

Good evening, I'm Ian Gray and welcome to Doubletake. Tonight ---- an interview with the foreign editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, Peter Hastings, who recently accompanied former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam to East Timor at the invitation of the Indonesian Government.

A fortnight ago I prepared a report on the tour for Doubletake but Mr. Hastings was very busy at the time and was unable to appear, but tonight he is able to reply to criticism of the visit made by representatives of Church aid groups.

The Whitlam/Hastings visit took place after the Australian Catholic Relief organisation received a letter from the acting head of the Catholic Church in East Timor, Monsignor da Costa Lopes. In it the Monsignor said aid from Australian Catholic Relief should continue, and be increased if possible because of the threat of famine during the dry or harvest season, which will occur in East Timor between May and October later this year. Last October at least 30,000 villagers were taken away from their fields to flush out the remnants of the Fretilin guerilla group, leaving crops unplanted and the possibility of a food shortage come the harvest. Australian Catholic Relief used the letter as the basis for an appeal to raise \$250,000 for the Catholic church in East Timor.

However in reporting their visit both Mr. Whitlam and Mr. Hastings said the Monsignor was being mischievous and inaccurate in that he knew the International Red Cross was receiving 1,000 tonnes of buffer stock to deal with any problems of a food shortage. All the same Mr. Hastings did find evidence of food shortages and confirmed the Indonesian military operation using villagers had taken place, but he emphasised the Monsignor knew the two aid organisations in East Timor, the International Red Cross and the American Catholic Relief Services believed the situation was under control.

Two of Mr. Hastings critics from a fortnight ago expressed concern at the attacks on the Monsignor. They were Jim Dunn, Australia's former Consul in East Timor before the Indonesian invasion in 1975 and John Waddingham from the Melbourne based aid group Action for World Development. They believed the attacks on the Monsignor were unfounded and will only put pressure on the Vatican to have him removed and replaced by a less critical priest.

THE East Timorese diocese is separate from the Indonesian branches of the Catholic Church because the Vatican has yet to recognise the Indonesian takeover of East Timor. Despite this the Vatican representative in Jakarta has expressed support for integration into Indonesia and the controversy around the Monsignor may give weight to his opinion back in Rome. But Mr. Hastings while aware of this situation was concerned to find out how accurate was the Monsignor's letter. I spoke with Mr. Hastings at his seaside home in Sydney.

Mr.Hastings: In January the international office of Catholic Relief Services in Geneva wrote to the Catholic Relief Services in New York enclosing a number of articles appearing in European newspapers and magazines, including in particular one that appeared in Le Journal de Geneve in January, 22nd I think. All of them more or less had the same headline - Famine Threatening in Timor, all of them sourced this article one way or another to the Bishop. Now on February 1 the Catholic Relief Services director in Jakarta, who'd just come back from Timor, reported to his executive bishop in New York - a famine situation in --- does not exist in East Timor. Now, he says --- Now, he visited the most likely areas of famine in the East and there was none, and then he said, for your information, I also met with Monsignor da Costa Lopes, the Apostolic Administrator of Timor, frequently referred to as the bishop, who was the author of the famine reports.

He has not visited any of the areas in question and has no specific names of any villages suffering famine. I informed him of the food International Red Cross will have available and suggested he contact the International Red Cross delegate if he is able to identify any specific villages in need of food.

Now, point A, the bishop had no specific names of villages suffering famine or likely to suffer famine which I find --- curious. And point B, he already knew through Mr. Neukofm before he attended the Episcopal Conference in Jakarta and before he wrote to the Episcopal Conference in Australia that 1,000 tonnes of Australian corn was available as buffer stock against any eventuality of food shortages. This suggests politicking to me.

Now he also told me, personally, for example that "hundreds" were "dying daily" on Atauro island. This is simply not true, it's an exaggeration. According to the Red Cross doctor, Amin Willey and Indonesian Red Cross doctors to whom Mr. Whitlam and I both spoke in Atauro, several hundreds had certainly died last year from gastro-enteritis caused by previous privation and, they think, close quarters when they went into the new huts that they built. Actually, Red Cross has reduced that figure to 150, the figure we got was about 300. That situation has to be rectified. There was no question of hundreds dying daily.

Now, while I found no priest, for example, in the Timorese Church who was anything but properly respectful of the Bishop, I found some who made it very clear that he in their view a) exaggerated, b) was anxious that Timor should either return to Portugal or should become independent under the revived Fretilin --- which is
--- I'm not arguing with that --- I think it's an unrealistic point

of view, which caused him c) to be constitutionally incapable of co-operating with the Indonesian administration, even with the quite large number of Christians within it, and that d) this was often counter-productive of Timorese peoples' interests.

Mr. Waddington (sic) and Mr. Dunn both suggest that members of the Indonesian Government and Indonesian Church want integration of the Timorese Church into the Indonesian Church. I'm not sure how true this is, some undoubtedly do, some I don't think, do. I think most of them would like to see the administrator replaced, if not with an Indonesian bishop, then with a more co-operative bishop from elsewhere who did not, in the words of a senior archbishop, himself intensely critical of the Indonesian administration, make things difficult for everybody by compulsively adding zero to every figure he sees. By the same token I have not heard it suggested either on behalf of the Vatican representative or by the Indonesian Church members that any of the priests now in East Timor should be replaced or should be any less critical of the Indonesian administration than they already are, because in the words of the same senior archbishop, they keep the administration on its' toes, to do the things it ought to do.

It is worth pointing out here, just simply by the way, as Mr. Dunn stated himself in 1974 in his parliamentary paper, most Timorese are not Christian but animist. Only about 153,000, or about one third of the 1970 population is nominally Catholic.

Mr. Gray: It has been suggested by some of the critics of your tour and reporting that the question we should be looking at is the extent to which Red Cross aid is adequate, covers all those areas necessary and that they perhaps aren't able to go to certain areas. Now what's your reply to that?

Mr. Hastings: Well on the extent of aid of course it's not just Red Cross, it's also Indonesian Red Cross who are spending a lot of money, um, mainly in terms of providing personnel. There are a lot of doctors down there and Catholic Relief Services. But on the question of access, um, the ICRC officials pointed out that they chose the centres they did choose because they were the worst affected, after their initial survey and in fact the Government agreed, in very well they were the worst affected areas and wanted aid.

I asked Mr. Delapraz about access and he said it was unrestricted, he also said this publically. The ICRC has an agreement with Indonesia, renewable in June of this year, specifying that the delegates and their helpers may travel where and when they wish. Mr. Neukomm, he says, is allowed anytime to visit Tim/Tim er Timor/Timur, and go

anywhere he would like to go.

Ian Gray: Right now is the Red Cross going to all areas then or only to those areas in most need?

Hastings: Oh they went... to the areas... in most need. They reached 300.000 people at a certain minimum level and 90.000 was maximum. They were the people most in need or the people most needed er stocks building up, medical treatment and so on.

Gray: When we saw headlines like No Famine in Timor but Aid is Needed coming from your articles, it raised the question that Monsignor da Costa Lopes in fact never said there was famine. He said famine was imminent. So to go there now, as you did, and look at various places and say that there is not famine is perhaps understandable as it is the wet season, er, although you do say that there are food shortages in several areas but Monsignor da Costa Lopes' point, to me, was that famine would occur towards the dry season because villagers had been taken away from their village or, just simply enough crops hadn't been planted. And that this is really why he was trying to get aid in time for the dry season.

Now I suppose we could begin with your answer by saying for a start in your article you said the first three months of any year there is a perennial risk of food shortage. Now some people question that, saying that this in fact is the wet season and that food is abundant in the forest at least and that the real dire season for East Timor is the dry season between May and October.

Hastings: The dry season is the dire season. The first three months of the year is when they don't know how the crops are going to turn out. If they get good crops, they get good years, ah, then their reliance on buffer stock for a start, of course, is not anywhere near as great. Now the Bishop said to me, and one of his priests, we don't know how crops will turn out, that was in March, the first three months. Amin Willey the ICRC doctor says of crop planting, Timor has many local climates, micro-climates, he called them, and food shortages are common to that island and other islands in Nusa Tenggara, that is Flores, Sumba, and the islands around. Not necessarily all over the island, but in certain parts according to the rainfall. In some areas they have one rainy season, and others three. The main planting season, and it varies somewhat, is January and so there is this worry for the three months following, about what happens. He says.. he was asked in a public... that was to me... a public press conference, in general was the situation in Timor no worse, actually improving? That was Reuters. Answer: of course it is improving.

Delapraz, who is the head, chief delegate for South East Asia, we now have worked for three years in Jacolap, where in 1979 the situation was very

bad, and it certainly was, very serious. It is the last village, 16000 people dropped from our program and in February we found they had exported 300 tonnes of corn, not much, but surplus to the needs nevertheless.

Gray: So in fact what you're saying is that the aid the International Red Cross was receiving, that Monsignor da Costa Lopes knew about, is enough to provide for any food shortages?

Hastings: Unless there is a... an unforeseen disaster, yes, is ample.

Gray: And what sort of unforeseen disaster might occur?

Hastings: Well if the crops go bad, but there is no evidence they are, they're going well.

Gray: Is there evidence that enough crops were planted? I noticed in one of your articles you name two places where there are severe um.. food shortages, ah.. and then you add Laga and saying the Red Cross says er.. has warned the crops may have been planted too late.

Hastings: That's true about Laga, they may have been, but ah... the latest information I have was, it was coming along quite well, we don't know, but one thousand tonnes of buffer stock is enough to meet those requirements. That is not famine or even imminent famine. And it is the scare stuff that really worried the Indonesians and made them angry and also I think it probably put the Red Cross out because they had very carefully calculated.

Gray: I'm just wondering who it was that exaggerated this situation, that implied that the Bishop suggested there was famine when in fact he didn't suggest there was famine. He suggested that there could be famine er.. come the dry season. He seems to have mentioned Atauro to you, but not in the letter, about hundreds dying daily. But it would just seem to me that he is really appealing for aid to help in those projects that the er... Catholic Church in Timor already has established and that it seems that he is being criticised for doing that.

Hastings: I think... Monsignor de Costa Lopes would like to see food solidly placed mile after mile, all over the place. No doubt of that. But that is a very different question from ah... him... saying, which he did, there and abroad that a famine situation is likely when he knew that adequate buffer stocks were already in position against food shortages and that famine was not likely at that time given the evidence they had. Now I'm not saying he's a bad man, I'm saying he exaggerates ah.. and that he has caused a lot of people I suspect, ah.. a lot of trouble in relation to helping Timorese.

Gray: Can I just put er.. suggest to you though that to a lot of people it would seem highly suspicious that when very few people, especially Australians,

are allowed into East Timor, that yourself and Mr Whitlam are allowed in, thanks to the Indonesian Government. And that all we have to go on about what Monsignor da Costa Lopes said was a letter which appealed for aid because there could be crop shortages which seems to be supported by the Red Cross, and that we have to rely on you meeting him when no one else was there to hear it and you were there under the invitation of the Indonesian Government. Do you think that your credibility or objectivity is questioned when you were one of the very few people allowed into East Timor that is Australian?

Hastings: Is Peter Rodgers... um... integrity at stake?

Gray: I'm sorry?

Hastings: Is Peter Rodgers' integrity at stake?

Gray: Is he there now?

Hastings: He was there at the invitation of the Indonesian Government.

Gray: Is he still there?

Hastings: Answer my question. He was there at the invitation of the Indonesian Government, does that mean his integrity is at stake?

Gray: Ah... I guess not. He reported on the famine conditions in 1978 didn't he, with those photographs which led...

Hastings: 79.

Gray: 79, which led to ah... a massive aid programme, in fact it led to the International Red Cross and the American Catholic Services being allowed in.

Hastings: But he was there at the invitation of the Indonesian Government.

Gray: Why is he not there now? What Australian correspondents are there now?

Hastings: Hang on, that's a different question. I said he was asked there at the invitation of the Indonesian Government, so was David Jenkins, who said there was no famine last year. Now is his integrity at stake?

Gray: Well, perhaps. Why is it that the Indonesian Government only allows certain people in and not others, like for example, the Sydney Morning Herald has just been banned there, the Australian's just been banned there...

Hastings: Why do they allow the BBC in there?

Gray: Well, why not? If they allow the BBC in why not allow Australian journalists in?

Hastings: Is that why they allow the London Times in?

Gray: They allow foreign, resident foreign journalists in, but there don't seem to be any Australian journalists resident there.

Hastings: London Times came from Singapore and the BBC man from London. There is no reason why...

Gray: Well I think the question there is Mr Hastings, if they are allowed in

why aren't Australian journalists allowed in?

Hastings: A very good reason; they say we will take in journalists from Holland, Germany, United States, Britain, Australia, I think one New Zealander's been there in fact. But Australians have no God-given right to go. I hope hundreds of Australians go, but I doubt that they will any more than hundreds of others will go.

Gray: Why wouldn't they go?

Hastings: Why sh... Indonesians say why should we have them?

Gray: Because they might want to go there and, and question the reports coming out, saying that everything is well in Indonesia.

Hastings: There are plenty of places where the Indonesians won't let people go. I have just been banned from there.

Gray: In what sense?

Hastings: In the sense that I've been told I can't go back. Didn't you know that?

Gray: No I didn't know that... er... well what position do you then take of the Indonesian Government when they don't seem to allow Australian journalists in? I mean, your criticism, your er.. reporting on this situation in East Timor, by my reading, was ah... fairly close to the sort of um... the warnings we'd been given by Monsignor da Costa Lopes that there were military operations that took people away from fields, that food shortages are existing, that aid is going in and the only difference to me is that the Monsignor should be allowed to appeal for aid as well, not simply just the Red Cross or American Catholic Relief.

Hastings: I certainly agree that the um.., the Operasi Kikis is what you are talking about, ah... alarmed him, alarmed a lot of people and you know what I've written about it and what I think about it. That is very different from the fact that when that was well and truly over, ah.. he was told by International Red Cross and by the US Catholic Relife that it was OK. Now he could have questioned that but he never mentioned that in his statements to other people, either in Jakarta when he attended the Conference there or in his letters to down here. Now coming back to this business of er.. being allowed in and out. Now I ah.. my position is very simple; I think the Indonesian Government ah.. is very short-sighted in many of its policies. I'm on record as saying that ah... but I don't believe that we have any God-given right to go there, I don't think the Brits have or Americans or anyone else.

Gray: I must go back to the point though, that you seem to be saying, reporting on similar things as Mon... the issues that were raised by Monsignor de Costa Lopes that there were various areas of food shortage that people were suffering gastro-enteritis, berri-berri, in hospitals and um... but aid was going there and yet you believe that he has exaggerated. Now do you think he should be removed. Do you think there are better people in the Catholic Church in Timor that can give a more accurate assessment of the situation

there?

Hastings: I suspect, without knowing, that a different bishop willing to cooperate more with the Indonesians might be more to the advantage of the Timorese people. But that's something that ah... you know, the Church has got to work out ah.. I can't work it out. But I know that argument is certainly adopted and there are pros and cons. I suspect, and I only suspect this, that the Vatican may remove him, but they may very well not, one doesn't know.

Gray: Do you think though that you are in danger of getting the situation where the only people allowed into East Timor are those that are unable to, or unwilling to, criticise the Indonesian Government when in fact it may be true. That to me is the sense of the awkward situation the Monsignor is in although you would say its not his criticism, its his exaggeration.

Hastings: I think, I think the Indonesians will take criticism um.. I made that clear earlier I think. I said that er.. the.. senior archbishop.. I think you know who that is, obviously, wants critical people there, they also want people who have a sense of the realities of the situation ah.. and who simply aren't going to put people offside. Now, the archbishop also puts off, the bishop rather, puts off Christians in that administration and they're very good Christians, they wouldn't be there otherwise.

Gray: I would think that that comment might be questioned by a lot of Catholic sources in Australia. It is very difficult for them to get access to East Timor other than through their own sources, and their own sources suggest that he is well supported and yet you having been there would suggest that there are some that don't support him and that there is considerable concern about him taking such a line.

Hastings: There is none that question his authority ah... or don't have respect for him, I made that clear, but there are some who wonder about how effective he is, yes, I think that's pretty natural isn't it.

Gray: Are you surprised at the extent... perhaps the extent of the opposition to your visit from people like the Australian Catholic Relief and other people associated with Church aid groups, that find evidence outside the Monsignor to support exactly what he said and therefore are quite sceptical of the sort of ah.. attacks you have made on him.

Hastings: Well er.. if they're sceptical, they're sceptical.

Gray: But we have er.. perhaps, a conflict of sources here where you go there and find certain sources that say this and er.. they get their information to suggest that Monsignor da Costa Lopes is giving a very accurate situation from other sources, but still within East Timor.

Hastings: Look I've just made it clear to you, I spoke to a number of sources and they are... there are different views.

Gray: Therefore to say the Monsignor is exaggerating is your opinion and the

opinion of the sources you spoke to because there are sources that believe he is not exaggerating.

Hastings: Well, if that's what they say, they say it.

Gray: And so, we just have to leave it at that. Its really a matter of who you believe.

Hastings: My... strong impression is he exaggerates, and he exaggerated to me personally.

Gray: Peter Hastings: Foreign Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald.

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