on a basis of strict political neutrality." On January 8 Traill wrote to *The Canberra Times* that "ACFOA and some of its constituent aid agencies had become so enmeshed in the politics of confrontation with the Indonesian Government that they had not merely jeopardised but seriously impaired their capacity to perform the one task for which they exist as a specialist aid grouping; to comfort the victims of war and disaster, to assist the destitute and to aid refugees. No amount of name-calling or denunciation of the Indonesians can dis-

guise ACFOA's failure to provide much-needed aid to the East Timorese at the relevant time."

The Portuguese network has been responsible not only for the stories against Indonesia out of East Timor but for the annual resolution against Indonesia in the UN. The resolution is sustained by African and Caribbean members, influenced by the five former Portuguese colonies in Africa, which recognise Fretilin as the government of East Timor, and by Portuguese-speaking Brazil. The resolution receives virtually no support in southern Asia or the western Pacific and is rapidly losing support in the UN.

Meanwhile, to consolidate the development which is to be seen in all parts of East Timor, arrangements are being made for UNICEF to commence operations in June. It will develop permanent child health and welfare services, as it is already doing in 166 other developing countries and territories. Australia's three-year term on the executive board will end on July 31. Since 1979 ICRC has received larger contributions for East Timor relief from the Australian Government than from any other government and from the Australian Red Cross than from any national society other than the West German. ICRC and UNICEF skilfully plan and efficiently execute their programs. Australians should support their government in making contributions to both organisations. □