

opinions

Modern day East Timor holocaust ignored

Culpability for political inaction of citizens under a government committing or supporting large scale violations of human rights is directly proportionate to the degree of political freedom those citizens possess.

Under very repressive governments where the cost of dissidence is extremely high, say in Guatemala or China, an unwillingness to speak openly against government policy is understandable and excusable, the more so as these costs often extend to the dissenter's family and associates.

While we greatly admire those courageous and really heroic individuals who voluntarily incur such costs (often amounting to imprisonment, torture, and death) for reasons of conscience, it would be absurd to presume to criticize on moral grounds those incapable of ignoring the bludgeon poised above their heads.

By the same formula, however, in relatively free societies (where the cost of dissent is much lower and comparatively minimal — in western democracies for example), every citizen is to some extent implicated in every government crime s/he fails to oppose.

Thus when Noam Chomsky described the genocide in East Timor as "the most obscene abandonment of world moral order since the Holocaust," he was referring, not merely to the Indonesian atrocities themselves but also and primarily to the support of western nations and, by extension, the failure of the citizens of those nations to condemn this support.

Chomsky's remark should occasion us in Canada some very serious reflection as our government has been among the most complicitous in these atrocities. Before looking at the nature and extent of this complicity, a few words on the tragedy in East Timor itself are perhaps in order.

Indonesia, under president Suharto, invaded East Timor on December 7, 1975, in direct contravention of international law, and immediately began massacring the population. It is estimated that within six weeks 100,000 people were murdered. In the nineteen years that have followed, at least 250,000 Timorese (more than one third of the original population) have been killed — "...a death rate at least double that in Pol Pot's killing fields," to quote Dave Todd.

Indonesian forces have employed rape, torture, imprisonment, starvation, and murder on a vast scale in

their abortive attempts to crush the indomitable spirit of this valiant and fiercely independent people.

In a harrowing documentary by British journalist Max Stahl entitled "In Cold Blood" (aired on CBC in 1992), the narrator tells of whole villages being destroyed, of children having their brains smashed out against stones, of the infirm and elderly burned alive in their homes, of pregnant women having their stomachs slashed open, of people chained together in large numbers, laid out on the road and crushed beneath tractors, and other abominations equally horrible to relate.

And these are only a few of the countless crimes against humanity committed by Indonesian forces in their war of extermination against the almost completely defenseless citizens of East Timor in the past two decades.



We stand aghast before such horrors and naturally, if naively, ask how they can occur. In a post-Holocaust world, a world where human rights are enshrined in international conventions and treaties, signed and purportedly enforced by the most powerful governments on earth, by governments capable of bringing a country the size of Indonesia to its knees in a matter of weeks, by those same governments, moreover, which are most vociferous in proclaiming their commitment to these documents and to the principles on which they are based, how can genocide be allowed to occur?

Answer: because these same government are busy supporting and profiting from it. So much for the new world order. Consider Canada's behaviour (which, incidentally, almost exactly parallels that of the U.S.) in this regard.

Canada abstained from the U.N. resolution condemning the massacres and calling on Indonesia to withdraw from East Timor, voted against

a similar resolution in 1980, consistently voted against all succeeding resolutions, and even, according to parliamentarians for East Timor, a London-based, non-partisan organization, actively lobbied to have the issue removed from the U.N. agenda.

Fully cognizant of the situation in East Timor, Canada has also sold extensive military equipment to Indonesia throughout its occupation, including ammunition, military vehicles, transport planes and helicopter engines. The Department of External Affairs even hosted an arms bazaar in the capital in 1984. However, as if these policies were insufficient tokens of Canada's commitment to human rights, we also made Indonesia the second largest recipient of our foreign aid.

The justifications offered by the Department of External Affairs for these policies range from the irrelevant: "...we could not support the extreme tone of that [U.N.] resolution"; to the Orwellian: "...it is the line of action most likely to increase Indonesia's willingness to allow access to East Timor by international humanitarian organizations."

Fortunately, the real incentives are not too difficult to discern. To quote Adam Zachary: "Indonesia is a key player in the Pacific Rim trade initiative and has been specifically targeted for attention in Canada's national trade strategy... Canada enjoys more than a three to one trade advantage with Indonesia exchanging over \$290 million in exports and about \$70 million in imports... Canadian officials are hardly eager to jeopardize harmonious political and trading relations by rebuking Indonesia in the United Nations."

So, on one side of the scale we place our commitment to international law, to the U.N. charter, to human rights, to democracy, to liberty, and in fact, to the principles and ideals which are at the heart of any civilization worthy of the name, together with the unutterable misery caused by twenty years of Indonesian atrocities, the 250,000 or so corpses they have created, and the continuing suffering of the people of East Timor.

And on the other side we place a small percentage of Canada's economic interests. What seasoned pragmatist in Ottawa could hesitate, knowing that in international politics a half-ounce of interest outweighs a metric tonne of principle and human misery? What we as citizens in whose name these policies are being implemented — for that is what de-

mocracy means — should consider very seriously is how comfortable we feel being made parties to this insane pragmatism and its consequences. It may have been possible to evade this question in the past as irresponsible media have chosen to withhold the issue from public scrutiny, but no longer.

The continuous and untiring efforts of such dedicated and conscientious activists as Elaine Briere in Canada, Arnold Kohen in the U.S., Max Stahl in England, and many others who are committed to the democratic ideals we all profess, have brought the facts of the East Timor tragedy to light. By failing to act upon this knowledge we further implicate ourselves in Indonesian crimes since this inaction is crucial

to our country's continuing complicity in them.

Of course, we may willfully choose not to face these unpleasant facts, to leave the unfortunate Timorese to their fate with a shrug of the shoulders, a few pious reflections on the nature of man, etc., and return to our favourite diversions.

We may "insulate ourselves from this grim reality," in Chomsky's words.

"By so doing," he continues, "we sink to a level of cowardice and moral depravity that has few counterparts in the modern world, and we also help to fan the flames that will lead to a conflagration that will, very possibly engulf us as well."

Brooks Kind

Ask Joe and Jo

We decided to write this article on some of the computers you can use on-campus if you're too broke to head down to PCPC to buy your own. Except once we were down there, we found an entirely new issue to rant and rave about. DEBIT CARDS!!!

The Academic Computer Centre is located in the basement of the Killam Library (also known as the large rat maze experiment done by the psychology department). Mac labs, PC labs, computer-student-only labs — it's enough to make us blow our chips! We, having done our first draft, go to print it up.

The girl behind the desk (says in one breath):

"You can only print off the laser printer and that will cost you twenty cents a page but you have to buy a debit card first that will only cost you a dollar and then go over to that little machine on the wall with the green writing on it and put your money in. It only takes bills and no change is returned; no, we do not have change. What computer were you on?"

We, of course, gave the only response that two reasonably intelligent Dal students could — "The middle one, somewhere over there!"

She scowled, we shrugged, it was computer hell.

Turns out, we were at computer 4 that was actually labelled computer 2, and spent three bucks to get one lousy page printed on a laser printer. If you ask us, THAT SUCKS!

Once we got away from there (thankfully still alive), we decided to stick all of our plastic on the table. (Gas cards obtained after applying for free tupperware did not count.) All we could see was a mountain of debit cards. We could have melted it down to make chest molds of Dolly Parton.

This is what our two wallets contained: three from the Killam, one from the Tupper, two from the SUB, one from the Chemistry resource centre, and our new (and beloved) one from the Crazy Computer Cave.

If you put our deposit money together you could put both of our respective first-born children through school (at the current tuition fees increases!). Well... you could at least buy a lunch from Beaver.

The question is — WHY? Why can't this school get it together enough so that we only have to buy one debit card (that we probably will never use again) for all of our photocopying/printing needs?

Stand up, speak out! This debit card crap bites and we don't want to take it anymore! Does your wallet change the course of the tides through it's whacked out mass of magnetic striping? We've had to stay away from all heavy metals as they tend to come flying.

That's it. Now you know. If you want to have something printed up at the Killam Computer Centre, find some poor sap who has already wasted their three cups of coffee worth, and get them to print for you.

Anything that you want to tell us, want to hear about, want to ask — we'll find out what you want to know. Just ask Joe and Jo.

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