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Apr 7 SHACKLETON SCHOLAR A scholarship commemorating five Australian newsmen killed in East Timor in 1975 was awarded to Geraldine Brooks, a journalist with the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The scholarship allows twelve months' study at the Columbia University School of Journalism. (Herald 7.4.82)

Apr 14 ATAURO The *Age* reported that Indonesian approval had been given for ICRC/Indonesian Red Cross to make six deliveries of food and medicine to the 8,460 Timorese on Atauro. 3,280 of the people are "suspected Fretilin sympathisers" who were forcibly relocated to the island after June 1980. The deliveries are expected to be made monthly beginning April 1982. The ICRC did not describe conditions on the island, but the *Age* article said 300 of the detainees were sent to Los Palos and Baucau in January in the wake of a gastro-enteritis epidemic on Atauro last year which killed 150 people in three months. (Age 14.4.82)

GOUGH WHITLAM FAILS TO CONVINCE

When it was learned that Gough Whitlam was to visit East Timor in March, some Australians wondered whether this former 'big man' of Australian politics would be big enough to admit his defence of integration was a mistake. Few were surprised to find Mr Whitlam, on his return from Timor, even more vehemently defending his position.

While the heated nature of Whitlam's condemnation of the head of the Dili Catholic Church and Australian critics of integration has rendered his claims suspect, it remains important to show why and where Mr Whitlam is wrong.

The following article shows, despite Whitlam's assertions, that the claims of Indonesian military operations, mass killings and fears of famine in East Timor were well-founded. Where possible, we have drawn on the findings of Australian journalist Peter Hastings who travelled with Mr Whitlam in East Timor.

(Except where otherwise noted, direct quotes from Mr Whitlam are taken from his article in *The Bulletin* (1) and an interview on Radio Australia (2).)

FOOD SHORTAGES AND FAMINE

The primary focus of Mr Whitlam's statements to date has been to accuse the Apostolic Administrator of Dili, Monsignor Lopes, of writing an "alarmist, inaccurate letter" to Australian Catholic Relief. This letter, written on 19 November 1981, formed the basis of Australian media reports in early 1982 warning of impending famine in East Timor (3). According to Mr Whitlam, the letter was "without foundation" and Mgr Lopes "knew it". Mgr Lopes, said Mr Whitlam, is "a liar.... a mendacious and malicious correspondent".

Mr Whitlam's judgements follow his trip to East Timor on 1-4 March. However, apart from his statement that "nowhere were there signs of...famine", as well as general references to "thorough development programs" and "proper provision for increasing the variety and amount of food", Mr Whitlam's views are not based on what he saw in Timor. He has used statements of International Red Cross (ICRC), American Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the Vatican representative in Jakarta (Mgr Puente) to attempt to disprove Mgr Lopes' claims.

Catholic Relief Services & Mgr Puente

Mr Whitlam has cited a letter from CRS representative Patrick Johns early this year which stated that "a famine situation does not exist in East Timor". (4) What Mr Whitlam did not reveal was that Mr Johns made his assessment on the basis of visiting only two places (Baucau and Lospalos) in addition to the CRS agricultural project at Loes. This was hardly a comprehensive survey. CRS has not been involved in comprehensive aid distribution since April 1981. It is presently operating in one location only.

Similarly, Mr Whitlam's suggestion that the Vatican representative Mgr Puente has more

accurate information on the situation in East Timor is suspect. Mgr Puente was last in East Timor in June 1981. This hardly qualifies him as an expert on the current situation. More important than these two sources is Mr Whitlam's use of information from International Red Cross.

International Red Cross

According to Mr Whitlam, Mgr Lopes knew before he wrote his letter, that ICRC had arranged a 500 tonne buffer stock "in case there was any weather fluctuations (causing) a shortage of food". ICRC representative Cedric Neukomm also told the Monsignor that ICRC was confident of securing a further 500 tonnes of corn. On this basis, Mr Whitlam has claimed Mgr Lopes' letter was "alarmist and inaccurate".

Mgr Lopes' Letter - the context

Was it alarmist? Consider the situation in East Timor in November 1981. During the months July-September, some 30-50,000 East Timorese males were obliged to take part in an Indonesian military operation. That this operation occurred and that it may have been responsible for late or inadequate crop planting has been conceded by Peter Hastings. In November 1981, an English academic Michael Liefer was in East Timor in company with the ICRC. He also said the military operation would disrupt food production. (5) Mr Whitlam has not mentioned these events.

Mr Whitlam has not shown that in November 1981, Mgr Lopes believed the ICRC 1,000 tonne food buffer would be sufficient to meet expected and possible shortages in 1982. Is it not possible that ICRC advice on plans for a buffer stock were consistent with and confirmed Mgr Lopes' own belief that there would be food shortages in 1982? Since its East Timor program began, ICRC has been mainly responsible for only 14 centres in covering about 100,000 people (about 1/5th of the population). Is it possible that Mgr Lopes, when asking for aid for an "expected famine", had areas in mind that were not covered by ICRC?

According to Mr Whitlam, Mgr Lopes said on March 1 that ICRC's 1,000 tonne buffer stock "will be enough". But this is not proof of the falsity of fears held by Mgr Lopes three months earlier. These fears were based on the fact of a highly disruptive Indonesian military operation which had just concluded.

Current ICRC position

Mr Whitlam said he saw no signs of famine in East Timor in March. He has cited ICRC regional representative David Delapraz who led a survey team in East Timor on 16-26 February, 1981. Delapraz was reported to have said "the ICRC mission did not see any signs of famine". (6) Privately, however, Delapraz has drastically qualified this reported statement: "What we have said (i.e. no famine) is valid only for the places we visited and only for the time we were there. We did not make a general statement". (7)

The mission visited Atauro, Dili, Los Palos, Baucau and 14 villages - almost all of which were those villages in which ICRC and Indonesian Red Cross had operated since late 1979. (8) As ICRC has regularly monitored those villages, it would have been surprising to have found famine conditions there.

ICRC: 'Read Hastings' articles'

Mr Whitlam has claimed he was in East Timor "entirely under the auspices of ICRC". In fact his trip to East Timor, which is still closed to most outsiders, was organised by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies - a body which was directly involved from 1974 in covert operations to incorporate East Timor. Mr Whitlam, in using ICRC as his authority, would also be aware that it is difficult for ICRC to publically distance itself from his claims. In doing so, ICRC would run the risk of falling foul of the Indonesian government.

It is worth noting however, that when Australian aid agency representatives have approached ICRC personnel in S.E. Asia for information on East Timor, they are advised to read Peter Hastings' newspaper articles. Mr Whitlam is not mentioned! (9)

Despite a number of serious misinterpretations of the situation in East Timor (10), the reported findings of Peter Hastings offer strong qualifications to Mr Whitlam's blanket

claims. As we have already seen, Hastings confirmed the conduct of Indonesian military operations in East Timor last year. He wrote that the operations "took thousands of able-bodied men away from the urgent needs of planting..." (11) He reported a Red Cross warning that rice in Laga may have been planted too late and food aid might be needed there.

Of the eight places actually visited by Hastings (and Whitlam), he reported food shortages were possible in Dilor and Luro. Hastings made no mention of current food shortages on Atauro, but the recent launching of an emergency food program there suggests there were severe shortages on the island. Three other areas visited by Hastings - Suai, Maliana and Natarbora - have always been very fertile areas and are least likely to experience famine.

Hastings went on to confirm that ICRC "buffer stock" was needed in East Timor. If the Indonesian Government does not permit entry of the 1,000 tonnes of corn, "it might get away with nothing worse than food shortages in some regions. But, it is a risk - shortages can escalate if conditions become unfavourable". (12) Presumably Hastings is suggesting that food shortages could become serious food shortages.

Whitlam's and Hastings' trip to East Timor was short and well organised - yet even in the small numbers of places they visited, there were actual or potential food problems. Combined with David Delapraz' strong qualification on ICRC's findings, the Whitlam/Hastings trip has not proved food shortages do not exist in other parts of East Timor. Indeed, East Timorese insist there are food problems elsewhere. (13) The now vilified East Timor Church has also reported potential shortages:

February 1982 Church Estimates

Information collated from reports of Catholic priests throughout the territory in February, offers a wider sample of food conditions in East Timor. According to this source, some 85,000 East Timorese in parts of the Los Palos, Baucau, Manatuto and Ainaro districts can expect serious food shortages. Another 150,000 in the Liquica, Bobonaro and Viqueque regions can expect some shortages. No information was available from the



Peter Hastings, Gough Whitlam and Yusuf Wanandi - Jakarta, 5 March 1982.

The Whitlam /Hastings visit to East Timor was organised by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) of which Wanandi is a key figure. Wanandi and CSIS played key roles in Indonesian covert operations against East Timor from 1974.

administrative districts of Alieu, Ermera and Suai. (14) According to this report, the shortages are the result of a combination of factors - environmental and rat plagues as well as lack of access to adequate agricultural land. Late crop planting is also named as a factor in some areas.

Villages such as Soibada, Luro and Iliomar, which are named in this account as locations of probable serious food shortage, may well be covered by an ICRC "buffer stock" if Jakarta permits its establishment. However, other places named, such as Lore, Vemassee and Laleia are not normally visited by ICRC.

Conclusion

Mr Whitlam's basic charge that Mgr Lopes is "a liar" does not hold water. Mgr Lopes' letter to ACR in mid-November 1981 did not say there was famine in East Timor. He referred to "expected famine" - an anticipated serious food shortage resulting from the disruptive July-September military operations. Whether that 'expectation' will actually emerge is still unclear. Food problems do exist in East Timor; serious shortages are still possible. If shortages that do arise are completely covered by an ICRC "buffer stock", then that is cause for relief. It is not a reason for vilifying Mgr Lopes for justifiable fears held by him in November last year.

LACLUTA MASSACRE

The major focus of Mgr Lopes' letter to Australian Catholic Relief was the Indonesian military operations last year. He claimed that during July-September 1981, many people were killed, including children and pregnant women. In particular, he claimed that more than 500 people were killed during a "seige" at Lacluta.

As we have seen, Mr Whitlam has been absolutely silent about the military operations. In Australia, neither he nor Peter Hastings have mentioned the reported Lacluta massacre. In Jakarta however, Mr Whitlam did say that claims of atrocities were either false or grossly exaggerated. Whitlam based his claim on the fact that Mgr Lopes had not been to Lacluta and would not disclose his sources of the story. (15)

The obvious reason for not disclosing sources is that those people would face the danger of reprisals from the Indonesian government. Reports from a number of East Timorese other than Mgr Lopes have referred to a massacre at Lacluta. The actual number of deaths is not clear. A visitor to East Timor in November 1981 was told about 300 were killed (16). A person in Dili who has collected eye-witness accounts of events during last year's military operations reported: "One witness said 400 people were killed in one place in Lacluta; another said 20 trucks were used to take away the bodies as there were so many of them" (17). This same source has recorded a number of other incidents in the Lacluta area involving killings of East Timorese.

According to an Indonesian with army contacts, General Benny Murdani, overall commander of East Timor, is admitting at least 80 deaths at Lacluta. "This is the lowest number he can admit to" said the source. (18)

That there was a massacre in Lacluta last year seems certain. If Mgr Lopes' figure of 500 is too high, one wonders whether Mr Whitlam would concede that 80 deaths is worthy of some mention? Did Mr Whitlam ask to go to the site of the alleged massacre?

Not only has Mr Whitlam virtually ignored this massacre claim, but he has gone on to make the outright false statement that "the only source for allegations (of atrocities, corruption, exploitation of the local people).. in any of the Australian media, is this letter from the Monsignor in Dili."

This is nonsense. Members of Jakarta's own government structure in Dili presented a report to President Suharto last year in which complaints were made about atrocities and corruption (see TIS 32&34). Peter Hastings has conceded that many of the claims in this report are probably true. Many letters from East Timor and testimony of refugees have told of gross mistreatment of the population by the Indonesian army. Mr Whitlam's statement is astonishing.

TIS Comment

Two obvious questions can be asked. Why were Gough Whitlam and Peter Hastings invited by the Indonesian government to go to East Timor at this time and what are the likely consequences of Mr Whitlam's statements?

Senate Inquiry worries Jakarta

There is little doubt that the immediate reason for the Indonesian government's invitation to Whitlam and Hastings to visit Timor concerns the forthcoming Australian Senate inquiry. The Indonesian government would not welcome Senate inquiry findings contrary to its own propaganda on the situation in East Timor. Such findings could badly damage Jakarta's campaign for international support for its forced integration of the territory.

Jakarta can refuse permission for the Senate Committee to visit East Timor but it cannot stop the inquiry. The obvious tactic then is to try to weaken or divide the Committee by ensuring strongly contradictory evidence is submitted. Within this strategy, Jakarta would prefer that strongly pro-integration submissions came from non-Indonesian sources.

Mr Whitlam is an uncompromising defender of integration; Peter Hastings has had long, close connections with Jakarta and while opposed to Indonesian intervention in 1974, now defends the integration. Both were potentially safe choices for Jakarta's aims. Within the Australian context, however, neither are seen as "impartial" or "independent" witnesses. That Jakarta still admits only actual or potential friends into East Timor is testimony that the government is not confident its claims will survive critical scrutiny.

Whether or not Jakarta was expecting Gough Whitlam's extraordinary attack on Mgr Lopes and other clergy in East Timor remains unclear. It certainly would have seen these attacks as a bonus.

What consequences ?

Whether or not the Whitlam/Hastings findings do significantly affect the Senate Committee's findings remains to be seen. In broader terms, their findings have certainly not settled the controversy about conditions in East Timor - the opposite has occurred. The pro-integration journal, Far Eastern Economic Review entitled its account of their statements as "feeding the flames". (19)

Strategists in Jakarta who want to get rid of Monsignor Lopes, will use Mr Whitlam's intemperate statements to discredit the head of the Dili Church. Australian apologists for integration will use Mr Whitlam's ill-founded judgements to discredit "Church sources" of information from East Timor.

Jakarta wants Monsignor Lopes removed, not because he tells lies as Mr Whitlam claims, but because he is prepared to speak out against the crimes and other results of the Indonesian occupation. Anxious to win influence with the other clergy and, in particular, the East Timorese population, Jakarta cannot act directly against Mgr Lopes. It hopes (and encourages) the Vatican will solve this 'problem'. Ironically, Mr Whitlam's outbursts may work against this strategy. According to Far Eastern Economic Review journalist Susumu Awanohara, writing from Jakarta:

"Whitlam's attack on Lopes angered some who found it totally unconvincing and dismayed others who felt it was unnecessary. Some who have been involved in East Timor were worried that by alienating the Catholic leaders who are in close touch with the mostly Catholic population, Jakarta may create for itself a greater problem of communication with the Timorese" (20)

Mr Hastings' conclusion that "Timor's priest's remain the conscience of a whole people" cannot be easily ignored by the Vatican.

There is a third question that could be asked. Why is Mr Whitlam maintaining this 'high profile' on East Timor? According to Awanohara, "most observers seem to agree that Whitlam was rationalising his 1975 position of supporting the Indonesian annexation of East Timor." Perhaps, but is it rational to attempt to defend one's own place in history by making claims which are so easily refuted?

Sources/Footnotes

1. "Gough Whitlam: the truth about Timor" in Bulletin 30 March 1982 p. 79-81.
2. Interview was broadcast on ABC Radio, Melbourne, 26 March 1982.
3. Copy of letter held by TIS. All Australian media carried stories in mid-January about an ACR press release which drew on material in Mgr Lopes' letter,
4. Letter from Patrick Johns, director of CRS in Jakarta, to Bishop Broderick, director of CRS in New York, 1 February 1982. Copy held by TIS was distributed by the Indonesian embassy in Canberra as a Press Release dated 5 March 1982, under the heading "No famine in East Timor".
5. BBC Indonesia Service, 2315 GMT transmission, 26 November 1981.
6. Quoted by Whitlam in the Bulletin, 30 March 1982. This was also widely reported in the Indonesia press in early March.
7. Telephone conversation, Jakarta, 6 March 1982 - as reported to J. Waddingham.
8. Information reported in Kompas and Sinar Harapan, Jakarta, 5 March 1982.
9. Contacts made with ICRC office in Jakarta in early March and early April. The same advice was given on both occasions. Private communications.
10. See Patrick Walsh's article on the Whitlam/Hastings visit in Arena no. 60, April 1982. TIS no. 36 will also offer critical comment on Hastings' interpretations of present-day East Timor.
11. See "Timor: aid needed but there's no famine", P. Hastings, Sydney Morning Herald 6 March 1982.
12. See "Irritated Indonesia leaves corn on docks", P. Hastings, Sydney Morn. Herald 8 March 1982.
13. Letters seen by TIS - latest one dated 8 March 1982. Letters speak generally of shortages but do not specify places.
14. Document held by TIS, source not for publication.
15. Reported in the Age, 6 March 1982.
16. Private communication, 8 December 1981; source not for publication.
17. Document from East Timor - no date (late 1981) - held by TIS. Source not for publication.
18. Private communication, Jakarta, 17 March 1982. Source not for publication.
19. "Feeding the flames" by Susumu Awanohara in Far Eastern Economic Review, March 19, 1982. This astute piece is worth reading.
20. *Ibid.*

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