

---

## KOLOM

Emil Salim passed through Ithaca recently. The former minister of the environment complained that wherever he goes in America, people ask him about Timtim. People here do not understand, "We are not interested in Timor." The statement amazes us not least of all because it is accurate. The language of dictatorship is lies; the language of the New Order and the New New Order includes telling the truth and disregarding its consequences. "We are not interested in Timor" means "we are not interested in the deaths of well over 200,000 people, the destruction of whatever could be destroyed on that already impoverished island, the torture and rape of its inhabitants, the direction and execution of all this by the Indonesian army, the formation of 'militia' which could be more accurately called 'savage bands' and so on and so on and so on."

"The masses are only receptive to forceful expressions pointing to either the positive or the negative, never to a half-way station between the two." So said Hitler. Indonesians are different. They are interested only in what "people," meaning those connected with the center, occupied by Suharto, Habibie, or Gus Dur (it makes no difference), are interested in. At the moment that is the Bank Bali scandal. The new *Tempo*, which, in this age of the presumably free press, differs not at all from the old one, asks its readers, "Do you believe the statement of Rudy Ramli about the Bank Bali case is true?" (43 percent yes, 25 percent no, 32 percent don't know, total 100 percent). And it asks, about this scandal, "what about the group close to President Habibie?" In the same issue it reports the politics of referendum in Aceh but nothing of the army atrocities of the week there. It interests its readers in Timtim by asking, in its column "Indikator," "Do you agree with the presence of International Forces in Timtim?" (65 percent yes, 33.3 percent no, 1.7 percent don't know, total 100 percent). In the same issue it gives the opinion of army generals and militia leaders about the island and nothing about the killings. So much for public opinion and for truth.

*Tempo* of course is only different in style from *Kompas*, which has even less courage. It is perhaps more attuned to Jakartan realities, as "Indikator TEMPO *Interaktif*" charts changes of opinion. "The small amount of knowledge [a people] possesses channels its reactions into the realm of emotion. . . . But this emotion-directed attitude also makes for some extraordinary stability." Thus Hitler again, who clearly was not speaking of Indonesia, not because Indonesians lack emotion but because, as even the most casual reader of the Indonesian press understands, stability of opinion is not in style. It is through the instability of opinion that one can turn one's back on the nation's atrocities: "We are not interested in Timor," implying, "we used to be interested in Timor."

Hitler's Germany was a dictatorship. For countries such as Indonesia, formed in the New (World) Order of commerce, one needs another word or phrase: "obedient listenership" would do if it were not so awkward. In any case, Hitler was right about one characteristic of Indonesia. "Faith is harder to shake than knowledge," he said. Faith in the center is firm in a certain Jakarta, where censorship, this time self-censorship, apparently continues in the interest of authority. "We are not interested in Timor." Nor, one adds, in Aceh, in Ambon, and other distant and even not so distant places where recent lack of faith might, at some point, perturb a few readers of the mainstream press.

James Siegel  
October 30, 1999

Quotations from Hitler are from *Mein Kampf* as cited by Joachim Remak, *The Nazi Years: A Documentary History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969). The edition of *Tempo* referred to is dated September 26, 1999. The polls cited are in the articles "Pasukan Internasional Memang Perlu," p. 11, and "Rudy Benar, Muladi Bohong," pp. 12-13, of that issue. The statement "what about the group close to President Habibie?" is in the headline to the article entitled "Setelah Mereka Lintang-Pukang," p. 18.