

DR - Report 1978

THE EAST TIMOR CAMPAIGN IN AUSTRALIA

prepared by
Robert Carter

Since late 1975, opinion polls and discussions with thousands of people have shown that almost all Australians were, and still are, sympathetic towards the people of East Timor and their right to self-determination. For some, this is a matter of simple human rights and horror of the invasion; for others still, it is a matter of supporting the social changes Fretilin has begun in East Timor, and for many older people, it arises from an acknowledgment of Australia's wartime debt to East Timor.

At the same time, the movements in support of Fretilin and East Timorese independence here - mainly the various Australia-East Timor Associations and Campaign for an Independent East Timor groups throughout the country have been unable to mobilize sufficient effective public power to stop the continual support for the invasion by the Australian Government.

The Fraser Liberal Government has, by series of cautious moves, initially completely abandoned its opposition to the war as it was expressed in Australia's vote in the U.N. General Assembly in December, 1975, to condemn the invasion and call for the withdrawal of troops. Now, the Australian Government has moved to the point of recognising de facto recognition of the Indonesian right of administration, and opened sea-boundary negotiations on that basis.

In the light of this contradiction between the sympathy of the people for East Timor and the role of the government in support of Indonesia, the relative failure of the Australian movement must be analyzed.

Most people in Australia believe that Indonesia controls East Timor and that East Timorese resistance has been crushed. This belief is very understandable. In Australia, unless an issue or event is consistently covered by the national mainstream press, radio and television, even those very sympathetic to that issue will be unaware of its progress.

To a certain extent, it doesn't matter if the coverage is negative, so long as it establishes the issue on the political map. No domestic or foreign policy issue in Australia has successfully mobilized large numbers of people - whether of the left or the mainstream - without large-scale press coverage.

East Timor figures in the press rarely - when the Australian government makes an announcement, e.g. de facto recognition, oil field discussions, etc., when the D.R.E.T. Information Officer, Chris Santos, holds a press conference, usually following some other event or announcement; when an A.E.T.A. group holds an effective demonstration, e.g. in Hobart, Tasmania, a demonstration of 500 protested recognition in January; or when an A.E.T.A. or C.I.E.T. group takes some action concentrating on the deaths of the Australian journalists in Balibo (on this, the press are always helpful). But, these are infrequent, unreliable and of limited impact.

What the press does not report is news of the continued fighting in East Timor as received from Radio Maubere. Apart from the more observant visitors to Indonesia who hear the truth (unpublished) there, this is the only source of true information about the war for Australians. Radio Maubere reports are published very, very rarely, whereas any Indonesian claim, e.g. of an 'amnesty' or of large-scale 'surrenders' of Fretilin forces - is given uncritical treatment.

Hence it is not surprising - though demoralising to us - that most people's sympathy cannot be mobilised because they simply do not know the truth.

The main reasons for the press blackout are fairly straightforward. Most working journalists are personally sympathetic to Fretilin and have responded well to contacts with its representatives; in the past Araujo, Ramos-Horta, etc., and at present, when he is given appropriate facilities, Chris Santos.

ETNA (The East Timor News Agency) has two arms; publishing the fortnightly East Timor News and distributing Fretilin/Radio Maubere news around the world (as a news agency). In fact, it has had very limited success and, in a number of ways, it has been counter-productive.

East Timor News has been very useful for members of A.E.T.A. and C.I.E.T. groups and the small number of outside subscribers, because it has regularly collected the most relevant press clippings (mainly from the Australian press), and summarised most of the recent Radio Maubere broadcasts. On the other hand, most people deeply involved in the issue also subscribe to the Timor Information Service (Melbourne) which is less frequent, but regarded as far more reliable. Similarly, in Melbourne, for example, the A.E.T.A. group has had a weekly radio program of very high standard.

info sent to CIA
E.T.N.A.'s work as a whole - agency work and newspaper publication - has not been successful in its most basic purpose; to disseminate news for East Timor in such a way as to raise sympathetic awareness amongst the Australian population as a whole and key political groups in particular.

The language of Radio Maubere broadcasts and East Timor News Agency stories is too rhetorical and imprecise for the credibility of most Australian journalists. Continual accounts of victory after victory are simply not believed, even by those who accept the basic Fretilin claim to control most of the territory.

There is concern and surprise amongst journalists and amongst some AETA/CIET members about the tendency of E.T.N.A. to attack all things Indonesian and to gleefully report any problems of the Indonesian people as well as its government. The result is that people supporting East Timor are labelled as anti-Indonesian, and their views are not accorded credibility.

Equally, there is concern that E.T.N.A. is so readily and openly associated with so many Pacific and Melanesian and internal Indonesian nationalist groups. In most cases, people who support Fretilin would happily support these causes - e.g. in the New Hebrides, as West Papuan. In other cases, support for Fretilin suffers by a guilt by association, e.g. with the South Moluccan movement. We do not know Fretilin policy on the individual movements; what we are concerned about is the picture presented to the conservative Australian public, which includes many trade unionists, of a thoughtless support for any and every movement regardless of its relevance to the struggle of the people of East Timor, or indeed the desirability of the movement succeeding.

The direct link between Fretilin and the Communist Party of Australia through Denis Freney and E.T.N.A., is often mentioned by conservative (and moderate A.L.P.) politicians and journalists as a reason for not supporting Fretilin:

Example 1 A number of journalists (including those from the wire service) express that their editors will not use ETNA and telex material simply because it comes from the offices and telex of the C.P.A. newspaper, Tribune.

Example 2 The proposed Senate Inquiry into East Timor last year was thwarted by the successful attempt to link the C.P.A. and Fretilin.

Obviously, we deplore this type of thinking, but it is a very real and great barrier to the spread of material coming out of Radio Maubere.

ETNA must work inside an Australian movement which draws support from a wide range of political and community groups -

Elements of all political parties, many churches, some trade unions, student groups, some aid agencies and so on:

While ETNA cannot be all things to all people, it should take care not to deliberately attack those supporters it does not like. It should work with an eye to obtaining the greatest sympathy for the Australian public consistent with the aims of Fretilin and the movement as a whole in Australia.

These comments are critical of ETNA and Denis Freney. ETNA has been useful, but only to a limited point. By and large, it is not successful and, in some ways, harmful. These are matters of political judgment. Denis's dedication to Fretilin's cause and his continuing work are not questioned by most who have worked with him. The labor of producing the newspaper, transcribing tape-recordings under poor conditions, etc., increases the debt of all supporters to him. But, this acknowledgment of his great personal contribution should not stand in the way of an assessment of its actual effects.

We have stressed the pivotal role of the press because unless there is some drastic improvement there, nothing else will change for the moment. It is not just a question of attempting a mobilization across the broad population; even to get the usually sympathetic left groups moving - e.g. trade unions and students - requires much better press coverage of the war (via Radio Maubere) than at present.

Recommendations concerning news media:

1. Reports from East Timor should be sent direct to Chris Santos and released by him in form appropriate to the media.
2. There is a need for a fortnightly coverage of all East Timor news in a journal which is edited by Chris Santos, as an official organ of Fretilin.

This would require funds to be provided to support Chris Santos, finance despatch and transcription of reports from Radio Maubere and other Fretilin sources and to produce the journal.

Attached is a draft budget covering these costs.

*Do not release
some
TV*

*All 2 media
to be covered
+ Books
etc*

Australia is a politically divided country. It is essentially conservative though sympathetic of the issue of East Timor. A variety of strategies are needed to reach the different potential sources of support. The approach to one section of the population should not exclude the possibility of approaches to others. We have to live with the fact that any support for Fretilin will come from an alliance of diverse groups.

In the past, there has been too great a reliance on the badly over-worked organisations of the left. These have not been effective. Moreover, exclusive emphasis on the left has reacted against Fretilin in other areas of political support.

In the current political climate, the ability of those antagonists to Fretilin to point towards the CPA's alleged dominance has cost Fretilin dearly. As we have said, even with the CPA involvement (particularly through Denis Freney), the left itself has been poorly organised.

Trade Unions:

A broad political base for support of Fretilin must include active participation from rank and file unionists and their officials. This does not exist to-day. After our difficulties with the press, it is our single most costly failing. While many unions are 'left', many are not. The failing has been that, with two exceptions, not even the left wing unions have been effectively organised either in Victoria or N.S.W.

Through Denis Freney's and the CPA's early support for Fretilin, a number of unions have been identified with the cause of East Timor for a long time. However, the actual level of support (in terms of effects) has never been very great except for a very brief period around the time of the invasion. Now, there are no black bans or stoppages whatsoever. A few unions have been very generous financially in the past; many have made nominal contributions only. Little can be expected in the near future because of their general financial problems and broad lack of interest. Union members (and most of their leaders) are like most members of the population - without press information, the

Unions vary in their political character and it has mainly been the left unions in the past that have provided support. Even that is now minimal in real terms, despite a series of political resolutions passed by various unions.

But, two left-wing unions have been consistent in their support for Fretilin - the Seamen's Union and the Waterside Workers Federation. Under pressure from the A.C.T.U., employers and government, they recently reluctantly abandoned their bans on Indonesian shipping. While these bans were usually ineffective because goods to Indonesia were sent on non-Indonesian ships, it was an important symbolic gesture. Now that has gone. These unions continue to give important financial support for AETA and the DRET Office.

CPA influence is extensive in some areas, in some unions, but despite this and the small number of CPA (but important) members involved in the East Timor campaign, the party does not seem to have been very effective in its handling of the issue. We have dwelt at length on the counterproductive side of its involvement. Its early, positive contributions must be remembered. But, it is hard to see what it is doing positively to-day. In the unions, no other element in CIET/AETA can equal its potential influence, but relatively little has been achieved by it recently. Some have suggested that it is de facto CPA policy that East Timor will not be a mass political issue in Australia, and accordingly members ought not to over-emphasize its political potential. We do not know the truth of this, but we cannot see that current CPA involvement is proving very effective.

Again, we would stress that the CPA is not the only organisation relevant to the unions - e.g. the ALP. The situation will only improve when the rank and file in the unions press their leaders about East Timor; vice-versa, the leaders have to be mobilized to realise potential amongst rank and file. Here the information role of the press and the credibility of Fretilin's news sources are central. No one of them is sufficient, but all are necessary to change.

In the Australian political context, it is the middle ground that exerts influence; continuing 'middle ground' interest in the East Timorese struggle and support that has been largely due to the statements and activities of organisations and individuals who are not regarded as being to the political left or are seen to be non-political.

ALP

The Australian Labor Party was initially inhibited by Whitlam's role and the lack of party interest that made it possible for him to make one-man decisions that were pro-Indonesia and anti-East Timor.

Almost all ALP Parliamentary members, National and State Committees and party branches support East Timorese independence. For a long time, they were silent because they were vulnerable to accusations that their party took no action to prevent Indonesian aggression. This is now past history and as the Liberal Government is also guilty about its lack of principle over East Timor and its failure to make any stand against Indonesia, the 'guilty past' of both parties have cancelled out the "you were to blame" argument.

Under Bill Hayden's leadership and with a new shadow ministry, the ALP is united and willing to advocate a stronger Australian stand.

The ALP has also been inhibited by the 'left's' commitment and apparent leadership in the East Timor Campaign. To be identified with an issue that the extreme left supports is to be open to the accusation that the ALP is 'left' itself. This is an accusation that the Liberal Party is quick to make and it is electorally damaging to the ALP.

Within the ALP Parliamentary Labor Party, there is a small committed group of members who have kept the issue alive, although hampered by the taint of it being a left issue alone. Denis

*10-0000000000
with courts leading
to Kerr's coup*

The Liberal Party

Although the reality of not offending Indonesia predominates, there is a reasonably strong and growing support for the view that East Timor should not have been betrayed and that it is not in Australia's long term interest to continually appease Indonesia.

It is also apparent that a bitter struggle continues in East Timor, much to the surprise of those who assumed Indonesia would overcome East Timor in a matter of months. The realisation that the issue has not disappeared, and will not, in the middle term future means there is an opportunity for strengthening the Liberal Party position.

The number of vocal, committed pro-East Timor Liberal Party members has increased. As with the ALP, this has been largely due to the respect which Chris Santos has gained, and to his approach in sustaining and extending the interest of members of Parliament. In a recent visit to Canberra, Chris Santos was able to meet several leading members of the Government parties and received a sympathetic hearing.

This widening of support is again hampered by the left association, exaggerated and unreal as the accusation may be.

ICT, ~~UNIA~~

ACFOA, CAA, Catholic Bishops' Commissions:

The Australian Council for Overseas Aid, Community Aid Abroad, Catholic Bishops Commission for Peace and Justice have all sustained a keen interest in East Timor, despite the fact that this has resulted in them being labelled by some as 'red'.

The ACFOA Commission of Enquiry into East Timor is expected to report soon. Its report may not break new ground, but it will help to make the issue of East Timor more acceptable to many people as well as sustaining public interest.

These organisations have a potential for broadening support and activity amongst people not reached by the traditional left. Here an awareness of the diversity of groups supporting Fretilin means that over-emphasis or over-identification with one faction will frighten away others. The conservative base of these aid organisations means that they are very vulnerable if they are charged with too close an association with left groups.

A systematic report on the groups ought to come from the groups themselves. These comments are based on our experience and limited knowledge, mainly in the Victorian AETA, which is the most active.

AETA (Vic.) last year conducted public meetings with MP's and unionists, a number of small rallies, a 24-hour vigil commemorating the deaths of the Australian journalists, a travelling photographic show, many film evenings and speaking engagements to political party branches, union branches and community groups (including prisons). It held rallies commemorating Fretilin's special occasions, public meetings with Chris Santos about the arrest of Xavier de Amaril; public meetings with trade unionists. The media group broadcasts a highly-rated radio program on the community radio station every week; Timor Information Service continued to publish its excellent bi-monthly report; financial support for the DRET Office was regularized through the DRET Office fund; an AETA Centre distributing books and information had a turnover of \$8,000; ETNA's were distributed to members; during the election campaign in December, many meetings of candidates were picketed and leafletted (including Andrew Peacock's!) and a survey of Victoria, particularly candidates showing majority support for East Timor and Fretilin was conducted and publicised.

More has happened in 1978. Refugee groups and AETA and CAA conducted joint fund-raising concerts.

However, this list gives a slightly false impression. A lot happened, but it was the intense work of a small number of people that achieved it. (Some of the people that must be mentioned: Jill Jolliffe, Bill Roberts, George Preston, Rod Harris, John Waddingham, Helen Hill, Natalie Savin - and a lot more we cannot mention quickly).

Membership seems to have stopped falling at about 150 paid-up members and is beginning to rise due to systematic organisation. However, the actual members and participating members is much smaller when it comes to organising a new event (Again, this has been greatly improved recently).

The Victorian AETA has been concerned about its effectiveness for some time, particularly in two areas; the press and trade union work. A working class union and ALP base is essential, but as pointed out elsewhere, this will not come about without a change, i.e. press and national parliamentary treatment. One will lead the other and vice versa. At the moment, both are weak.

A proposed National Timor Activists' meeting in Canberra did not take place in February. However, in January, many ET, CIET/AETA activists met at a conference in Hobart organised by ACFOA. A demonstration of 500 was held in the centre of Hobart addressed by the Shadow Foreign Minister, a number of Victorian AETA members (Hill, Tanter & O'Sullivan) and church representatives. It became clear at the conference that the Victorian AETA was probably the most active in the country. If this is true, it is extremely depressing.

Canberra CIET and AETA (ACT) have merged into one organisation and seem to have gained some new life. Little is known about Brisbane. Perth is beginning to revive, although it is very small. Adelaide has a small, but consistent organisation.

Duram

CIET (Sydney) has been almost completely identified with Denis Freney and ETNA. We know little about the operations, but reports suggest it has small numbers and a limited range of effectiveness.

This very brief report also illustrates the lack of national consultation between groups - this is partly due to lack of resources, but also due to a tendency to factional and destructive criticism. Denis Freney, on several very influential occasions, has passed beyond constructive criticism of others' political judgment and action to a destructive personal attack.

These attacks are usually extremely bitter, loaded with unproven innuendo and have the effect of smearing and de-authorising that person in the Timor movement (e.g. the attacks on Jill Jolliffe and Sue Nichterlein). In some of these cases, there may have been grounds for criticism, and feelings of concern may have been voiced by others - but these destructive, smearing, personal attacks have been responsible for a widespread mistrust between groups, and of Denis Freney. This has undermined the possibility of co-operation.

The DRET Office:

Visits to Australia by Ministers Araujo and Ramos-Horta and others laid a good foundation for the DRET Information Officer, Chris Santos. When his circumstances allowed, he has demonstrated his effectiveness with a wide range of politically relevant groups here - journalists, union officials and MP's from both sides.

His official relations with these people and their organisations are often based on warm personal friendship.

However, he has been severely harassed by his circumstances. Firstly, financial. The DRET Office Fund is committed to supplying him with approximately \$150 a week. For a short time, this target was attained, but recently, the target has not been reached. Most AETA/CIET groups around the country are pledged to support the Fund. Some have not been able to reach their pledge targets. Usually, the deficit has been made up by private individuals from their own pockets.

AETA (Vic.), for example, gives about \$150 a month, but a number of its members give privately in generous amounts.

Even if the DRET Office Fund can maintain its target level of support, \$150 a week is not sufficient to support Chris Santos and his family (at a time of high unemployment in Australia), and run a proper information office. Santos has had several difficulties with office space in the past, and was recently evicted from the Australian Union of Students' Offices following a legal challenge. In any case, he has been without a telephone at either work or home for almost 9 months. He does not drive a car. He does not have funds to travel widely or hold the necessary official DRET meetings for diplomatic and government and press people. He has no office operating expenses or equipment.

At the time, local AETA/CIET funds are stretched beyond capacity and may decline.

These financial difficulties are very debilitating. The lack of e.g. a telephone, makes the job of dealing with the press on a continuing day-to-day basis almost impossible. Moreover, the insecurity about his family's future, his visa and support from Fretilin makes the whole situation worse.

We strongly recommend a much higher living allowance and expense allowance for Chris Santos than at present. This will not resolve all difficulties, but it will begin to clear the way. The relationship between Chris Santos and Denis Freney must be clarified, and we believe, re-arranged.

We have recommended that all Radio Maubere news reports become official Fretilin news releases from the DRET Information Officer. Appropriate funding must be provided for this.

We have recommended also that the DRET Information Officer publish a fortnightly diplomatic review for distribution to government, diplomatic and press people. This review could be internationally circulated as well and be regarded as a reliable English language source of DRET and Fretilin information, news and policy.

In conclusion, we feel that the support groups for Fretilin are facing their last chance of broad success. It is possible to mobilize many people in Australia, to influence our government and others. There is an opportunity.

To achieve this, the campaign will have to use different approaches to the variety of groups here supporting Fretilin. No one must predominate, but there must be a clear and deliberate strategy based on the realities of Australia.

*Systematic contact
with refugees?*

Enc.

- David Scott
Richard Tanter

23-3-78

APPENDIX

DRAFT BUDGET FOR DRET INFORMATION OFFICE

1. Producing frequent news releases for the Australian press, including Radio Maubere reports.
2. A fortnightly semi-diplomatic review (4 pages).

Items:

1. Living Allowance (Chris Santos) - \$180 per week. This is \$30 below the average male wage (\$9,000 p.a.)
2. Publication and printing - current rates with sympathetic printer, using offset press and assuming typesetting done by DRET Information Office, \$2,000. *ETVA.*
3. Stationery and photocopying facilities - photocopying, essential for rapid production of news releases, \$500.
4. Postage - Calculations based on 25¢ x 200 for fortnightly review = \$50 per fortnight; \$15 per press release. Total = \$1,300 p.a. This could vary depending on postal concessions.
5. Typing and typesetting - Assuming access to a good quality electric typewriter and typist; this can be done in the Information Office. Half person per week, \$3,500.
6. Rent - depends on location of office (e.g. combined office and home?) Minimum for office = \$30 p.w. = \$1,600 p.a.
7. Equipment - Adequate second-hand electric typewriter, at best \$500. Typesetting and layout equipment, etc. \$100, initially.
8. Funds for 28th November and 20th May commemorations. Last November, this was not done because CS felt DRET (& not AETA) should provide the funds for such occasions. These were not available) \$300.
9. Newspaper subscriptions, \$300.
10. Telex facilities. Entirely dependent on type of use envisaged, e.g. distribution of releases by telex to news agencies and newspapers?

Costs:

Living allowance	\$9,400
Publications & Printing	2,000
Stationery & photocopying	500
Postage	1,300
Telephones/telegrams	800
Typing, etc.	3,500
Rent	1,600
Equipment (initial)	600
Newspaper subs.	300
28th November/20th May	<u>250</u>
	<u>\$20,250</u>