

In revealing interview, People's Democratic Party of Indonesia calls for alignment with US

Comment by Peter Symonds
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A recent interview given by Budiman Sujatmiko, jailed leader of the People's Democratic Party (PRD) in Indonesia, has underscored the warnings made by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) over the past 18 months about the PRD's role in seeking to politically subordinate workers and students to allegedly "democratic" sections of the Indonesian ruling class.

In the interview published in Australia in the *Green Left Weekly*, the newspaper of the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), Budiman reveals that the "democratic movement" to which the PRD is striving to tie the many-millioned Indonesian working class extends not only to opposition figure Megawati Sukarnoputri and sections of the Indonesian bourgeoisie, but to the military and US imperialism.

When the Socialist Equality Party first warned in August 1996 about the PRD's efforts to shackle the working class to Megawati, we clearly struck a raw nerve within layers of the Democratic Socialist Party, which originated as a Pabliste revisionist organisation, formed in Australia in the early 1970s as a section of United Secretariat.

The DSP accused the SEP of "sectarianism," defended its PRD "comrades" and tried to justify the opportunist perspective of a political front with Megawati. Since the PRD's emergence from the student movement as the Peoples Democratic Union in 1994, the DSP has maintained the closest of relations with the PRD, acting as its political advisers.

Now the political dangers to which the SEP pointed are taking on flesh and blood. The collapse of the rupiah and the unprecedented economic crisis in Indonesia have transformed Jakarta into a hotbed of political intrigue. Plots and counterplots are rife as opposition figures, army generals, IMF officials, foreign diplomats and businessmen manoeuvre and scheme to take advantage of the weakened Suharto regime.

But what haunts all sections of the ruling class is the great danger posed by the staggering growth of the Indonesian working class, which has increasingly engaged in strikes and protests in recent years. Will workers erupt against the destruction of jobs and rising prices? What will be the impact of such a mass movement? What the political strategists of the ruling elite fear, above all, is that the working class will intervene into the political crisis in Indonesia, raising its own demands and fighting for its own class interests.

That is why the PRD plays such an indispensable role for the bourgeoisie. By politically tying workers to capitalist politicians like Megawati and to her allies in the military and state apparatus, the PRD prevents the working class from mobilising independently and utilising the Suharto regime's crisis to seize political power in its own right.

Budiman's comments reveal the political bankruptcy of the PRD's middle class radicalism. Right at the point when US President Clinton and his strategists are locked in discussions over the desirability and feasibility of ousting Suharto, Budiman insists that workers and students should align themselves with Washington.

"Imperialist governments like the US have their own interests—they need

more democratic government in Indonesia. The dictatorship cannot guarantee free market reforms the US wants because of the nepotism and monopolies controlled by Suharto. So we have common interests in opposing this corrupt regime at this time," he told his interviewer.

For decades the US has backed the Suharto dictatorship to the hilt and supported all of its atrocities against the Indonesian people. Its change of heart is not motivated by concerns for "human rights" or "democracy," but by the shifting demands of globally mobile capital. Suharto and his business cronies have become an intolerable barrier to the opening up and exploitation of the Indonesian economy by foreign investors.

The IMF and the US government have seized upon the economic crisis in Indonesia to impose a plan for the dismantling of all state-sanctioned monopolies, restrictive trade practices and tax concessions. When Indonesia failed to implement the measures, the IMF cut off its emergency funds, and the Clinton administration began holding top-level meetings at the White House, involving the State Department, the CIA and the Pentagon, to consider the possibility of removing Suharto.

The only purpose of the IMF's demands for "free market reforms," even if implemented through a US-backed ouster of Suharto, is to intensify the exploitation of the Indonesian working class by the international banks and big business. The social layers who share "common interests" with the US are not the Indonesian masses, but sections of the national bourgeoisie who have been frustrated by Suharto's all pervasive control of the Indonesian economy.

Budiman hails Megawati and Amien Rais, head of the conservative Islamic organisation Muhammadiyah, for their opposition to Suharto. Both espouse an economic programme which is identical to that of the IMF—an end to "cronyism and corruption" and the dismantling of the Suharto family monopolies.

The IMF's policies cannot be imposed either peacefully or democratically. Millions of workers are already being thrown out of work as banks, finance houses and companies, large and small, are forced to restructure, merge or go out of business. According to official figures, more than 30 percent of the work force is either unemployed or underemployed. Many face poverty, disease and starvation as prices for food, fuel and medicines skyrocket beyond the reach of ordinary working people.

Any regime headed by Megawati or Rais will be compelled to use methods every bit as ruthless as Suharto to implement policies which will inevitably accelerate the destruction of living standards and provoke widespread social unrest. These bourgeois opposition figures would require the support of key sections of the military not only for the removal of Suharto, but to suppress any opposition to the IMF's economic program.

Both Megawati and Rais have close relations with elements in the Indonesian military. Since the beginning of the year, Rais has held private talks with senior army figures, including Suharto's son-in-law Prabowo Subianto, head of the notorious Kostrad strategic forces. Sections of the

military have opened up talks with academics and student protest leaders.

Right at the point when these opposition leaders are intriguing with various generals, Budiman advances the necessity to subordinate the working class to one or another wing of the army. "I think that in the face of massive anti-regime mobilisations, the military would split. So again this is why we are focussing on strengthening workers' organisations and the urban poor," he states.

In other words, for the PRD, the purpose of mobilising workers and the poor is not to destroy the military apparatus which has bloodily suppressed any opposition to Suharto for 30 years, but to open up a split and encourage sections of the army leadership to back a government headed by Megawati or Rais.

This is precisely one of the options under discussion in ruling circles in Washington and Jakarta. An article last month in the *Los Angeles Times* revealed that the "Manila scenario" was being hotly debated in the White House as a means of removing Suharto. Rais has threatened "peoples power" demonstrations to oust Suharto if he fails to resolve Indonesia's economic problems within six months.

The "Manila scenario" is a reference to the "people's power" movement led by Cory Aquino which in 1986 brought an end to the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines. Backed by the US, Aquino diverted the aspirations of the students, workers, peasants and middle class for democratic rights and improved living conditions into support for a capitalist government more suited to US business interests.

The military played a crucial role in these events. It was only after the chief of the Filipino armed forces, General Ramos, at the urging of the US, swung his support behind the Aquino wing of the national bourgeoisie, that Marcos was forced to step aside. A decade after the so-called "people's power revolution," the Philippines remains a capitalist semicolon, the exploitation of the working class has intensified, and, as the current election campaign reveals, democracy is a farce.

If the Clinton administration, Rais and others have not as yet put the "Manila scenario" into operation, it is because they fear the consequences of setting in motion a mass movement of workers and youth. Their chief concern is that they will lose control of the opposition to Suharto and that the working class will begin to fight for its own class interests, threatening the entire bourgeois order. In any move against Suharto, they are dependent on organisations like the PRD to prevent the working class from initiating its own independent struggle for power and the establishment of a workers and peasants government.

In its programmatic documents, the PRD recognises the significance of the vastly expanded Indonesian proletariat. Its manifesto states: "Of all the potential present, we see the resistance put up by workers as the most significant potential force that will be harnessed and organised into the democratic struggle." In other words, the working class can never play an independent political role. The PRD's preoccupation is to "harness" workers to elements of the national bourgeoisie, the military and the economic restructuring program demanded by the US and the IMF.

In his interview, Budiman explains how the PRD is working to tie workers and youth to Megawati, in particular. "We have been involved in local coalitions uniting urban poor, students, workers and Megawati supporters in a number of cities. Now we are focussing on a mass campaign to support Megawati in rejecting the re-election of Suharto [in March]."

The political line of the PRD is similar to that pursued by the Stalinist Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in the 1950s and 1960s, with disastrous consequences. The PRD's support for Megawati and Rais reproduces the reactionary Stalinist perspective of the "two-stage revolution" and the "bloc of four classes" which paralysed the Indonesian working class and enabled Suharto and his generals to launch their bloody military coup in 1965-66.

According to the "two-stage theory," the backward character of

countries like Indonesia puts the struggle for socialism off the agenda indefinitely. In the first stage, the Stalinists claimed, only limited democratic demands, including land reform and national independence from imperialism, are possible. To achieve these aims, the working class must be subordinated to a political bloc with the so-called democratic wing of the national bourgeoisie.

Just as the PRD has embraced Megawati, so the PKI leadership hailed her father, the then-president, Sukarno, as the embodiment of progressive sections of the capitalist class. In the 1950s and 1960s Sukarno relied on the PKI to suppress an increasingly militant movement of Indonesian workers and peasants that erupted in the takeover of plantations and factories.

Just as the PRD is looking for an alliance with a wing of the Indonesian military, so the PKI insisted that sections of the army could play a democratic role in the 1960s. As it became obvious that the military was plotting its coup, the PKI continued to promote the fatal illusion that the armed forces were part of the "peoples democratic revolution" and that any transition to socialism would take place peacefully through the ballot box.

Even after Suharto had launched his bid for power and initiated a massacre of PKI members, workers and peasants, the PKI leaders continued to back Sukarno's appeal for "unity" and refused to organise any resistance. At least one million people were butchered by army troops and right-wing Muslim groups in one of this century's greatest acts of political genocide.

The US, which Budiman and the PRD now asserts can play a progressive role in Indonesia, was intimately involved in the planning and execution of the coup. The CIA worked closely with Suharto and the military, providing extensive lists of PKI members and sympathisers and others on the left to be killed by the army's death squads.

In its pamphlet *Lessons of the 1965 Indonesian Coup*, the SEP exposed in detail not only the political line of the PKI, but the treacherous role of the leaders of the Pabloite United Secretariat, who falsely claimed to be Trotskyists while covering up for the PKI leaders, both before and after the massacre.

The SEP is the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, formed in 1953 to combat an opportunist tendency headed by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel that emerged within the Fourth International. Adapting to the postwar restabilisation of capitalism and the apparent strength of Stalinism, the Pabloites set out to liquidate the international Trotskyist movement into various Stalinist, social democratic and bourgeois nationalist parties, claiming they could be pressured to project a revolutionary orientation.

In years leading up to Suharto's coup, the Pabloites tied the Indonesian working class to the PKI leadership and its alliance with Sukarno, responding to the warnings of the ICFI in the same manner as the DSP does today.

In an article in the Pabloite journal *Quatrieme Internationale* in 1958, Sal Santen, a close associate of Pablo, wrote: "In contradiction to some sectarian 'orthodox' people, the International does not let itself be fascinated by the reactionary Stalinist policy, but orients itself, above all, on the dynamism of the situation itself, a dynamism that pushes the masses, and through the masses, the PKI itself into contradiction with the present order in Indonesia."

But it was precisely the reactionary Stalinist policies that politically disarmed the masses and allowed Suharto to launch his coup. In its aftermath, the Pabloites whitewashed the role of the Stalinists and their "two-stage" program. Needless to say, the present-day Pabloites of the DSP have never answered the criticisms of the SEP and the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Unlike the PKI, the PRD is not a mass party with the support of millions of workers, students and peasants. But its program for shackling workers

to a “democratic coalition government” with sections of the bourgeoisie and the military will lead to a tragedy no less bloody.

The 1965-66 coup was a confirmation of the utter incapacity of the national capitalist class in Indonesia to resolve any of the basic tasks of the bourgeois revolution—democracy, land reform and national liberation. Nearly 50 years after formal independence from the Dutch, Indonesia remains a semicolony, economically dependent on international capital and politically subservient to the demands of the major imperialist powers. Suharto’s pledge to implement the IMF’s austerity plan, which will further devastate the lives of millions of working people, is the latest confirmation of the utterly venal character of the Indonesian ruling elite.

As Leon Trotsky, following Marx, explained in his theory of Permanent Revolution, the working class is the only social force capable of breaking the grip of imperialism and reorganising society along democratic, egalitarian and socialist lines. The working class will only draw layers of the peasantry and the oppressed to its banner by vigorously combatting the deadly illusion that “democrats” like Megawati offer an alternative to Suharto, and by demonstrating its willingness to launch its own struggle for power. This is the political basis for the establishment of a workers and peasants government to carry out democratic and socialist measures.

We urge workers and students in Indonesia, throughout Asia and internationally to seriously study the record of the political struggle of Trotskyism against Stalinism and all forms of opportunism. The vital task in Indonesia is to build a revolutionary political party in the working class, as a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

See Also:

Lessons of the 1965 Indonesian Coup
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