

Gordon McIntosh: An East Timor biography

Gordon McIntosh was a Labor Party Senator in the Australian Parliament from 1974-1987.

During those years he played a key role in keeping the issue alive in the Parliament, despite the actions and policies of successive Australian Governments (Labor and Liberal) to oppose East Timorese self-determination and independence.

In the parliament his significant contributions included:

- Continually asking difficult questions about Australian government policies and actions on East Timor
- Membership and later Chairmanship of the 1982-83 Senate Standing Committee Inquiry into the 'Human rights and conditions of the people of East Timor'.
- Membership of the first Australian Parliamentary delegation to visit Indonesian-occupied East Timor (1983). McIntosh wrote a dissenting report on the delegation's findings, effectively neutralising Australian government attempts to show that East Timor was no longer a significant political issue.

Outside the parliament, Gordon McIntosh contributed greatly to Australian and international knowledge and concern about East Timor in a number of ways, notably:

- Addressing many public and private non-government, community and solidarity group meetings in Australia, New Zealand, Europe and the USA.
- Petitioning the United Nations Decolonisation Committee in 1982 as a representative of East Timor advocacy organisations in Australia (serving as a powerful counter to Gough Whitlam who addressed the UN that same year).

Following his retirement from the parliament in 1987, Gordon McIntosh continued to work for East Timorese self-determination up until the 1999 United Nations-supervised ballot. His actions included

- Membership of and active support for the West Australian Timor solidarity group, Friends of East Timor
- Supporting and arranging meetings for visiting East Timorese identities, particularly Jose Ramos-Horta
- Joining the attempted embargo-breaking peace mission voyage to East Timor of the ship *Lusitania Expresso*, 1992.

Since East Timor gained its independence, Gordon McIntosh continues to closely follow developments in the new country.

There is no doubt that Gordon McIntosh made a major contribution to the cause of East Timorese self-determination. This was especially the case during his years in the Australian Parliament where very few others can claim to have so consistently and actively pursued a course of justice for the East Timorese.

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Appendix: Gordon McIntosh chronology of significant East Timor events

1975

Member of Labor Party delegation to East Timor (with Ken Fry, Arthur Gietzelt, John Kerin, Richie Gunn). [March]

Circulated direct appeal from Xavier do Amaral who rang McIntosh from Dili on 2 December seeking assistance in face of impending invasion

1975-1987

Countless questions and statements in the Parliament about events in occupied East Timor and Australian Government actions and policies on the matter.

Addressed scores of public and private meetings on the East Timor issue in Australia and overseas.

1976

Member of Australian Parliamentary delegation to Indonesia during which he challenged senior military figure General Panggabean's claims about East Timor.

1977

Member of peace delegation to New Zealand speaking many times on Timor and stimulating growth of solidarity organisation there

1982

Member of Senate Standing Committee inquiry into East Timor. Timorese trust of McIntosh in his home state of Western Australia ensured a significant number of confidential submissions from the East Timorese community in exile there.

Represented Australian advocacy organisations to petition the United Nations Decolonisation Committee. His submission included a self-organised petition in favour of East Timorese self-determination – signed by a large majority of his fellow Labor Party federal parliamentarians.

Briefed US Congressman Tony Hall on the East Timor situation and Australian policy

1983

Chairman of Senate Standing Committee inquiry into the 'Human rights and conditions of the people of East Timor'.

Member of Australian Parliamentary Delegation to Indonesia and East Timor. McIntosh's chance meeting with members of the resistance in East Timor and his decision to dissent from the main delegation report ensured the East Timor issue stayed on the front pages. On Atauro Island a document listing detainees there was passed secretly to him. McIntosh insisted this document be mentioned in the delegation report (despite resistance from the head of the delegation, Bill Morrison) and a copy was given later to resistance external representatives. At the request of other Timorese in Dili, McIntosh also carried other

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documents and audio-visual material out of Timor for passing to the external resistance representatives. This action was not known to other delegation members.

Parliamentary Advisor to the Australian Mission at the UN General Assembly, September – December. During this time McIntosh was able to do informal lobbying on behalf of East Timor.

1984

Special guest speaker on Timor policy, Labor Party National Conference.

1985

Actively lobbied the Australian Government to grant broadcast license to Australian and East Timorese activists who had re-established radio contact with the resistance in Timor.

1986

In Lisbon, addressed Portuguese parliamentary committee concerned with Portugal's East Timor policy

1985-87

Actively assisted the West Australian solidarity organisation Friends of East Timor to expand its work.

1990-1999

Active member of Friends of East Timor (Western Australia).

1992

Member of the *Lusitania Expresso* peace mission voyage to East Timor

1995

Actively assisted Tom Sherman to conduct interviews of West Australian-based East Timorese with knowledge of the 1975 Balibo killings of newsmen. As with the 1982 Senate Inquiry, East Timorese trust of McIntosh was crucial to their decision to come forward with evidence.

Written petition to the United Nations in favour of East Timorese self-determination.

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