

As students prepare for national demonstrations - A letter to Indonesian students and teachers

14 May 1998

The World Socialist Web Site has sent the following reply to the appeal below from students and teachers at the Institute of Technology of Bandung (ITB), in Indonesia. Students at ITB and nationally are preparing for a May 20 day of protest against the Suharto regime.

Thank you for sending us your open letter of appeal concerning the struggle of students and lecturers at the Institute of Technology of Bandung against the Suharto regime.

We have followed very closely the wave of student protests across Indonesia over the last 10 weeks. The police murder of six unarmed student demonstrators from the Trisakti University in Jakarta, apparently on the orders of Suharto, marks a new stage in the political crisis in Indonesia.

The decision to unleash the police and armed forces against protesters is an act of desperation by a regime which is facing widespread opposition not just from students but workers, housewives, the unemployed and the rural poor.

The Socialist Equality Party believes that the present situation in Indonesia confronts workers, students, youth and intellectuals with many basic questions of political perspective. For that reason we would like to open up a dialogue with you over the policies and program that should guide the movement.

We could start by asking a series of questions. What organisations or political groups are involved in organising the 'reform tent' outside the Institute of Technology of Bandung? What are their policies and demands? What has been the response from workers and others? Is it supported by groups, trade unions or other organisations outside the ITB in Bandung?

The central demand of students is for the removal of Suharto. But the question immediately arises: what sort of government is to replace the Suharto regime and based on what policies? What is your attitude to the main opposition figures -- Amien Rais and Megawati Sukarnoputri?

Both Rais and Megawati support the IMF's economic

restructuring plan which will certainly lead to rising prices and higher unemployment -- as it has done in South Korea and Thailand. What is your view of the IMF's measures, and of the role of the US in backing the IMF and figures like Rais?

The political crisis also raises crucial historical issues. The origins of the New Order regime lie in the 1965-66 military coup, in which a million workers, peasants and PKI members were massacred. We believe that there are many important political lessons to be drawn from those tragic events, both for the working class in Indonesia and internationally. How do you see the role of Suharto, Sukarno, the Stalinist PKI and the US during that period?

The last two months have demonstrated the great determination and courage of tens of thousands of students in fighting the repressive Suharto regime. But without a political perspective and program that defends the interests of workers, peasants and youth, such a movement can be manipulated by elements of the ruling class to maintain the exploitative profit system.

The experience of the working class in the Philippines is revealing. Twelve years after the 'Peoples Power' movement toppled the Marcos dictatorship, the banks and big business continue to dictate economic and political life -- as they did under Marcos.

The likely next president, Joseph Estrada, is backed by a group of wealthy businessmen including the billionaire tycoon Eduardo Cojuangco, a long time crony of Marcos. The rest of the candidates are all from the ruling elite -- many of them directly representing different sections of business. At the same time, the living standards of Filipino workers continue to decline as a result of the economic crisis.

In Indonesia, Rais and Megawati, supported by the US, elements of the military, and organisations like the Peoples Democratic Party (PRD) have a similar political program to Aquino. It is to end the economic cronyism and corruption of the present Suharto junta and replace it with a regime to

meet the new requirements of global corporations to open up and exploit the Indonesian economy.

Whereas Aquino came to power at the high point of the economic upsurge in South East Asia, any new government in Indonesia will take power under conditions of an unprecedented economic collapse. The program set out by the IMF cannot be implemented peacefully or democratically but will be carried out with methods just as ruthless as those of the Suharto regime.

We believe that an entirely different program is necessary, based on the fight to take power and establish a workers' and peasants' government that will completely reorganise society to meet the needs of the working people, the peasants and poor masses, rather than to satisfy private profit.

The Indonesian working class, as part of the international working class, is the only force capable of challenging and overturning the economic system -- that of private profit -- that installed Suharto 32 years ago and has now created the financial and social crisis gripping Indonesia and the rest of Asia.

Just as the crisis in Indonesia is the outcome of global processes, so it can only be resolved on a progressive basis by the adoption of a global strategy. That means unifying the struggles of Indonesian workers with those of their fellow workers worldwide, and rejecting all attempts to divide the masses by whipping up racism, including anti-Chinese racism.

A discussion of these issues is critical for the future of the working class and young people in Indonesia. We welcome any questions you may have and look forward to your reply and an ongoing dialogue.

Best regards,
Peter Symonds for the World Socialist Web Site Editorial Board

See Also:

The political crisis in Indonesia
[Articles and comments from the World Socialist Web Site]
Lessons of the 1965 Indonesian Coup
[A detailed analysis of the rise to power of the Suharto regime]

To top of page

The following appeal from students and teachers at the Institute of Technology of Bandung (ITB), in Indonesia, was sent as e-mail to the Socialist Equality Party in Australia. It was translated from the Indonesian text for the World Socialist Web Site.

The situation is more and more becoming uncertain. The problem which exists today is getting too big to be just ignored. From our observations, there are almost no teachers and students who are not concerned by these conditions.

Thousands of protests are expressed by the teachers and

student activists individually, despite the knowledge that the change will never come from it. But the struggle should not only come from the university students.

As a part of the academic activities, we envision the establishment of 'reform tents' at the front gate of the ITB as a strategic means of expressing the principle of and the struggle for reform. Therefore, we are putting forward our support as teachers and student activists together, for its establishment.

We also appeal to all the ranks of teachers and student activists in the ITB campus to join in those tents together with the masses of people and other university students who are fighting for reform.

The plan and strategy for the movement can be organized together with the development of those reform tents. Please do not judge the good or bad of the ITB student movements only. But let us together overcome the slowness of the development and mistakes that we made along the way. Let us build another hundred tents in Ganesha Street.

For the university students who have not yet joined, after the exams, let's unite. Hopefully, your families who are also concerned will understand. Your fear will probably lessen by knowing that we, your brothers and sisters, are standing beside you. Organize your time, prepare 50 people from each organization so that a minimum of 1,000 people can always be camping in Ganesha Street.

Imagine, a hundred tents! Discussion, singing, reading, strategy organization, concern together, inviting speakers, writing statements, etc. Thousands of other activities that can be organized from there.

Bandung, May 4, 1998

(16 days before the celebration of the 90th National Day of Uprising [the anniversary of the May 20, 1908 revolt against Dutch colonialism--WSWS]. Time for the youth to state their principles.)

Signed for ITB teachers, students and alumni,

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See Also:

To top of page: A letter to Indonesian students and teachers
[A reply to the Open Letter of Appeal, 18 May 1998]
Lessons of the 1965 Indonesian Coup
[A detailed analysis of the rise to power of the Suharto regime]



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