

East Timor: The hidden Cambodia

by Alan Christensen

The suffering of my people is deep and intense. Not one corner of their lives has been left unscarred by Indonesia's forced and unwanted attempt at integration. Lack of food and medicine are not the only humanitarian problems in Timor. Any attempt to address the problem in these terms alone, to reduce East Timor to a mere question of material aid and money, is both naive and unjust.

*Fr. Francisco Fernandes,
Honorary Chairperson,
East Timorese Refugees
Commission in Portugal*

While the attention of the world was focused on the starvation and genocide in Cambodia, there was a massacre of similar proportions taking place on the island of Timor in the East Indies. It is estimated that between 1975 and 1980 at least 50,000 (10% of the population) and perhaps as much as 300,000 people (one half of the population) died either through direct fighting or through the famine that accompanied the fighting there. The facts surrounding these events seem to implicate not only Indonesia, but also the many countries which chose to ignore the events on this tiny island until it was too late for many of the dying Timorese.

The island of Timor was originally divided between the Netherlands and Portugal as a result of one of the many colonial wars of the 17th century. Western Timor thus became a part of the Indonesian Republic when it gained its independence from the Netherlands in 1949 while the eastern part of the island remained a Portuguese colony.

When Portugal started letting

go of its colonies in 1974 the question of East Timor's future status came up. By this time three major political groupings had been formed; one favored integration with Indonesia while two favored independence. In August of 1975 the leaders of one of the pro-independence groups, UDT, visited Jakarta, the Indonesian capital, to talk to the leaders of that country. The topics of those discussions have never been disclosed but within days of their return to East Timor there was a UDT coup.

The other pro-independence group, the Fretilin, announced that they would resist this coup and launched a counterattack. There followed a brief civil war in which the Fretilin emerged the victor. It was at this time that the Indonesian army started to become active along the border. In October they occupied three border towns, killing five Australian journalists in the process.

On November 8, 1975 Fretilin declared East Timor to be independent. A week and a half later Indonesian troops invaded East Timor and captured the capital city of Dili. Most of East Timor, however, remained in Fretilin hand all through 1976 as the war remained at a standstill.

The UN General Assembly condemned this invasion in a harshly worded resolution. The United States and Australia both supported the invasion although it has never been proven that they approved the invasion beforehand. The United States continued to supply arms to Indonesia. The Soviet Union and Vietnam here trying to get Indonesia's support in their attempt to oust the Cambodian representative to the UN, who was a Khmer Rouge, and replace him

with a representative of the pro-Vietnam puppet regime. Thus they were unwilling to back the Fretilin forces.

In 1977 and 1978 the Indonesians renewed their invasion with new vigour. The new offensive was carried out with much brutality according to international human rights observers. The Indonesian army engaged, according to American writer Noam Chomsky, "in a program of wholesale destruction, including massive bombardment, forced population removal, destruction of villages and crops, and all other techniques used by modern armies". At the same time all foreign observers including all relief agencies were banned from entering Timor.

This was followed up, according to Portuguese missionaries who had fled the island, by intense firebombing which lasted until 1979. This combination of attacks destroyed the croplands and thus the Timorese people's ability to feed themselves. At this point the mass starvation began. As a result over 200,000 people fled from the central part of the island and surrendered to the Indonesian forces. They were subsequently sent to some 150 "resettlement areas" which according to the South-East Asia Chronicle "are virtual concentration camps, because their inhabitants are not permitted to leave without permission of the Indonesian military". These camps also put people "in larger groups than was the Timorese tradition" according to NY Times journalist Henry Kamm and have been located such that the Timorese can easily be controlled by the Indonesian Military. This, he added, would make Timor permanently de-

pendant on food imports because according to Kamm's sources "the Timorese have traditionally been able to feed themselves only because they lived in small groups and farmed in all the arable valleys of the interior".

The full extent of the disaster was first recognized by the rest of the world late in 1978. It was only one year later when the first relief operations were allowed, to enter the country. Even then only two groups, the Catholic Relief Services and the International Committee of the Red Cross, were allowed to operate on the island. Both concentrated on providing relief to refugees in the "resettlement areas" under tight Indonesian control. The CRS has been accused by Australian relief agencies of "working as a sub-contractor to the US government implementing a government to government program on governmental terms." Other agencies including UNICEF, the Indonesian Council of Churches, the Australian Catholic Relief and OXFAM (London) were not permitted to operate.

Since last year the worst of the famine is over but the bulk of the Timorese population still lives in the "resettlement areas"

where they are unable to feed themselves and which they are not permitted to leave. The Fretilin still operates on a much smaller scale and has carried out several raids on Indonesian army posts and convoys.

The Indonesian government has declared an amnesty to all Fretilin members who would surrender to them but there are many reports which indicate that many Fretilin and other political detainees have been tortured and executed. Amnesty International USA chairperson David Hinkley testified that "Reports from a variety of sources, including US officials (off the record), describe summary executions of surrendering Fretilin guerrillas". He also testified that there are about 800 detainees in the Timorese capital alone and that there are at least 40 prisons on the entire island.

Thus we have a situation very similar to that of Cambodia in which an entire nation has been pushed to the brink of destruction by an ambitious neighbour. The main difference between East Timor and Cambodia is that while the situation in Cambodia received constant attention in 1979 and 1980, East Timor and its people were allowed to perish behind an almost universal wall of silence.

Publishers scared of libel

by Eric Eggertson
reprinted from the UBYSSEY
by Canadian University Press

Publishers in Canada are running scared in the face of expensive libel suits. Newspaper and book publishers, responding to a rash of suits costing thousands of dollars, are careful not to tread on potentially libellous ground.

"We don't have any interest in publishing something with libel possibilities," Jack McClelland, president of McClelland and Stewart, a major Canadian publishing company, said in a recent magazine interview. "Life is too short for publishing companies, and libel is too costly."

The future of investigative journalism in Canada comes into question when publishers won't publish sensitive material.

"If something like Watergate had happened in Canada, a smart paper would have hushed it up, because that would have opened them up to a libel suit," says UBC associate law professor Bill Black. "In Canada Nixon could have sued and they would

have had to bring Deep Throat to court to prove their case."

Under Canadian law, the party being sued must prove that what they said is true. Journalists must either reveal their sources or face possible jail sentences. American journalists however, can demand government documents to back up their cases under freedom of information legislation. Some Canadian writers obtain information in the U.S. that cannot legally be written or talked about in Canada.

Two books about the RCMP security service (SS) drew libel suits in the past few years, partly because of the sensitive political climate surrounding the Mounties. Until recently the SS was a secret organization, but Ian Adams' *S: Portrait of a Spy*, and John Sawatsky's *Men in the Shadows: the RCMP Security Service*, and a royal commission have brought it to the public's attention.

Writers and publishers rallied to Adams' support when he was sued for the alleged libellous content of his novel. In the 1977 novel, an SS agent is revealed to be a triple agent,

working for the CIA and the KGB. Adams and his publisher were sued for \$2.2 million by a former SS agent, Leslie James Bennett. Bennett alleged that he was recognizable as the triple agent S, and that his reputation was damaged by the book.

Adams and Gage, his publisher, settled out of court with Bennett. If the case had gone to court it might have set a precedent for libel suits against works of fiction.

"If you're writing fiction you take a real chance of referring to real people," Black said. Whether or not a book is fiction, a libel can take place. If a "reasonable person" thinks a story is about J.L. Bennett, Bennett can sue for libel.

A libel suit against a book has one immediate effect: that book goes out of circulation. Adams' novel came out in 1977. Due to its controversial subject it sold well — 15,000 copies in 40 days. But when Bennett began his suit the book was immediately withdrawn and has been unavailable since.

Former prostitute Wendy
continued on page 11

GRAD WEEK EVENTS

May 13, 14, 15

Wednesday

"Sail Away" Boat Cruise

\$4.00/person

Pub Night Stages 57

Thursday

Baccalaureate Service

Public Affairs Auditorium

Champagne Reception

Green Room \$1.00

Grad Night in the Grawood

"S.S. Celebration" Ball

Friday

\$15.00/couple

\$8.00 single

Tickets on sale

At the SUB
11:30-2:30

April 8, 9, 10, 15, 22.

May 11, 12, 13, 14, 15.