

## Deceit, Dissent and the Verdict of History

Professor Clinton Fernandes, UNSW Canberra.

(Paper delivered to the Timor Leste Studies Association Conference, 29-30 June 2017, Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e, Liceu Campus, Dili, Timor-Leste. This refereed version was published in the conference proceedings: *Peskiza foun kona-ba Timor-Leste / Novas investigações sobre Timor-Leste / New research on Timor-Leste / Penelitian baru tentang Timor-Leste*. Edited by Peter Job, Antero B. da Silva, Nuno Canas Mendes, Alarico da Costa Ximenes, Mica Barreto Soares, Sara Niner, and Therese Tam.)

This paper<sup>1</sup> examines an important episode in East Timor's campaign for independence, and Australian foreign policy towards that campaign. In 1983, an Australian parliamentary delegation led by former Defence Minister Bill Morrison visited East Timor. The delegation reported that the Indonesian government was 'in effective control of all settled areas' (Delegation 1983, 77). Armed with this conclusion, the Hawke Government abandoned its party's commitment to East Timorese self-determination. One member of the delegation, Senator Gordon McIntosh, dissented from this report, despite coming under great pressure to conform. Using the documents of delegation leader Bill Morrison in the National Library of Australia (Morrison 1983), this paper exposes a long-concealed excision from the delegation's report.

### The Delegation

The relevant background is that the Australian Labor Party was in opposition from December 1975 to March 1983. During this time, it adopted a series of strong National Conference resolutions on the subject of East Timor (Waddingham 2013). For example, its 1979 Resolution declared that it 'condemns, in the strongest terms, the Australian government's recognition of Indonesia's annexation of East Timor and undertakes, on becoming the Government of Australia, to reverse the decision' (ALP 1979). Its 1982 Resolution affirmed 'the inalienable right of the East Timorese to self-determination and independence' (ALP 1982). It returned to government in March 1983 after a decisive victory in the federal election. Determined to engage with Indonesia, it needed political cover to jettison its pro-Timor resolutions. Accordingly, the new Foreign Minister Bill Hayden visited Jakarta in April 1983, and merely 'noted on behalf of the Australian Government that Indonesia has incorporated East Timor into the Republic of Indonesia,' while perfunctorily expressing his 'deep concern' that the people of East Timor hadn't voted on this matter (Hayden 1983). Hayden's remarks contrasted sharply with his declaration in Opposition that it was 'inconceivable that the Australian people' would 'endorse the Government's action in recognising Indonesia's seizure of East Timor' (Grattan 1978, 8).

These National Conference resolutions weren't the Government's only concern. The Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence was conducting an inquiry into the human rights and conditions of the people of East Timor. This inquiry had been established in late 1981, and received a substantial amount of evidence from East Timorese in Australia, as well as letters from their family members in East Timor. Some evidence was kept *in camera* to protect East Timorese eyewitnesses to massacres and other human rights violations. The inquiry was still ongoing when Labor came to power in March 1983. The Government understood the need to counter the Senate Inquiry's report, which would be quite critical of Indonesia's conduct in East Timor. Accordingly, Hawke visited Suharto in Jakarta, where his praise for the Indonesian dictator was 'not just warm, but extravagant,' according to a journalist accompanying his party (Grattan 1983, 1). He praised Suharto, whose regime had presided over the deaths of about 200,000 East

---

<sup>1</sup> International and Political Studies, UNSW Canberra. This paper is dedicated to the late Dr. Andrew McNaughtan.

Timorese, for improving ‘the conditions of life for the people of East Timor after centuries of colonial misrule’ (Grattan 1983, 1; Staveteig 2009, 143-183).

Arrangements were made for an Australian parliamentary delegation to visit East Timor. The delegation would be led by Bill Morrison, a member of the House of Representatives who had previously been an Australian diplomat. Morrison, for reasons unrelated to anything he did as a diplomat, had twice been expelled from Australia’s embassy in Moscow - on both occasions in retaliation for Australia’s actions towards the USSR. This quirk of history no doubt burnished Morrison’s appeal to the staunchly anti-communist Indonesian government.

The delegation was significant because it was the first visit of Australian parliamentarians to East Timor since 1975. It would also be the only high-profile group of foreign visitors until Pope John Paul II went to East Timor in October 1989. Even the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence had been unable to obtain Indonesia’s permission to visit East Timor. As such, its conclusions would carry substantial political weight.

### **The Deceit**

The deceit began early. Before he entered East Timor, at his first press conference in Jakarta, Morrison said:

I might mention that I was the Minister for Defence in 1975. I noticed that some commentators in some newspapers in Indonesia have written that I was the Minister for Defence at the time Indonesian troops entered East Timor. That is not correct – I was Minister for Defence until the 11 November 1975. We were dismissed from office on that date and the Indonesian Forces entered East Timor in December. So I would like for anybody who is writing those bits in the Indonesian press to correct that statement (Morrison 1983b).

Morrison was Defence Minister from 5 June to 11 November 1975. The truth is that the Indonesian military had been conducting armed hostilities in East Timor during his time in office. The Defence Department’s Office of Current Intelligence, located within the Joint Intelligence Organisation, had published at least 33 Situation Reports about developments in East Timor during Morrison’s tenure alone.<sup>2</sup> Few questions preoccupied the Defence Department more than East Timor during Morrison’s time as Minister.

He had, furthermore, taken an active interest in the question of East Timor - in order to give the Indonesians a free hand there. On one occasion, a senior officer in the Department of Foreign Affairs had sent a cable to the Australian Embassy in Jakarta, asking it to remind its Indonesian contacts that Indonesia’s use of force in East Timor would:

‘precipitate serious problems in relations with Australia. The Australian Government could not condone the use of force in any form. The reaction here to an immoderate Indonesian policy would not be temporary or perfunctory [but] could be sharp and of an intensity that would risk setting relations back for a considerable time. It could substantially undo the work of both countries over the past four or five years aimed at developing a close and cooperative relationship between them.’<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> NAA: A13685, Reports 1-33/1975. Office of Current Intelligence Situation Reports - Portuguese Timor. National Archives of Australia.

<sup>3</sup> NAA: A10463, 801/13/11/1 Part 10. Jakarta - Portuguese Timor.

As Defence Minister, Morrison had ‘on several occasions ... expressed his displeasure’ about this cable. He had preferred to quell his Department’s objections to Indonesia’s conduct in East Timor; as Graham Feakes, the First Assistant Secretary in the Department of Foreign Affairs observed, there had been ‘no expression of Defence views on Portuguese Timor... since the present Minister for Defence [Morrison] assumed office.’ There was an obvious contrast with Morrison’s predecessor, Lance Barnard, who ‘dwelt on the damage to Indonesian-Australian relations and the increase in regional tensions and instability which would result from an Indonesian move against Portuguese Timor.’<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, Morrison was Defence Minister when five journalists working for Australian TV networks were killed in East Timor. Known ever since as the Balibo Five, they were killed by the Indonesian military on 16 October 1975 in a terror and destabilisation campaign. The Joint Intelligence Organisation reported soon after that the Indonesian military was responsible for their deaths. Moreover, the Australian Embassy had been told in advance about Indonesia’s military operations in Balibo.<sup>5</sup> Morrison had lunched with the person who’d told them this on the same day as the press conference, so his remarks could hardly be an oversight (Morrison 1983c).

The deceit continued during the delegation’s visit to East Timor. A particular problem was caused by its meeting with the Apostolic Administrator of East Timor, Monsignor Carlos Belo. ‘There were no Indonesian officials present’ during this meeting, according to the Record of Conversation (Morrison 1983d). Monsignor Belo had replaced his outspoken predecessor, Monsignor Martinho da Costa Lopes, just two months before. Belo was a quiet, inexperienced priest who was not known as a campaigner for East Timorese independence. He had been studying in Macau, Portugal and Rome during the grueling first six years of the Indonesian occupation.

Morrison asked Belo to describe the situation of the Church in East Timor and its relationship with the Government. Belo gave a factual accounting of the Catholic population of East Timor. He listed the number of priests, deacons, brothers and nuns, and their countries of origin: East Timor, Portugal, India, Italy, and so on. Then he said something startling: East Timor’s Catholic congregation was ‘365,000 out of a population of 555,000 compared with a Catholic congregation of 300,000 out of 750,000 inhabitants in 1975’ (Morrison 1983d).

Belo was describing a population decline of nearly 200,000 people - a figure that would’ve raised outrage in Australia if his remarks were published.

Belo also spoke about the reasons for the increase in conversions to the Catholic faith: East Timorese priests spoke and said mass in Tetum, and there was a ‘psychological factor of seeing unity within the church as some sort of protection against the Indonesian administration.’ He talked about the school system in East Timor, the prevalence of local languages as opposed to Portuguese, East Timorese cultural identity, financial matters, and his own background. He then dropped another bombshell when asked about the human rights situation. According to the Record of Conversation:

‘... the Administrator said that the military presence in all villages was very strong, and they appeared to do what they liked despite the fact they knew that the people did not approve of their performance. He said there was daily censorship of mail and admitted there were attempts to curb the freedom of speech. While the churchmen tried to speak out, the Indonesians were “very slow” on allowing freedom of speech. He said he was told that before the Delegation arrived in East Timor, Government officials had gone to all the places

---

<sup>4</sup> NAA: A1838, 3006/4/3 Part 6. Indonesia: Relations with Portuguese Timor.

<sup>5</sup> NAA: A10463, 801/13/11/1, Part 15. Correspondence Files: East Timor; A1838, 49/2/1/1, Part 8. Portugal: foreign policy: Portuguese Timor.

to be visited by the Delegation telling people not to speak freely to the Delegation, to pretend they did not know anything or that they could not speak English' (Morrison 1983d).

Once again, this was most inconvenient for Morrison's agenda. How could he report that all his East Timorese interlocutors had been threatened in advance?

The discussion moved to freedom of movement. Here, too, Monsignor Belo said that East Timor 'was presently like the communist country where a "Surat Jalan" or travel permit was necessary for any movement.' But, a member of the delegation asked, was this different to Portuguese times? Belo replied that he 'remembered being free to move anywhere during that period.' Nor was there any freedom of assembly: 'Monsignor Belo said that if they wanted to organise any meetings in the schools or churches they had to advise the authorities. If they ever tried to have a meeting without doing so they found they were reported by two or three people.' What did he think of the newly-appointed Governor of East Timor, Mario Carrascalao? Here the delegation found a bright spot: 'Belo said that Governor Carrascalao was viewed by all East Timorese including himself as the "hope" of East Timor' (Morrison 1983d).

Morrison managed to omit all of Monsignor Belo's damaging remarks. The Report lists 36 appendices, each containing a 'record of meeting', a 'record of briefing' or something similar. The meeting with Belo is not listed anywhere. The transcript of the conversation was kept out of the papers of the Delegation. The report quotes Belo on the subject of children in Catholic schools, his own status as Apostolic Administrator, and other innocuous details, but left out all his damaging statements. It concluded instead that 'the authorities in East Timor generally show sensitivity towards the Catholic Church'. When launching the report in Parliament, one of the members of the Delegation, Don Dobie, said that Indonesia was 'making a significant effort to improve the physical and material conditions in the province of East Timor.' Governor Mario Carrascalao, he said, 'impressed all members of the delegation, and it was pleasing to hear one Roman Catholic authority refer to him as the hope of East Timor' (Dobie 1983, 389).

It was this reference to an unnamed 'Roman Catholic authority' that provided a clue that a full record of conversation might exist somewhere. Only when Morrison's papers were examined at the National Library in 2016 did the Record of Conversation with Monsignor Belo surface. The extent of the deceit then became clear.

Morrison himself didn't say anything about this 'Roman Catholic authority' in his statement to Parliament. Instead, he focused on his task of enabling the Labor Government to jettison its East Timor baggage. Morrison said that the Indonesian Government 'appeared to be in effective control of all settled areas.' The delegation 'was invited to go anywhere in East Timor it wished to go, and it did so,' he said, suppressing Belo's observation that all their East Timorese interlocutors had been threatened beforehand. Indonesia, he said, had 'opted for a hearts and minds campaign to encourage Fretilin groups to lay down their arms.' But the problem was that the 'hearts and minds campaign is being depicted as a sign of weakness, particularly by Fretilin supporters outside East Timor who continue to encourage the resistance movement' (Morrison 1983e). Morrison's suppression of the conversation with Monsignor Belo was of a piece with his distortion of his knowledge of Indonesia's conduct during his time as Defence Minister: both provided public relations cover to the Indonesian military, and thus made easier the political task of the Hawke Government's policy turnaround in 1983.

## **The Dissent**

Senator Gordon McIntosh, a long-time supporter of East Timor's right to self-determination, was the only member of the Delegation to dissent from the report. He did so despite coming under

enormous pressure to not rock the boat; it was Labor's first few months back in Government after the upheavals of the Whitlam years, and the Hawke Government was at pains to demonstrate its ability to deliver stable, steady-as-she-goes policy continuity. East Timor, moreover, was a sensitive issue for Labor. But McIntosh's Dissenting Report was uncompromising. He took issue with the way in which history had been simply swept aside by the Report. He said that there was 'a clear tendency to gloss over the circumstances in which East Timor was illegally seized in a long operation which caused great suffering to the Timorese people, whose current attitudes to their new situation we were simply not able to assess' (Delegation 1983, 83).

He said that the majority report 'manifests a clear tendency to diminish the significance of fundamentally important aspects of the Timor problem, and it contains some quite misleading comments and perceptions.' He said that it avoided 'what must surely be the central human rights issue, and that is, the attitude of the Timorese people to their present circumstances.' While he had been at first honoured to be invited to join the Delegation, he said he later realised that it was 'a cynical exercise designed to strengthen the legitimacy of certain views and conclusions held by other members of the Delegation, in some cases, I regret to say, long before the mission went to Indonesia.' On the question of East Timor's self-determination, McIntosh was uncompromising:

No matter what anyone says about the seizure of East Timor, it was an illegal act. I do not intend to transgress in any way from the fact that it was an illegal act and I do not recognise de jure recognition of the incorporation (McIntosh 1983, 353).

McIntosh's dissenting report had an immediate political impact. His dissent was covered widely by the media, and diminished the political impact of the delegation's entry into East Timor. Morrison's letter of transmittal when he submitted the report to parliament contained more material complaining about McIntosh's dissent than about the delegation's visit.

### **The Verdict of History**

History will, of course, record that Gordon McIntosh was right. The Government of an independent Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste awarded him the Order of Timor-Leste in December 2014. It described him as 'the conscience of the Federal Parliament on the matter of the Indonesian invasion of East Timor and the repression of the Timorese people.'<sup>6</sup> Several more Foreign Affairs records pertaining to the delegation remain unexamined at the National Archives. Clearly, the last word on this event has not been written.

### **Bibliography:**

ALP 1979. National Conference Resolution, Biennial National Conference records, National Library of Australia.

ALP 1982. National Conference Resolution, Biennial National Conference records, National Library of Australia.

Delegation 1983: Official Report of the Australian Parliamentary Delegation to Indonesia (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1983).

Dobie, Donald 1983. House of Representatives Hansard, 6 September 1983, p. 389.

Grattan, Michelle 1978. Timor: sense or just a sellout?, *The Age*, 23 January 1978, p. 8.

---

<sup>6</sup> Senate Biography, Gordon McIntosh, <http://biography.senate.gov.au/mcintosh-gordon-douglas/> accessed 7 October 2017.

Grattan, Michelle 1983. Hawke turns foreign policy on its head. *The Age*, 6 June 1983, p. 1.

Hayden, William 1983. *The Australian Year Book of International Law*, vol. 10, p. 366. (Sydney: Butterworths, 1983)

McIntosh, Gordon 1983. Senate Hansard, 6 September 1983, p. 353.

Morrison, William 1983a: Papers of William L. Morrison, National Library of Australia Manuscripts Collection. MS 4957, Boxes 65-67.

Morrison, William 1983b. Bill Morrison, Press conference 26 July 1983. Transcript from the Morrison Papers, NLA.

Morrison, William 1983c. Lunch and Discussion with CSIS, Tuesday 26 July 1983, 1200h. Harry Tjan Silalahi, Vice Chairman, Board of Directors, CSIS, was at the lunch. Morrison Papers, NLA.

Morrison, William 1983d. Record of Conversation with the Apostolic Administrator of East Timor, Dili, 31 July 1983. Morrison Papers, NLA.

Morrison, William 1983e. House of Representatives Hansard, 6 September 1983, p. 385.

Staveteig, Sarah. 2009. "Excess Mortality in Timor-Leste during Indonesian Occupation." In Binchy, William, ed., *Timor-Leste: Challenges for Justice and Human Rights in the Shadow of the Past*. Dublin: Clarus Press.

Waddingham, John 2013. Australia's new Labor government, March 1983. Clearing House for Archival Records on Timor, <https://timorarchives.wordpress.com/2013/03/05/hawke-labor-march-1983/> accessed 7 October 2017