

## East Timor revisited

In a previous article on East Timor, I briefly discussed Canada's support for Indonesia throughout its genocidal occupation of that former Portuguese colony. One aspect of that support I would like to consider more closely here is Canada's response to United Nations initiatives to terminate the occupation and the explanation put forward by External Affairs in defense of this policy.

Even a cursory look into the matter provides some insight into the sincerity of the government's professed commitments to peace-keeping, human rights and international law and helps us to understand what induced East Timorese observer Jose Ramos Horta to refer to Canada as, "One of the most hypocritical countries in the world."

As mentioned in the last article, Canada, like the United States, Britain and other western countries, in effect legitimized the annexation of East Timor not only through financial support, trade and military sales to Indonesia since the 1975 invasion, but also through its refusal to support East Timor's right to self-determination at the United Nations. Canada abstained from the first General Assembly resolutions calling on Indonesia to observe international law and withdraw from East Timor, and from 1980 on, voted against all similar resolutions. Parliamentarians for East Timor even charge Canada with lobbying to have the issue removed from the U.N. agenda.

A few things should be borne in mind when attempting to put these policies in context. First, that the resolutions were drawn up in response to one of the most flagrantly illegal and murderous acts of international aggression in this century which, by the time Canada began voting against the resolutions condemning it, had become near genocidal. Second, that as a signatory to the U.N. Charter, Canada has pledged its commitment to the articles in it, which are founded primarily upon principles of respect for human rights, the sanctity of internationally recognized borders and

the right of all peoples to self-determination.

There can be no question that these general principles, along with several specific articles of the Charter, one of which guarantees the right of self-determination to former colonies, and virtually every article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have been directly violated by Indonesian aggression which so far has killed about a third of the total population of East Timor.

So why, in the case of such an unambiguous violation of international law, did Canada refuse to support the victim of this violation?

Having put this question to the External Affairs ministers of the previous and present administrations, I was informed that Canada could not support the "tone" of these resolutions, which it regarded as "extreme," "unreasonable," and "anti-Indonesian." This is an interesting claim.

### ...the face of genocide in East Timor...

In resolution 3845, the first resolution on the question of Timor, the General Assembly expresses itself with considerable temperance (considering the nature of the crimes being addressed) and, with the customary diplomatic formalities says it is "gravely concerned" about the situation in East Timor, names the articles violated by the invasion, urges "all states to respect the territorial integrity of East Timor as well as the inalienable right of its people to self-determination in accordance with General Assembly resolution 1514 (xv)," and "calls upon the government of Indonesia to withdraw without delay all its forces from the territory."

In short, the resolution simply called upon Indonesia to abide by international law, hardly an extreme or unreasonable demand one would suppose. But then it should be remembered that it is not the content of the resolution — a mere irrel-

evance it seems since External Affairs made no reference to it whatsoever — but the *tone* which Canada objected to, so that what might appear to be a clear question of justice, human rights, treaty commitment and terrible human suffering, is actually a very subtle one of diplomatic etiquette. (Curiously, a slightly different criterion seems to have been operative when Canada supported a much more strongly worded Security Council resolution condemning Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, a tea party compared to the terrible atrocities in East Timor," to borrow a phrase of Chomsky's.)

But this of course is nonsense as External Affairs must be very well aware, since it did not provide the least hint as to what the extremity and unreasonableness of the resolutions consisted in.

As to the ludicrous charge that they were "anti-Indonesian," this indicates the real desperation to which the department was driven in trying to devise palatable pretexts. One can imagine a lawyer for Clifford Olsen arguing in similar vein that, while he admitted the defendant's guilt on all charges, he could not accept the court's sentence, though perfectly consistent with the criminal code, because it was extreme and anti-Olsenian.

At any rate, since External Affairs did not specify the substance of their objections to the U.N. resolutions on East Timor, one is forced to draw one's own inferences. And since there is nothing in them that is at all inconsistent with the purposes, principles and articles of the Charter, the obvious conclusion is that Canada objects to the Charter itself, perhaps because it fails to grant absolute impunity to international gangsters and mass murderers who cater to our trading interests.

Needless to say such a conclusion cannot be articulated since it is not quite consistent with our illustrious peace-keeping image or with our fervent public protestations of commitment to the rule of law in international affairs and to human rights — making them indeed look very much

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like mere cynical posturing — and might disturb a public that naively place these commitments somewhat above corporate prerogatives.

Therefore the government must rely upon such inane and transparent pretexts as those we have just looked at on the one hand, and upon the servility of the national media on the other to prevent the real issues

from being widely known and debated. The fact that Canada has managed to pursue its pro-Indonesia policies to this day in the face of the genocide in East Timor indicates that this strategy has served its purpose admirably until now.

Whether it will continue to do so is for us to determine.

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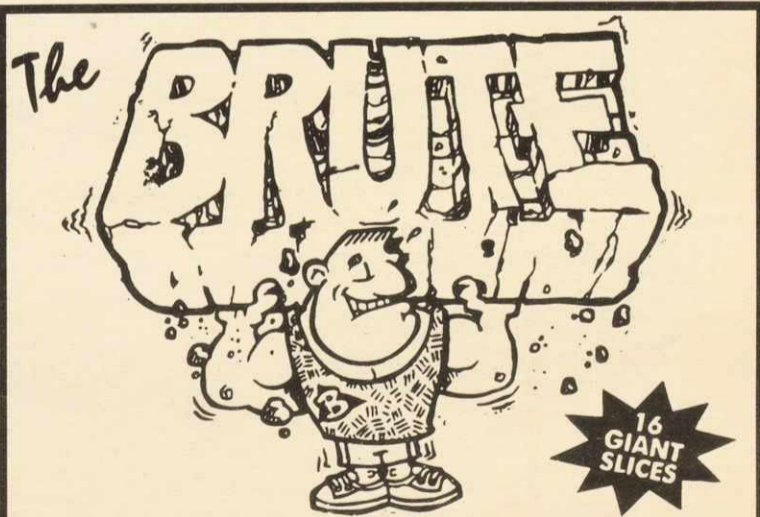


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