

# Revisiting the Scott-Tanter secret 1978 assessments on the state of the East Timor campaign in Australia and on the question of FRETILIN negotiations

Richard Tanter

Presentation to the International Workshop Solidarity with Timor-Leste struggle for Self-determination, Actors, Institutions, Contexts, 16 a 19 de maio de 2022, Fundação Oriente, em cujo Museu do Oriente, Lisboa.

18 May 2022

Email – [rtanter@nautilus.org](mailto:rtanter@nautilus.org)

<https://nautilus.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Tanter-Lisbon-presentation-v1.pdf>

# Outline

1. Introduction and explanation: this is autobiography, reflections, and a call for serious historical work.
2. The main documents discussed in this presentation (available on my Nautilus Institute site [here](#)).
3. Introducing David Scott and Richard Tanter, '[The East Timor Campaign in Australia](#)', 23 March 1978 – the origins and purpose
4. Introducing David Scott and Richard Tanter, '[Independence in East Timor — a new view from Australia](#)', March 1978
5. Two public autobiographical accounts of the 1978 events in Maputo, East Timor and Australia – Freney and Scott
6. And at we didn't know: Introducing Denis Freney, '[Report on my trip... 7.11.78](#)'
7. Reflections on the role of foreigners in solidarity movements
8. Aftermath

# 1. Introduction and explanation

- From mid-December 1975 to February 1977 I worked together with Sue Roff as assistants to Jose Ramos-Horta and Mari Alkatiri as the DRET/Fretilin office in New York, mainly focused on the United Nations. In 1977 I returned to Australia and became chair of the Australia-East Timor Association (Victoria), the largest Timor solidarity group at the time. In both roles I worked closely with David Scott, who had established the NY DRET office a week after the invasion.
- **This presentation deals with two sets of events in the Australian Timor solidarity movement during an intense period in 1978-79.** The core purpose is to introduce three documents that were written in 1978 without the knowledge of almost all of the leading East Timor activists at the time.
- Two were written by David Scott and myself in March 1978 at the request of Jose Ramos Horta for the information of the DRET/Fretilin External Leadership in Maputo. One paper critically assessed the state of Australian support for East Timor. The other explored the conditions under which negotiations with Indonesia may be to Fretilin's advantage as the military balance in East Timor changed for the worse. At Horta's request the existence and contents of these papers were not disclosed to our AETA (Vic) colleagues in Melbourne.
- The third was written in November of that year by the CIET Sydney activist Denis Freney on his return from the Frelimo-supervised trials of Horta and Alkatiri on charges of treason. Freney's document was also withheld from all but a very small group of Communist Party of Australia Darwin-based activists who operated the Darwin radio link to East Timor.
- The remainder of the presentation outlines the aftermath of these events for Horta, Alkatiri and the external leadership in Mozambique, and for David Scott and myself in Australia, followed by reflections on issues raised for solidarity movements in support of national revolutions.
- This is not serious history: it is largely autobiography, explanation of documents I wrote with David, and exploration of the dilemmas the events in Maputo , including Freney's role, created for us.
- Above all, this is a call for serious historical work on these events, their parallel events inside the resistance in East Timor, and the critical part played by FRELIMO in limiting the most damaging consequences.

2. The following documents discussed in this presentation are available on my Nautilus Institute site [here](#), together with [the PDF](#) of this presentation PPT.

#### Original documents by David Scott and Richard Tanter, March 1978

- David Scott and Richard Tanter, '[The East Timor Campaign in Australia](#)', 23 March 1978:
- David Scott and Richard Tanter, '[Independence in East Timor — a new view from Australia](#)', March 1978

#### Re-typed documents by David Scott and Richard Tanter, March 1978 (May 2022)

- [Retyped text of Scott and Tanter, 'The East Timor Campaign in Australia'](#) - 15 May 2022:
- [Retyped text of Scott and Tanter, 'Independence in East Timor — a new view from Australia'](#) - 15 May 2022

#### Denis Freney, 'Report on my trip... 7.11.78'

- Original of Denis Freney, '[Report on my trip... 7.11.78](#)'
- [Draft transcript of Denis Freney, 'Report on my trip... 7.11.78'](#) (Draft, May 2022)

#### David Scott

- David Scott, *Last Flight Out of Dili: Memoirs of an Accidental Activist in the Triumph of East Timor*, (Pluto Press Australia, 2005), Chapter 13 '[Crisis in Maputo](#)'.
- See also
  - John Waddingham/CHART, '[Operation Skylight, 1978: Unresolved questions](#)', *CHART Project - Timor Archives*, 26 June 2020.
  - Richard Tanter, '[The military situation in East Timor](#)', *Pacific Research*, VIII, 2: 1-6 (1977) [revised version of a DRET UN Office briefing paper, New York, Summer 1976.]

Two papers by David Scott and Richard Tanter, March 1978, written at the request of Jose Ramos Horta for presentation to the DRET External Leadership, Maputo, March 1978.

### Original 1978 documents

- Held in University of Melbourne Archives, David Scott Papers 1974 – 2004 collection, 2006.0039.0002 , Folder Title: ET 1976-80 / Papers / Scott, Tanter - Maputo 1976 / PPT Judgement Lisbon, and reproduced at
- David Scott and Richard Tanter, '[The East Timor Campaign in Australia](#)', 23 March 1978
- David Scott and Richard Tanter, '[Independence in East Timor — a new view from Australia](#)', March 1978

### 1978 documents transcribed (RT drafts, 15 May 2022)

- Retyped text of Scott and Tanter, '[The East Timor Campaign in Australia](#)' – 15 May 2022:
- Retyped text of Scott and Tanter, '[Independence in East Timor — a new view from Australia](#)' – 15 May 2022

### 3. Introducing David Scott and Richard Tanter, '[The East Timor Campaign in Australia](#)', 23 March 1978 – the origins and purpose

- Horta's request to us:
  - 'I would also like to hear a detailed account from you about AETA [Australia East Timor Association, Victoria] – who runs it now and how does it work, what's the policy towards Fretilin - East Timor, etc., ...
  - 'I would also like a briefing from you about CIET and ETNA [Campaign for East Timor, NSW, and East Timor News Agency].
  - 'It is understood that your comments would be kept confidential and would just be for Mari's and my own information.'

Jose Ramos Horta to David Scott, 16 October 1977, in Scott, *Last Flight Out of Dili*, p. 203.

Our purpose was spelled out to the External Leadership most clearly in the opening of the second paper 'Independence ...', p. 1:

- 'We want to take this opportunity to give you a realistic indication of the state of support for FRETILIN and East Timorese independence in Australia.
- 'We feel it is necessary to describe our viewpoint fully, and to make judgements which are sometimes harsh, firstly, because of your isolation from this country, and secondly, because of the urgency of a change in strategy that is needed here in Australia.
- 'Essentially, we believe that there is a large reservoir of public support for FRETILIN and the East Timorese people, but it has proved very difficult to convert that latent support into political action.'

Our account: the primary problem in Australia by early 1978 – great popular sympathy but declining effective mobilization against the Australian government

**Three themes:**

1. Lack of media coverage and the ineffectiveness of East Timor News Agency and *East Timor News*
2. Need to understand the nature of Australian society and consequently 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.
3. Need for serious ongoing support from Maputo – political and financial – for the official Fretilin representative in Australia, Chris Santos in Melbourne

**Our conclusions:**

- ‘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.’

## Our account: The problem of Denis Freney and his control of communications with East Timor and Maputo

‘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 [Roff]).

‘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.’



## Our core strategic message to the External Leadership Group

‘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.’

## Our recommendations on the dire situation of the Fretilin representative in Australia, Chris Santos

1. '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.
2. '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.
3. We have recommended also that the DRET Information Officer publish a fortnightly diplomatic review for distribution to government, diplomatic and press people.' (draft budget attached)

4. Introducing David Scott and Richard Tanter, '[Independence in East Timor — a new view from Australia](#)', March 1978

## Shift over 1977- early 1978 from Fretilin's successful resistance to stalemate to possible serious existential threat to Fretilin

- 'It is clear that the struggle for East Timor is now stalemated - a stalemate that involves continued brutal aggression and resistance, with bitter fighting in many parts of the country.'
- 'On the one hand, Indonesia has utterly failed in its invasion ... However it is clear that the military capacity of the D.R.E.T. is not of a kind to be able to re-take Dili and Baucau and throw the invaders back across the border.'
- Blockade: 'It is our great concern that the position of FRETILIN may begin to deteriorate now. ... The worst obstacle to a FRETILIN victory is the Indonesian naval and air blockade of the territory. .. the blockade, if maintained, must be very serious over time... We feel it is extremely unlikely in the present international climate that any of D.R.E.T.'s allies will risk providing material (rather than moral and token political) support in the form of weapons and medicines.'
- Recent reports from East Timor – Radio Maubere reports of effective ABRI tactics of encirclement and annihilation; Catholic Church reports of large numbers of dead, displaced and internal refugees (*TIS* # XX)
- Arms supplies to Indonesia from the US, Australia, UK, France, Spain –
  - especially OV-10 Bronco counter-insurgency aircraft
  - unusually prolonged ABRI offensive and shifts in ABRI force structure

‘...unless either the blockade is broken or the Indonesian political picture changes unpredictably, that the Fretilin position must begin to deteriorate in the near future.’

- “East Timor is unique. There is no other example of an isolated resistance being maintained for colony in such a constricted area; having no land boundary with any other country than the aggressor; having no capacity to maintain sea-communications; and having a limited, and probably reducing, capacity to maintain a slender radio communication link with the outside world.
- ‘Until now, we have felt that time has been on the side of the Maubere people. Now we feel that time, at least in the short-term, may no longer be with the forces of resistance.
- ‘In the long-term, we feel sure that the strength of East Timor, and the tensions inherent in Indonesia, will lead to eventual victory - but that time is far away, and heavy in cost. If the Indonesian invasion forces are prepared to practice systematic genocide, without international interference, then there may be few East Timorese alive to witness that final victory.’

## Options: four rough possibilities to be considered

- (a) 'Fretilin forces maintain their present capacity and control and within the foreseeable future repel the invaders across the border.

This seems unlikely. To date, Fretilin's strategic military capacity has been mainly defensive. Without some unknown factor, it is hard to imagine successful and sustained assaults on Dili, Baucau, etc....'

- (b) 'Fretilin and Indonesian forces maintain their positions roughly as they are now.

While the war is in rough equilibrium, we feel that it is likely that, as things are now, the advantage in a war of attrition will pass to Indonesia....'

- (c) 'Indonesia crushes Fretilin completely.

This seems most unlikely although the Indonesian Army's relentless pursuit of remnants of the PKI in Central and East Java should be remembered....'

- (d) 'Discussions between Fretilin and Indonesia as a stage in the independence struggle.

- 'On 5/4/77, Ministers Alkatiri, Araujo and Ramos-Horta issued a statement which concluded:
  - 'We reaffirm our readiness to establish a relationship. A co-operation with all neighbourly states, including Indonesia, based on a principle of equality, reciprocity of benefits, mutual respect for the sovereignty and independence and non-interference in the domestic affairs of each state.
- 'The Ministers stressed that any discussions could only be initiated by the Central Committee of Fretilin, and could only be based on the two principles established in successive U.N. resolutions, namely, unconditional withdrawal of Indonesian troops, and recognition of the right of the East Timorese people, to independence.'

Exploratory framework re UN supervised 'cease-fire negotiations as a temporary stage in a strategy', assuming 'Fretilin's military capacity remains unimpaired at any stage'.

- 'It is assumed that the D.R.E.T. would publicly denounce any proposal short of complete victory. The actual, 'un-negotiable' D.R.E.T. position could possibly be roughly as follows:
  - rapid withdrawal of bulk of Indonesian troops;
  - maintenance of Fretilin weapons in cease-fire situation;
  - international observers;
  - International Red Cross;
  - treaty mechanisms that guarantees self-determination and which provide Fretilin a reasonable chance for eventual dominance in the East Timorese government, e.g. a plebiscite and/or elections under international supervision.'
- An Indonesian approach could appeal to 'a post-Suharto government [which] had sufficient reason to get out of Timor, and could see a relatively inexpensive way of doing so. In such circumstances, the actual [Indonesian] negotiating position could be roughly as follows:
  - assurances regarding future D.R.E.T. policy and conduct regarding West Irian and the other Nusa Tenggara irredentism;
  - assurances of neutrality concerning establishment of sovereign bases in East Timor;
  - no immediate recognition of defect or "error";
  - military guarantees of the above, e.g. restriction of East Timorese contact with the rest of Indonesia.'

- 'The difficulties are obvious. The most immediate, as a starting point, is the withdrawal of Indonesian troops. Need all Indonesian troops be withdrawn? Could some, token, forces remain, with U.N. observers, for a fixed period - until the results of the plebiscite are known, and for as a token guarantee of East Timorese compliance with non-interference with Indonesia?'
- 'Since November 28, 1975, East Timor has been a sovereign republic. Fretilin will never consider any option that does not guarantee de facto independence in the short-term, and de jure independence shortly after. The question of whether a way through this problem of a period in which formal East Timorese claims to sovereignty are held in abeyance for the present will be most difficult. Yet unless Fretilin is able to exert any great pressure on Indonesia, it will be equally difficult to force them into immediate admission of less de jure control over the territory. A great deal here would depend on the strength of Fretilin's diplomatic alliance as well as the military situation.'
- 'We do not know the opinion of the Fretilin leadership on these issues. It may be felt this is presumptuous of us to make this suggestions, but we believe it is best that you realise the extent of our concern, a concern made more real by our commitment to Fretilin and the people of East Timor.'
- 'The will of the people of East Timor to independence eventually will mean victory - but for a people to live to enjoy a long-term victory, they must be able to choose the most judicious path, and the least costly one in terms of death and suffering. 'Independence or death' is a cry that we admire in the freedom fighters of East Timor, but we do not believe they are real options for all of the people; the Indonesian invaders may be prepared to exact the price of total annihilation in return for East Timorese freedom - for those alive to enjoy it.'



## 5. What happened next - what we knew

- Shortly afterwards David took the papers to Maputo for discussions with the External Leadership
- In mid-1978 previously secret discussions about possible negotiations broke into public discussion and acrimony
  - Negotiations with ex-UDT; with ABRI, with US
  - 11 May: Michael Hodgman, Australian MP
  - 13 May: Banning Garrett, NY-based US journalist
    - Some ABRI generals reportedly weary of war
    - UN sources suggest Fretilin representatives would consider negotiations, possible based on
      - De facto acceptance of regional strategic limitations
      - Abstaining from support for Indonesian separatist struggles
      - Consideration of licensing Indonesian pl companies
  - 18 May Alkatiri confirms instruction to Horta re negotiations
  - 20 May Nicolau Lobato speech
    - No compromise on territory; 'no Timorese neo-colony'
  - 21 May Alarico Fernando to Ken Fry MP
    - 'negotiations never'; unconditional withdrawal of all ABRI forces.
- See: '[East Timor: A negotiated settlement?](#)', *Timor Information Service*, No. 25, June 1978, pp. 2-4.

## 5. Two published autobiographical accounts of the 1978 events in Maputo, East Timor and Australia

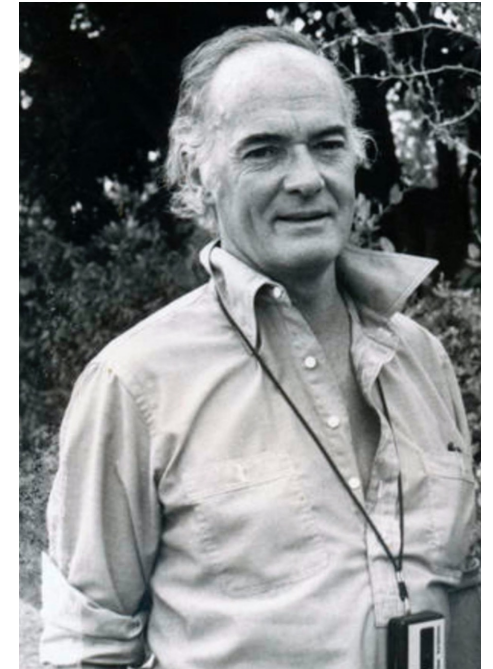
- In the decades after these linked events in Mozambique, East Timor and Australia, the two leading Australians involved published very different accounts of these events:
  - Denis Freney, *A Map of Days: Life on the Left* (Port Melbourne: William Heinemann, 1991).
  - David Scott, *Last flight out of Dili : memoirs of an accidental activist in the triumph of East Timor*, Pluto Press Australia, 2005
- Freney's 1991 account is very brief.
- Scott's account a decade and a half later is much more comprehensive, complex, and documented.
- Some of Freney's private papers were deposited in the National Library of Australia, including report made up of seven closely-typed pages titled *Report on my trip... 7/11/78*.
- Freney's secret account written to [unnamed] CPA colleagues in Darwin is very different from his public account (see below).
- A key background document stressing the need for careful historical work on these parallel sequences of events is John Waddingham's careful brief account in his '[Operation Skylight, 1978: Unresolved questions](#)', *CHART Project - Timor Archives*, where with considerable understatement Waddingham wrote 'There are informed but differing views on what 'Skylight' actually was.' See also the important comment on this piece by Peter Job, who worked on the Darwin radio at the time.

Freney's brief (and misleading) account of Operation Skylight in his autobiography,  
*A Map of Days: Life on the Left* pp. 369-373

- September 1977 – Lobato denunciation of DRET president, Xavier do Amaral = 'a first sign of split in Fretilin'
- Mid-1978 'Alarico [Fernandes] was again sounding the alarm about new areas of "encirclement and annihilation"... Hundreds were dying from starvation and heavy bombing, he said.'
- 'A few weeks later we received a coded message from Alarico...It was directed to Jose Ramos-Horta and signed "Saturno",' rather than to Rogerio Lobato or Mari Alkatiri.
- DF sent to Lobato who decoded the message, then informed DF it 'contained an appeal to Horta to join a coup against Nicolau Lobato'.
- 'What should I do, I asked Rogerio and Abilio [Araujo]?'
- RL and AA decided to withhold the message from Horta, reply in his name in an attempt to draw out Fernandes in his 'apparent treachery'.
- 'In early December 1978 Abilio and Rogerio decided the time had come to denounce him... Just before [the announcement], Abilio had told Horta what had happened and apologized to him for not taking him into his confidence in the beginning. It was now clear that Jose knew nothing about what was planned by Alarico who had vainly hoped to draw him into his "Operation Skylight" because they had both been "moderates" inside Fretilin before the invasion.'
- Freney concluded: "Suspensions and divisions among them almost destroyed the organization outside East Timor Only the diplomatic intervention of Fretilin's African friends allowed its leaders to overcome their differences and work out a new strategy to support those who survived inside.'

David Scott's account of the Maputo events in his *Last flight out of Dili : memoirs of an accidental activist in the triumph of East Timor*, Pluto Press Australia, 2005

- On David Scott see Richard Tanter, [‘Rare human’s compassion for all beyond brotherhood – Obituary: David Horace Ford Scott, AO, Activist, 23-1-1925 – 24-2-2012’](#), *The Age*, 1 May 2012; and David Scott with Carrie Hutchinson, *Always Say Yes: A giant of Australian social policy*, (Crows Nest, NSW: Pier 9/Allen & Unwin, 2014)
- Scott, *Last Flight out of Dili*, Chapter 13, [‘Crisis in Maputo’](#), pp. 248-269:
- The key event of the second half of 1978, prior to the death of Nicolau Lobato at the end of the year, was the apparent defection of Alarico Fernandes and secret messages sent in his name to Horta calling for Horta to join with AF against ‘the communists’.
- Rob Wesley-Smith doubted ‘whether Fernandes was acting freely when he was supposed to have defected.
- ‘To Freney, who had almost daily contact with Alarico for nearly three years, Alarico’s expressed intention to defect was an “extraordinary betrayal”.’ (p. 249)
- ‘Freney and Araujo saw Alarico’s supposed defection as an opportunity to discredit Jose and those who supported his “democratic socialist” position and diplomatic campaign, expel them from Fretilin and force Jose out of his crucial role as Foreign Affairs spokesman for Fretilin.’ (p. 250)



- ‘When [in October 1978] Jose and Mari returned from New York, Freney had accused Jose of being a traitor and said the Central Committee in East Timor wanted him detained...
- ‘Freney travelled from Sydney to give “evidence” against Jose at the “internal self-examination”. To Abilio Araujo, Denis Freney and the one or two others in the clique, it was an offence to support talks or even to speak to fellow East Timorese who were, or had been, in the UDT party. (p. 250)
- ‘The Fretilin-to-Darwin radio was closed with Alarico’s departure so I was asked to transmit and receive coded messages through the telex at Trade Action, the handcrafts trading subsidiary of Community Aid Abroad in Melbourne. On 28 October 1978 I was asked to send a long coded message to Maputo, marked: “Attention Horta or Alkatiri”. Converting 150 lines, each containing 60 closely typed letters in groups of five into a telex message almost a metre long was a heroic assignment willingly undertaken by my secretary Vera Hart on 1 November. I did not know who “Saturno” was, had no idea what the message contained and consistent with my view that if it was not my business, and to know might jeopardize the safety or lives of those whose business it was, I did not ask about the contents or who was sending the messages.’ pp. 250-251.
  - [This telex was to become important in Freney’s case against Horta in his Report and as a basis for an intended attempt at political blackmail of Scott as a leader in what Freney called the the ‘Wes-Santos-Scott-Mari spy network’. See below.]
- Sue Roff to DS, 12 Nov. 1978: AA answered JRH’s phone in NY ‘saying he will be making a speech at the UN on Tuesday 14 November. Jose, he says, is in Mozambique because of higher priorities. So, ...I wonder if you know more about the state of things...Changing personnel at the UN seems very poor strategy to me as people seem very concerned with rumours of internal faction fighting in the leadership.’ (p. 252)
- DS to SR Freney visited Melbourne to brief DSD and the AETA (Vic) Committee – “Richard was away” (p. 253).

- SR to DS (late November, early December) ‘ am very worried about Jose and your remarks have not reassured me...I think a possible interpretation is that Jose wanted to be in Maputo with Ana for the birth of the baby and didn’t care if Abilio and Branco wanted to do the UN this year. I’ll let you know as soon as I hear anything. The only clear thing is that Abilio and Branco are being useless and perhaps disastrous here at the UN.’ (p. 255)
- ‘On 22 December, I was at a holiday house ...130 kilometers east of Melbourne. ...I was surprised to see a police car coming along the track through the manna gums. The constable said he had an urgent message that I should contact Herb Feith at Monash University. I drove to Wonthaggi and phoned Herb who said I was to call Sue Roff in New York urgently, which I did.
- ‘Sue told me Jose was in danger. Maureen Berman of the International League of Human Rights told Sue she had received a letter from Jose two weeks earlier. The letter told her he was in serious trouble and she should contact Sue when she got a signal from him. Maureen had waited for three weeks, heard nothing from Jose so was telling Sue of her concerns, Sue showed the letter to her husband, Professor Bill Roff of Columbia University. He said Sue should call me. (p. 257)
- ‘Meantime Sue had contacted people at the United Nations and others including Noam Chomsky who expressed concern about Jose. They all wanted evidence that he was in some kind of danger that she could not give.
- ‘Sue told me that Alkatiri, who was in New York, was piqued about the fuss, but said, “we all know DF [Denis Freney] is a maniac.”’ (p. 258)

- ‘I sent a copy of my telex to Mozambique’s Ambassador to the UN, told Ken Fry and other friends of Jose’s suspected detention and asked them to cable Maputo. Chris Santos gave the story to the Melbourne Herald journalist Peter Game and also contacted John Ridley, Andrew Peacock’s private secretary, to see if Peacock would offer asylum to Jose if it became necessary.’ (p. 258)
- DS cabled Mari Alkatiri urgently requesting Horta phone him, and received a telex from MA saying ‘,... RAMOS HORTA IS OK ...STOP...EVERYTHING IS GOING WELL... MERRY CHRISTMAS ...’
- ‘It was not reassuring. Why couldn’t Jose speak to me? Then Sue sent me a copy of a letter Jose had left with Maureen Berman and I had no doubt he was in danger. But the letter could not be cited as evidence of our concern or Jose would be in deeper trouble. Jose’s letter to Maureen read [RT – abridged below]:  
 “I had intended to be back in New York a week after I left on 22 October but now I’m stuck in Maputo and unable to leave. I’m virtually under house arrest.  
 “I have been charged with treason but no evidence has been presented. Just because I’m a social democrat and the liberal conservative faction tried to get my support I was accused of betraying the Republic...”  
 “If a political asylum is refused, I’ll be killed or be detained to spend many years confined. Please understand the seriousness of my situation...”  
 “I spared no efforts and sacrifices over the past four years to promote the struggle of my people for self-determination. Now I’m stabbed in the back because I’m not communist.  
 “I do not fear for my life under Fretilin but I fear for my life under my own colleagues...” (pp. 259-260)

- On 29 December Jose rang David to say ‘He was fit and had suffered no physical harm but was to able to leave “to anywhere”. He said he believed the Mozambican government had nothing to do with the situation. It was due to “over-excitement” on the part of his friends...he believed the situation would be sorted out.’ (p. 261)
- In mid-February Horta wrote to David ‘saying he knew Sue had told him of the “episode” in Maputo:
 

“I am planning to return to Maputo. I have been advised by well-meaning friends not to, but I still owe loyalty to the people of east Timor and FRETILIN. If I did quit I would just be giving ammunition to the Indonesians to fire at FRETILIN. I still believe FRETILIN is the only legitimate and capable representative of the people of East Timor. In spite of the overwhelming odds and serious setbacks of the past few weeks [referring to the death of Nicolau Lobato on 31 December], the struggle goes on I could not conceive of not going back to Maputo. I am aware of the fact that in going back to Maputo I am taking a serious risk.

“I must ell you that your “good friend” DF (Denis Freney) is seriously implicated in this story. My detention in Maputo was largely pressed for by DF (Denis Freney). The others succumb to his pressures and political blackmail. I must sign of now. Thank you for your concern and efforts in helping me. Believe me, if it weren’t for you, I would have been left to rot in Maputo.

Warmest regards, Jose.”
- ‘Jose gave credit to the Frelimo (Government) authorities for the way they handled the intra-Fretilin dispute.
- An unfortunate but not surprising outcome from the incident was Sue and Bill Roff’s reluctant withdrawal from work in support of East Timor, concluding that ideologies had poisoned and factionalised Fretilin.
- ‘I pushed aside awareness of the madnesses and ambitions of Fretilin, UDT, Apodeti and the other groups and through all the fog tried to keep my eyes on the people of East Timor.’ (p. 261-262)



## 6. What we didn't know - Introducing Denis Freney, '[Report on my trip... 7.11.78](#)'

- A third documentary source on the late 1978 events in Maputo, East Timor, Australia, and New York was a secret report prepared by Denis Freney, written in early November immediately after Freney's return to Sydney from Maputo.
  - Denis Freney, '[Report on my trip... 7.11.78](#)', Papers of Denis Freney, National Library of Australia, [MS 9535, Series 1, File 7 Correspondence 1978](#), (seven pages)
  - A draft transcript of Denis Freney, '[Report on my trip... 7.11.78](#)' prepared by RT in May 2022 is available [here](#). (If any errors are found in the transcript I would be grateful to hear of them: [rtanter@nautilus.org](mailto:rtanter@nautilus.org).)
  - I am grateful to John Waddingham for pointing me to the existence of Denis Freney's 7 November 1978 report on his visit to Maputo.
- The detailed secret report was written to a very small group of people in Darwin involved in the maintaining and operating the radio connection to East Timor, made up mostly, if not all, of a small group of local members of the CPA. This would have included Brian Manning. It is not clear whether Freney circulated the report to other CPA leaders – either those in the dominant Sydney faction sympathetic to his position or those opposed in the Eurocommunist-inclined Melbourne faction. Internal evidence shows it did not include the non-CPA Darwin activist Rob Wesley-Smith, about whom the report suggested ways of 'handling'.
- The report mentions two individuals who would be visiting Darwin and who would bring further information and/or instructions from Freney. One is cited as 'AW', referring to Andrew Waterhouse, a radio operations technical specialist. The other is referred to as 'the old man' and is currently unidentified.
- The remainder of this section is made up of extracts from Freney's report:

## 'Report on my trip... 7.11.78'

Papers of Denis Freney, National Library of Australia, MS 9535, Series 1., File 7 Correspondence 1978, p. 1 of 7), <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-327185516/findingaid>



Available as a draft transcript of Denis Freney, 'Report on my trip...  
7.11.78' (transcript draft, May 2022)

7/11/78

### Report on my trip...

#### 1. First week ..

I arrived Oct. 12 and was met by RL and Frelimo. I had hoped to leave the following Monday ,on the once-a -week flight to Rome, or at the latest the Monday after ,Oct. 23. However it soon became clear that it would be impossible to leave even on Oct. 23.

On Sept. 23, there was the "Matola incident". RL had arrived a few days before but no one met him at the airport. When he went to Frelilin's villas at Matola ,outside Maputo, he was told by Leonel Andrade, the new DRET Ambassador to Mozambique, that he had to hand over his passport and that he would be arrested. (JRH, MA and RR were overseas). He refused and when he saw friends in Frelim ~~headquarters~~ he was told that x Mari etc. had accused him (RL) of being a traitor and had asked Frelim to arrest him. Frelimo was instead investigating the total situation. RL then handed over a report to Frelim accusing MA,JRH and RR of being traitors ,with documentation for claims.

RL then reacted in a rage.He organised an ambush at Matola with his "security group" of Frelilin militants, on Oct. 23. They surrounded Andrade and other supporters of MA ,including MA's wife. They told them they were under arrest. However, Leonel Andrade who knows judo, told the others to run away and tried to grab the machette carried by one of RL's X "security" Mario. Mario knew karate and in the fight, Mario slashed the side of Andrade's face, broke his arm and fingers with the machette. It came close to killing him but he is now ok ,with a big scar which will go with plastic surgery. The others were held under arrest ,tied up and slapped around a bit. However Mozambique police soon released them and arrested Mario. The two groups were then separated into two houses in Maputo, and Matola placed under police guard. Both groups were allocated police and security men .

It was a stupid act by RL carried out in one of his blind rages, when he loses all control.

MA immediately returned from New York as his wife was in a nervous state and he also saw the political advantage from the big error that RL committed. RL was in fact as guilty as hell under Mozambican law , for conspiracy to commit murder.

This was all before the first message from AF to JRH. We sent that to RL on Sept. 30, and he immediately informed Frelimo.This put a new complexion on the situation. The priority was to get Mario back. Frelimo also decided

## '1. FIRST WEEK..' [Freney arrives in Maputo, 23 September 1978 : the Matola Incident]

- 23 September (prior to DF's arrival) Horta, Alkatiri and Roque Rodrigues were overseas. Rogerio Lobato was placed under arrest by Leonel Andrade, the new DRET ambassador to Mozambique, accused of being a traitor by Mari. Rogerio resisted.
- 'However, Andrade, who knows judo, told the others to run away and tried to grab the machete carried by one of RL's "security" Mario. Mario knew karate and in the fight, Mario slashed the side of Andrade's face, broke his arm and fingers with the machete. It came close to killing him, but he is now ok, with a big scar that will go with plastic surgery. The others were held under arrest, tied up and slapped around a bit. However Mozambique police soon released them and arrested Mario. The two groups were then separated ..and placed under police guard. Both groups were allocated police and security men.
- 'It was a stupid act by RL carried out in one of his blind rages, when he loses all control...'
- 'This was all before the first message from AF to JRH. We sent that to RL on Sept. 30, and he immediately informed Frelimo. This put a new complexion on the situation. Top priority was to get Horta back. Frelimo also decided to get all the Frelilin leaders back to hear all accusations and to decide what to do about RL's crime.
- 'When I came I found RL literally off his brain, in a state of extreme nervous tension. He was raging like a lunatic....'
- 'On the second or third day I was there, Rogerio went into one of his rages, in the hearing of Frelimo security comrades, shouting at the top of his voice how he was going to kill Mari, Horta and all of them. Not surprisingly the next day he was placed under house arrest by Frelimo...'

## '2. THE ALL-IN MEETING' ['the main accusations : gross indiscipline to the Fretilin CC and treason' - Maputo, 28 October 1978]

- 'On Oct. 28, two Mozambican Ministers, myself and RL, [typed in above: 'as "presidium"'] Abilio and Lugu (on one side of room) and Mari, Horta and Roque on the other began the meeting. Mari opened to put their accusations which consisted of one main point: an attempt to link "Operation Skylight" to "Operation Isaac: (which was the plan to arrest all Mari group). They also stress the "criminal attack" at Matola and demanded arrest of the counter-revolutionaries RL and Abilio as responsables [sic] for the attack.
- 'Although RL and Abilio had prepared a very detailed series of accusations they both went into rages at being accused of being "counter-revolutionaries". RL with much chest-beating (literally!) went through his role in the counter-offensive etc. Abilio could hardly speak he was so enraged...it was only Lugu who present [sic] a calm and devastating attack on Mari and Horta....
- 'Frelimo then summed up main accusations : gross indiscipline to the Fretilin CC and treason. They took the indiscipline question first. Abilio had steeled down a bit and made a series of accusations of which Frelimo already had the proof.
- 'The main points were: Mari group had set up a "mini CC" in Maputo, establishing the "external front" as autonomous from the CC, and second, that they had begun "negotiations" with the Indonesians against CC decision and without any control, with signs of preparing betrayal.

- 'Frelimo did not take long to dismiss the Skylight-Isaac link, and to show their agreement with these charges against Mari, etc.. They then went on to ask the causes of this gross indiscipline but RL and AA continued to provide further evidence against MA etc., until finally AA mentioned that Mari was "ambitious" wanting to become President of the Republic of the External Front.
- 'Frelimo agreed and the heat was on Mari.
- 'Horta had cracked earlier, after evidence of his contacts with Indonesians etc, and said he had "objectively" betrayed because of this and asked to be sent to a "re-education camp" (!).
- 'Mari eventually made a "self-criticism" ....'
- 'Frelimo said there was clear evidence of at least "objective" treason. The question was then posed who would be the liaison between Fretilin in Maputo and Frelimo and us. Frelimo said they could not obviously accept Mari, that also Rogerio was guilty of a social crime and was unacceptable. They did not want Abilio because he was undisciplined also, but this was as of "oct. 29" [sic] although they said they might change their view later. ...'
- 'I made a statement based on our experiences concerning censorship of CC statements after my visit to Maputo last April, and of the order from Mari to send all materials from AF through Maputo. This was particularly devastating and was influential in Frelimo's view.'

### '3. THE ANTI-CLIMAX'

- 'After the meeting ended, both groups shook hands (AA, RL, Lugu, JRH, MA and RR) and walked out of building [sic] together. They spoke briefly to the assembled militants of both groups who had been waiting since Sat. morning. It was planned the militants should also present their views, but as Frelimo ministers had to go to another meeting they did not have chance [sic]. Lugu joined us at the presidium and all others made statements --- supposedly to be "self-criticisms" by MA and JRH but in fact none was delivered. The six Frelilin leaders (?) then went to a meeting at one of their houses to work out what to do at the UN. I went home to sleep!'
- 'On October 30 I was visited by the Frelimo liaison men, who told me, to my great surprise that the six leaders had decided that Horta, Abilio and Olimpio Franco (a Frelilin militant to be from now on Frelilin rep. at UN [sic]) would leave that night for the United Nations.
- 'I got him to drop me at the home of RL, Abilio etc.. I told them I thought they were crazy sending Horta to the UN to give him the chance to betray. They stopped me and said they had taken "collective responsibility".
- I saw Mozambican minister [sic] soon after and he was furious, said Frelimo had taken risks getting Horta back, now they were going to give him the chance to betray. He said they were all ambitious etc.. I could only agree...'
- 'I had a meeting with the Six to discuss the situation here, what to do with Santos Wes etc.. and how to handle AF betrayal.
- 'I played it cool, to judge what was happening. In fact, it was Mari and Horta who did all the talking. Horta even said that we should not attack AF as a traitor but only as someone who had wanted a neo-colonial solution!'

#### '4. THE ANTI-ANTI-CLIMAX' (October 31)

- 'I decided ...I would break off personal relations with all of them and make a very hard attack...'
- '...I found the Six in a meeting. I didn't shake hands and asked immediately to see Lugu.
- 'I then told Lugu I was breaking off personal relations, that I considered them all traitors for letting Horta go to the UN, that they had no right to make that decision (as only the CC can let a traitor go) and that they were setting up a new "mini-CC of the Republic of the External Front", they were all ego-trippers who thought they were great men, "veterans" etc...'
- '...later Abilio arrived. I addressed him as "Your Excellency", sat him down, and with the Frelimo security man listening launched the bitterest attack I've ever given to anyone, as Abilio is the strongest and I could understand his actions. He ended up bursting into tears, said he accepted criticism and that RL was also in tears...
- 'An hour or so later Lugu came and took me to the house where I (calmly) reiterated to them all I what I had told Lugu and AA... They agreed Horta must not go and said they had acted "emotionally" in accepting Horta etc. in the name of "unity". Horta (and AA and Olimpio) did not get on the plane to the UN (which had been adjourned discussing ET until December)....'



## ‘5. SITUATION ON “DIPLOMATIC FRONT”’

‘Here are a few tentative observations:’

1. ‘AA, RL and Lugu are politically inexperienced. Fretilin was not, before the invasion, really a party. They have no “party experience”, including how to handle people like MA, JRH, etc. For them unity means all together and no rocking boat [sic].
  2. ‘they all (except for the moment Lugu) have complexes of being “great men” and “veterans” who because of what they’ve done in the past cannot be criticised
  3. ‘they are all old pals. RL I am sure went into a rage to think of arresting/killing MS, Horta etc. Once there was some chance of “reconciliation” then all the old pals were back together!
  4. ‘they’ve all been under psychological strain, and wanted to get down to work exposing AF.
  5. ‘the life had been easy .. Frelimo has accepted them as Ministers, given them good living conditions, access to top leaders etc.. This has gone to their heads. They think they are the greatest, have no modesty etc ..’
- ‘Hopefully, the anti-anti-climax was a big enough shock and the knowledge that Frelimo was totally disillusioned with them, will mean they will seek help from Frelimo in getting some “party experience” and guidance on how to handle these questions. But this is more a hope than a certainty.’
  - ‘The best thing that can be said is that Horta and Mari have been neutralised and will not be able to support AF.’



## ‘6. SITUATION IN EAST TIMOR’

- ‘As I hope you know, all the messages Turiscai has sent to AF since Sept. 30 have been messages prepared by Rogerio, as false messages from Horta, aimed at getting more information from AF and also keeping him occupied while things were worked out (Horta back to Maputo, strategy for UN etc).
- ‘It has been a very successful operation. AF has been told that “Horta” has “complete confidence” in Turiscai and us all – and AF in his last message expressed his confidence in “Horta’s” decision. But more on this later.
- ‘Also he has spelt out very clearly that Nicolau Lobato is very aware of his plot but not perhaps all details.
- ‘Also clear that NL and revolutionary CC members in full control in other areas, with many of the anti-communists already arrested, dead, or escaped to Indonesians. In fact, we can assume almost all of the main AF group out of action. [sic]
- ““Horta” in his last long message told AF that the Indonesians were being very hard-line and wanted his surrender. AF complained that Indonesians were very strong encirclement [sic] of his area of North-Centre Sector and he couldn’t get out to contact his other supporters elsewhere. He says he doesn’t want to surrender but in almost panic appeals to “Horta” to contact Indonesians for peace.’
- ‘He also said that he (AF) has all the long-range transmitters and that NL etc have only small Portuguese radios.’

## ‘7. CONTACTING NICOLAU LOBATO ETC

- ‘We have identified these radios as small Racal back-packs which have no long range. AW will fill you in on details. He has the partial list of frequencies that Frelimo has supplied of Racals they have which were used by Portuguese and are hopefully the same as those being used in ET. The re-establishment of contact with NL is our most important task now. AW will fill you in on details of the difficulties this imposes.
- ‘Frelimo claims they have evidence that while Nicolau Lobato cannot talk to us on 5270, he monitors all messages on 5270 (ie he can receive on that channel). That means he has heard all the false messages including the assurance from “Horta” that we are in support of Horta and AF!
- ‘I have a tape with Rogerio’s voice and we’ll be able to use that as identification .. but still may be problems. ‘Therefore, Turiscai should not go out any more to contact AF except in the unlikely possibility that there is another false “Horta” message.
- ‘We also should remember that as we are supposed to be trusted by Horta, the tone should (if there is another false message) change, so no more “comrade” but only “brother” etc..)!!!’

## ‘8. HANDLING AF EXPOSURE’

- ‘We expect soon to have a public statement from Maputo exposing AF, ‘Operation Skylight’ etc.. Hopefully, we’ll have time to alert people such as Ken Fry etc.. beforehand.
- ‘We will organise a broadcast on 3804 at RM time (AW will fill you in).
- ‘Turiscai (renamed Kailaco) will have to go out as soon as possible with material of public statement etc (including in Portuguese) to send on 5270, in the hope that President NL will be listening and give AF a big setback. You will probably get an angry response from AF of course.
- ‘Unless it is decided that Turiscai-Kailaco should not be the voice (to keep AF guessing), cde Turiscai-Kailaco can feel free to abuse AF and tell him that he has been tricked! Say goodbye traitor!
- ‘Tell him all the messages from “Horta” in fact were prepared by Rogerio Lobato. It will be a big psychological blow.
- ‘The broadcast on 5270 should be repeated at other times during the same day – not just at the usual time in case NL is listening then also. The security will not expect it and of course it should be done from different spots.
- ‘In addition of course we hope the news will get through to NL etc from Radio Mozambique, Radio Australia etc..’

## ‘9. HANDLING WES, SANTOS and Scott’ [‘the Wes-Santos-Scott-Mari spy network’]

### a. ‘As for Wes:’ [Rob Wesley-Smith in the Darwin radio group]:

- ‘I think that first, just before the public exposure of AF, he should be shown the first “Saturno” message and told the content of the rest.
- ‘Tell him all are now together again on the external front, united in their determination to fight AF betrayal, and there has been “self-criticism” from all of them.
- ‘Tell him the full story of Mari’s attempts at “censorship” and that we know of the Wes-Santos-Scott-Mari spy network and that Mari has told us and apologised and made self-criticism.
- ‘Ask him not to rat, to support the CC and not to support AF.
- ‘That is my view – I will let you know the day before the public exposure. You can then talk to him and others (such as Laurentino) and get Wes to phone me.
- ‘Of course, you will have to judge how to handle Wes. The main thing is to try, even by being very sympathetic and conciliatory, to stop him publicly supporting AF.
- ‘That is very important – our main strategy must be to stop anyone from supporting AF.
- ‘Other things can be settled later.
- ‘I do not know how much Wes knows already – Santos has the Flexa code and may have told him a lot. But maybe he is an innocent victim. I think you should also at the same time fill him in on the above, expose Santos to him – and quote the money he has embezzled.’

## b. Chris Santos ['I don't think there will then be any trouble with this rat.']

- 'I saw in Maputo, from the files of Mari that were captured by Rogerio, a copy of a telex sent from AA3350 TRACT – the telex of Trade Action, a subsidiary of Community Aid Abroad in Melbourne. The message was dated 7/7/78, to Mari and signed "David (Scott)".
- 'It was in fact from Chris Santos and gave the full text of a message sent to RL by NL of 5/7/78 in code.
- 'In other words at least since early July, Wes has been taping messages, sending them to Santos, who has been giving them to David Scott to send to Mari in Maputo.
- 'This spynetwork [sic] was established after Santos visit to the Mari group in Maputo.'
- 'Santos is to be dismissed by all – Mari even said he was a thief. ...
- '...The person is a confidence trickster – he has also tricked Mari etc. who were desperate.
- 'He is guilty of fraud against the Australia Party. The way to handle him is to tell him with a letter from Fretilin (all including Horta/Mari) that he is dismissed and if he says one word, then all his fraud will be publicly exposed.
- 'The way to handle him is to tell him with a letter from Fretilin (all including Horta/Mari) that he is dismissed and if he says one word, then all his fraud will be publicly exposed.
- I don't think there will then be any trouble with this rat.'

### c. David Scott [the Freney plan for political blackmail]

- ‘As for Scott, it is a bit tricky. He is a big wheel, certainly with links with security cops here.
- ‘However, he would be very embarrassed if we published his use of the CAA telex! [see above].
- ‘I expect he’ll keep quiet when he understands how much we know.’

‘It is a very difficult time and historic turning point -- a second, real revolution ...’

- ‘Well that is about all for the moment, and hopefully the agony will soon be over and everything out in the open re: AF and we can get it out of the way and start to mobilise against the sell-out and the deals Fraser etc are making. Hopefully there will be a big improvement of work coming out of Maputo.
- ‘They have very good friends in Maputo – I was tremendously impressed it is really a marxist party [sic] and their leaders have a very high consciousness. An African Cuba but much more independent of China and Soviet. CPA now has very good relations.
- ‘Well that is about all for the moment, and hopefully the agony will soon be over and everything out in the open re: AF and we can get it out of the way and start to mobilise against the sell-out and the deals Fraser etc are making. Hopefully there will be a big improvement of work coming out of Maputo. ...’
- ‘Thanks from all here and in Maputo. It is a very difficult time and historic turning point -- a second, real revolution inside and hopefully on the “diplomatic front” of DRET.’

## 7. Reflections on the role of foreigners in solidarity movements

- Bob Boughton presented one model of the appropriate role of foreign activists in international solidarity movements in his 'ASIO and the Australia–Timor-Leste Solidarity Movement, 1974–79', in Aziz Choudry (ed.), *Activists and the Surveillance State - Learning from Repression*, (London: Pluto Press, 2018).]
- For Boughton, the key reflection is that there were (and are) 'two quite different notions of solidarity within the broad movement, differences which need to be subject to critical scrutiny. I call the two notions liberal solidarity and the solidarity of international socialism.'
- For Boughton Pat Walsh's 2006 note about a shift in the Australian East Timor solidarity movement epitomised these two notions:
  - Walsh: 'Originally it was largely ideologically driven and related to Fretilin, but today it is a broader phenomenon that embraces a cross-section of partnerships in both societies and includes business, professionals, and local and national government in its ranks. This is a welcome development and a model for other countries. It is consistent with a human rights approach, particularly in support of the right of self-determination...' [from Walsh, [Address to AETA – 'Reflections on solidarity'](#), Melbourne, 28 November 2011.
- Boughton: 'This is a classic statement of what I call "liberal solidarity". However, it is not, as Walsh suggested, a new approach; in fact, it had long been the position of a significant element within the Australian solidarity movement, especially among people associated with aid organisations.'
- Exhibit A. for liberal solidarity according to Boughton = the two 1978 papers by Scott and Tanter: 'It is possible to see that Horta's position [in the 1980s] was consistent with the position taken by David Scott and Richard Tanter more than ten years earlier.' Interestingly there is no comment on internal developments in the resistance in the same period.

- Boughton's celebration of the CPA role in the early years of Australian support for East Timorese self-determination raises an interesting argument, albeit very briefly and without much discussion:
  - 'FRETILIN was an anti-colonialist party, a party of national liberation; and its natural allies and the parties from which it learned most in the early years of its existence were other national liberation parties and revolutionary parties.
  - 'They were the parties, which had the experiences and the skills and the traditions of clandestine work and armed struggle that FRETILIN needed.
  - 'That is why they formed an alliance with the CPA, because it was part of an international movement which had been working successfully with national liberation movements since the 1920s, and which had its own experience of illegality and operating clandestinely.'
- This is an important argument to consider, although review of the history of leninist parties might suggest other possibilities and a more complex account – and warrant a measure of accountability. Moreover, Boughton's account avoids serious discussion of the dynamics of the East Timorese resistance in these years and subsequently – including the achievements of the non-communist streams.
- In the workshop discussion of this presentation a participant in the Darwin-based radio link to East Timor in the late 1970s suggested that operation required such a level of organisational capability and commitment which only the CPA could have supplied. Another speaker also close to Freney in that period expressed doubt as to whether that had been the case.
- Either way, this is another matter for serious historical consideration – regarding East Timor and Fretilin and other revolutionary nationalist movements.



- In general, the positions David and I set out in 1978 about the Australian solidarity movement were both accurate and necessary to explain to the DRET external leadership the loss of capability of the Australian campaign of support. My only regret about the *East Timor Campaign* paper is that it was too brief and consequently shallow in places. Most of what we wrote was supported by the subsequent revelations from the Maputo crisis, especially the Freney *Report of my visit*.
- David and I felt we were obliged to not make the existence or text of the two papers public. Apart from Horta's request for confidentiality, there was no way to write the *East Timor Campaign* paper honestly and usefully other than by risking libel. More than one of the small number of respected AETA colleagues I trusted at the time for their sound judgement (aligned with mine or not) remains angry with us for arrogating to ourselves the right to 'advise' the DRET leadership. I didn't and don't think that's what we were doing, and certainly not in the manner Freney undertook.
- Looking at the *Independence* paper four decades later there is little I disagree with, but I wish it could have been both more thorough and longer in its discussion than the circumstances of the time allowed. Against the subsequent history of Timor ceasefire negotiations the paper stands scrutiny.
- What is clear from hindsight is the paper's over-emphasis on the possibilities of a shift in support for Suharto. Around this time there were a number of conversations between myself, Herb Feith and Ben Anderson in the run-up to Ben's publishing *Last Days of Indonesia's Suharto* article in *South East Asia Chronicle* 63 (July-August 1978): 2–17. Subsequent events disproved our optimism about the vulnerability of the Suharto regime at that point.

## 8. Aftermath

- When the events of late 1978 and early 1979 were over David, Sue, and I agreed we would not speak about any of this – lest the news of the plot against Horta and Alkatiri fatally weaken solidarity movements – especially in Australia where support was flagging.
- Late in life David decided otherwise, publishing his account in *Last Flight from Dili* in 2005.
- Now with Freney's secret account we have the beginnings of an account of the Australian connection to the events of Operation Skylight and its consequences.
- It is time for serious history based on research in Timor, Indonesia, and Mozambique.
- An additional document that is key to understanding all these events stressing the need for careful historical work on this entire sequence of events is John Waddingham's careful brief CHART account in his '[Operation Skylight, 1978: Unresolved questions](#)', *Timor Archives*, where with careful understatement Waddingham wrote 'There are informed but differing views on what 'Skylight' actually was.' See also the important comment following that piece by Peter Job, who worked on the Darwin radio at the time.
- What is remarkable is that today – even after David's 2005 public account – is that almost all Australian Timor activists of a certain age I speak to say they are unaware of the events of the Maputo crisis and the involvement of a leading Australian activist accusing Horta and Alkatiri of treason and arguing for their imprisonment or death.
- As well as being a consequence of secrecy within the movement maintained far beyond any reasonable time, this also suggests a measure of denial that in itself warrants serious inquiry.

- No-one outside the Darwin CPA-Freney group knew of the existence of Freney's *Report of my visit*, but by early 1979 David, Sue and I were clear about the consequences of the Maputo crisis. Horta had told Sue and David of the threat to his and Alkatiri's lives and Freney's active and malign role.
- These events separately led both Sue Roff and myself to remove ourselves from active involvement with the support movement. With more courage than me, David continued with great determination and unflagging energy for another two decades despite feeling sick at heart.
- Realising that Freney had colluded to murder Horta and possibly Alkatiri raised profound anger and doubt in my mind – not about the importance and urgency of East Timorese self-determination but about the proper role of foreigners – myself as much as Freney – in the resistance struggles of other countries.
- The then secret *Report* exemplified Freney's incessant recourse to manipulation, vituperation and political blackmail – practices rooted in both his personality and in the opportunities provided for those qualities to flourish by aspects of tiny fractions of covert revolutionism – a matter of elective affinities between personality, ideological culture and organisational structure.
- Freney's alliance with Rogerio Lobato and Abilio Araujo highlighted in the secret Report – indeed, what he regarded as his mentoring of them – should have been warning enough, though few Australian activists other than Scott and Freney had much significant experience with them after the invasion.
- Freney's secret knowledge of Lobato's uncontrollable rages – 'literally off his brain' – was kept from everyone else. At the time David and Sue and I mistrusted the authenticity of Abilio Araujo's hyper-radicalism and character, with good cause as his later history showed.

- My Timor role shifted, until the mid-1990s, to one of research on militarization in Indonesia and South Korea and the use of terror and surveillance by Indonesian and South Korean intelligence organisations, and the locus of my activism shifted to the enduring threat of nuclear war.
- The thought that anything that I was doing (or not doing) for my part in the broader Australian movement facilitated, or enabled or in any way colluded with the kind of psychopathic destructiveness that Freney displayed to persist led me to walk away from that dimension of my activist life. The 1978 events, the character of which gradually became clear, shifted the political and psychological ground in which my deep involvement over four years in East Timor issues was rooted in two respects.
- The first was the realization that what had culminated in the Maputo trial was in effect a plot to kill Horta, and possibly Alkatiri. For me, whatever my deep admiration for Fretilin's 1974-75 radical education foundation for national revolution, it was my assessment of Horta and Alkatiri that was my personal thread to commitment. I had worked closely with Jose for almost three years, knew some of his vices, but both admired his virtues and witnessed his extraordinary diplomatic skills on behalf of his country. Jose made it quite clear that his execution had been on the agenda.
- The second, more disabling revelation, was Freney's part in all this. Contrary to Boughton's crude distinction between liberals and socialists, I was, amongst other things, a child of what was then still 'the new left', fiercely opposed to the cruel dishonesties of sections of communist parties that invoked their own version of *raison d'état* to justify fratricidal manipulative politics in the name of ever-receding hopes of revolution – usually located, in those days – somewhere safely elsewhere.

The psychopathologies of Freney's politics were not his alone, but his energy and relationship to the Fretilin External Leadership made them lethal

- My objections were not fundamentally ideological, so much as a matter of political practice and critique of the psychopathologies of certain versions of communist politics. The tone of Freney's secret diary reveals his real thinking and manner of operation – blackmail, manipulation, and coercion against 'rats', 'traitors', 'spy networks' – and 'Say goodbye traitor!' are evidence enough.
- These traits of Freney's – perhaps not then carried to their murderous reaches as in Maputo in 1978 – were well known amongst the Australian communist leadership for a decade or more earlier.
- Bernie Taft, the long time leader of the Eurocommunist Victorian faction of the CPA recalled what he regarded as the malign influence of Freney's 'extremist views' on the wider CPA, saying that while he respected Freney's commitment and energy,

'[Freney] was rigid and dogmatic. His political analyses were mostly superficial. He lacked a long-term strategic view, and usually failed to see the wood for the trees.'

Bernie Taft, *Crossing the Party Line – Memoirs of Bernie Taft*, Scribe, 1994, pp. 203-4.

- [It should be noted that Freney had loyal friends who continue to laud him more than two decades after his death in 1995, and probably none more so than the respected historian, journalist and activist David McKnight in his two strongly felt memoirs of Freney:
  - '[Denis Freney: 1936 – 1995](#)', Search Foundation, *Communist Biographies Project*; and '[Denis Freney 1936-1995: a rebel with many causes](#)', *David McKnight.com.au*, 27 September 2005.]

## Dogmatic hostility to even discussion of negotiations – from the safety of Sydney

- But there was more disturbing side still to the zealotry of Freney's fanatical determination to interpret any consideration of negotiations by any of the East Timor resistance leadership as betrayal. Not only did these traits confirm Alkatiri's ('we know Denis is a maniac') and Taft's ('rigid and dogmatic... mostly superficial') contemporary judgements of Freney, but his anxious insistence to impose his views on the Fretilin leadership of the resistance was dangerous enough in itself – he was after all in good company with Lobato and Araujo in Maputo.
- Freney's incessant hostility to even discussing the place of negotiations in the face of a potentially lethal shift of military advantage to Indonesia rested on an unquestioning insistence that Fretilin to fight to the last Timorese – all from the safety and comfort of distant Sydney.
- In writing our two papers at Horta's request, especially '[Independence in East Timor — a new view from Australia](#)', we knew we were taking a serious risk of being misunderstood as advocating surrender which we most certainly did not. We also assumed that if the discussion of the papers in the pressures of the environment of the External Leadership in Maputo turned sour for Horta and Alkatiri, then our views could be written off as just those of Australian busybodies. We had no problem with that outcome. Our job was to set out an analysis of the conditions under which negotiations of a certain type may be to Fretilin's medium- to long-term advantage. But in doing so we took the process of analysis very seriously, making clear our distance from knowledge the leadership would have that we did not, and our distance from responsibility. We could only ameliorate the dangers flowing from the safety of distance by being as analytically sound as we could.

- We did not, and I still do not, know what role, if any, either of the papers played in the events of late 1978 in Maputo. Certainly for Freney, Araujo and Lobato our *Independence in East Timor* was a gift, and it is likely that Horta's sponsoring of our work made matters worse for him.
- Even in writing our papers, David and I were intensely aware that we were supporters of East Timorese self-determination and social revolution – but that we were most certainly neither Timorese ourselves nor a part of the national resistance. We did not have that particular honour. And that meant that speaking truth to power (even that of the exiled DRET leadership) required both attachment and distance.
- It was only later that I realized how much that of the work over the next four decades of research on intelligence – on Indonesia, Japan, the United States, and Australia - owed to the lessons I learned both in Timor days and the last years of the Vietnam War from John Waddingham and his colleagues. First at Retrieval in the last years of the Vietnam War, and then at Timor Information Service they me how to do serious peace research in the service of activism, always committed to finding the thread linking intellectual honesty and political needs.
- Interestingly for Boughton's Manichaeian world of liberals and socialists, within a few years of the events discussed here both the Communist Party of Australia and Freney had abandoned their revolutionary commitments. Much of the dissolved CPA to become a conservative supporter of the ALP Hawke government (a matter very much in evidence in the peace movement during the Hawke government).

## Freney: 'Timor had been my revolution...' No, it was not.

- The psychopathologies of Freney's politics were not his alone, nor those only of the left, but his energy and relationship to the Fretilin External Leadership made them lethal.
- In discussion of this presentation John Waddingham suggested that Freney not only thought of himself as part of Fretilin, but was, at least by some by the Fretilin leadership, treated as such.
- Every C.20<sup>th</sup> nationalist and anti-colonial revolution had foreign supporters, as advisors and fighters on the ground, assisting as allies, political or military or financial enablers, as ideological comrades on the political road, sympathetic critics, as spies, or simply as willing propagandists. Depending on context, all in principle defensible and positive, with obvious negative instances.
- Tellingly, in his autobiography Freney wrote that the killing of Nicolau Lobato in December 1978 meant that  
'An heroic period in the East Timor struggle had come to an end...It was also the conclusion of another episode in my life. In its own way, Timor had been my revolution...'
- That was the fundamental political and moral error: it never was Freney's revolution, any more than for anyone outside East Timor. All support and love for the Timorese people and their right to self-determination – yes. Right of possession – no.
- I am grateful to the organisers of the Lisbon workshop for making this discussion possible; to comments in discussion from Marisa Ramos, John Waddingham and Peter Job; to John Waddingham for pushing me to present this paper; and to George Preston for making me think hard about all of this.