

German Chancellor Kohl relays to Suharto his "great respect and approval"

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"My dear friend"--with these words begins the telegram sent by Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany to Suharto on the occasion of the Indonesian's president's resignation. Kohl goes on to acknowledge Suharto's decision with "great respect and approval," because it contributes "to avoiding further bloodshed and thereby stabilising the internal situation and security of the country."

The friendship between Kohl and the brutal dictator in Jakarta goes back over decades. Long before taking over the chief post in Bonn, Kohl enjoyed good relations with General Suharto, notwithstanding that Suharto assumed power by means of a monstrous bloodbath. The figure for the number of victims varies between 500,000 and one million.

Again, in the mid-70s, when Suharto occupied East Timor and allowed hundreds of thousands to be murdered, Kohl did not sway from his friendly attitude. Rather he expanded German military and economic collaboration with the Indonesian regime.

Many of the weapons turned on students and workers in Indonesia over the past several weeks originally came from Germany--machine guns from Heckler und Koch as well as small tanks from MAK Systemtechnik. Some years ago the armaments company MBB gave the license for the construction of helicopters to the Indonesian air plane company IPTN, which is owned by the new president, Jusuf Habibie.

Habibie played a key role in the collaboration between Germany and Indonesia, and a few months ago was suitably rewarded, receiving the highest German decoration for a foreign politician, the Great Cross. His sister Sri Rahayu has a post on the executive board of the Indonesian office of Ferrostahl AG (a subsidiary of the MAN concern), which acts as a general attorney for a large consortium of German firms.

Leading members of the Indonesian military were trained at the leadership academy of the German army. General Prabowo, a son-in-law of Suharto, who up until a few days ago headed the notorious elite unit Kopassus, received his training with the German anti-terror unit GSG9. With the growth of mass demonstrations at the beginning of the year, the minister of internal affairs for Berlin, Schoenbohm, offered to help reinforce and assist with the training of the police in Jakarta. Berlin and Jakarta are partner cities.

That Kohl is able so shamelessly to lavish friendship and praise on one of the world's most bloody and corrupt dictators throws considerable light on political relations within Germany. There is no one in official German politics who is prepared to contradict him or call him to order on this question.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) is on its way to taking over the reigns of government. The social democrats present themselves as the most effective representatives of German business. Like Kohl, their attitude towards Suharto and his successor Habibie is determined by the economic interests of German corporations and banks.

In 1995 the SPD's current candidate for chancellor, Gerhard Schroeder, personally intervened in his post as prime minister of Lower Saxony to make Indonesia a partner country for the Hannover Messe (industrial exhibition).

At the head of the Greens, Joschka Fischer still hopes he can assume the post of foreign minister in a Schroeder government and vehemently protests against the slightest criticism of the foreign policy interests of German business from the ranks of the Greens.

The standpoint of the trade unions was made clear by Hans Berger when, two years ago in his capacity as

chairman of the miners union and SPD deputy in the Bundestag, he took part in Kohl's 60-strong delegation that met Suharto to intensify and develop economic collaboration.

While corruption and nepotism do not assume the same visible forms in Germany as they do in Indonesia, a similar process of political decay is well advanced. All of the parties in Bonn march in step and defend the interests of business, while the anger and indignation of the people at the enrichment of the privileged few continues to grow.

It is high time that the German chancellor, who frequently foams at the mouth over the "terror of communism" and systematically attacks democratic rights, should meet the same fate as Suharto. The allies of the Indonesian students and workers are to be found among the workers in the German factories, who are increasingly coming into conflict with the government of Suharto's buddy, Helmut Kohl.

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