

Australian media owners urge Suharto to stand aside

The Editorial Board
16 May 1998

Expressing the economic and strategic interests of Australian capitalism--which has more than \$10 billion in direct investments in Indonesia--daily newspaper editorials in Australia on Friday called on Suharto to stand down and make way for a new government that can restore order.

While urging the Howard government to maintain its ties--including military ties--to the dictatorship that has served Australian corporate interests well for three decades--the media owners expressed alarm that the regime had proven incapable of preventing massive social unrest. "Anarchy the immediate threat," declared Murdoch's the *Australian*.

The most explicit political agenda was that outlined by the *Sydney Morning Herald*. After recording its gratitude to Suharto--"a leader of astuteness and craft"--for delivering economic stability since the mid-1960s, it called on the aging dictator to announce a transition to a "council of national unity".

This council would include figures from both the Suharto regime and capitalist-backed opposition elements. Among them would be the current Economics Minister, Ginandjar Kartasasmita; the Defence Minister and head of the 465,000-strong armed forces (ABRI), General Wiranto; the urban-based Islamic leader Amien Rais; and a rural-based Islamic leader Nahdatul Ulama.

Also on the list are ousted Indonesian Democratic Party leader Megawati Sukarnoputri, the daughter of Suharto's predecessor; and Dr Emil Salim and Professor Mohammad Sadli, two US-trained economic technocrats formerly associated with the Suharto junta.

The role of this council, according to the newspaper, would be to "cautiously loosen" the political system but prevent a "headlong rush to democracy" that "may prove counterproductive." The primary concern was to

impose an "orderly transition" to a new government.

The council's most important tasks would be to get the students to return to campus, restore faith among foreign investors and prevent "an opportunistic or panicky split in the military that may end in civil war".

In other words, end the unrest, restore the conditions for profit-making and prevent a breakup of the central instrument of capitalist rule for the past 32 years--the armed forces. Corporate Australia is looking to key figures in the bourgeois opposition, particularly Rais, Salim and Megawati, to deliver that agenda.

During Friday both the Howard government and the Labor Party opposition effectively called on sections of the military high command to secure Suharto's orderly departure. Howard urged ABRI leaders to consider the Indonesia's "long-term future." Labor's deputy leader and former foreign minister Gareth Evans was more explicit, suggesting that a new military strongman should come forward to oust Suharto.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact