

An exchange on Malaysian politics

9 July 1998

Dear Mr Symonds,

I think the comments or opinions you put forward in the article ('Economic crisis fuels tensions in Malaysian government' by Peter Symonds, 2 July 1998) are biased. I am sure that as you yourself are aware that you wrote this article without any solid basis but merely acting on populist aspirations of equating the crisis in Asia were purely caused by Asian mismanagement. The understanding on the subject like NEP was definitely unsatisfactory. This is in the same light a very typical perception many (western) writers interpret what they claim western i.e. democracy, human rights, freedom of the press etc.

Ironically you survived all this because of your so-called freedom of the press - the freedom for the big boys of the press to impose their values and influence, which you are just one of the collaborators. Imagine if you are against what they believe, do you think your article would get published?

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment.

Regards

IK

Dear IK,

Thank you for your e-mail to the World Socialist Web Site concerning my article 'Economic crisis fuels tensions in Malaysian government'. From what you write, it appears that you have not examined either the contents of the article or of the WSWS very closely. While you assert that the arguments are 'without any solid basis' your e-mail does not point to any error of fact or deal concretely with any of the issues which were raised. Instead you attribute to myself and the WSWS a series of political positions which we have never held as anyone who examines either the article or more broadly our coverage of events in Asia can check. Let me deal with each in turn:

1. You say that I was 'acting on populist aspirations of equating the crisis in Asia were [sic] purely caused by Asian mismanagement'. On the contrary, the WSWS

has been unique in explaining that the economic crisis in Malaysia and throughout Asia is a product of a much broader breakdown of the profit system as a whole which finds its expression in every country around the globe. What is generally referred to as 'mismanagement' are the close ties between big business and government, and the policies of national economic regulation which have been undermined by the development of globally organised production over the last two decades or so. In every country, not just in Asia, international investors are demanding the removal of all barriers to the free flow of capital. The antagonisms between Anwar and Mahathir, between the supporters of economic deregulation and those who want to try to control the operations of global capital, are mirrored in the conflicts within the ruling circles of every nation state. But neither side, nor any of the international institutions of capitalism such as the IMF and World Bank, have any solution to the crisis. Their response is ever sharper attacks on their rivals and on the rights and living standards of working people.

2. What you say about 'western writers' and 'democracy, human rights and freedom of the press' is not very clear. There is unquestionably a great deal of hypocrisy by the governments of the major powers about 'human rights'. In Australia where I live, both Labor and Liberal governments have kept hundreds of refugees, mainly from Asia, in detention in concentration camp style conditions for years and stripped them of all their basic legal rights. Many more have been rounded up in police raids and forcibly deported. The Socialist Equality Party in Australia has vigorously opposed such practices and campaigned for the removal of all immigration controls so that workers can live and work wherever they choose with full citizenship rights.

These same governments have maintained the closest relationships with military juntas like the Suharto dictatorship and other repressive regimes in Asia and

elsewhere around the world. The banner of 'human rights' is used by the Clinton administration and others not because they have the slightest concern for the basic democratic rights of working people in countries like China or Indonesia but as a means of advancing a definite economic agenda - the removal of national economic restrictions.

Having said that, however, it is also clear that various Asian capitalist leaders like Mahathir use the hypocrisy and double-dealing of the major powers as an excuse for their own repressive policies. All the various claims that democratic rights are 'against Asian values or culture' or simply 'a western invention' are used to justify the continued domination of the ruling cliques and their use of the most ruthless police state methods against the working class and any form of political opposition.

That is certainly the case in Malaysia where the Internal Security Act remains in force. Just recently, Lim Guan Eng, the deputy leader of the opposition Democratic Action Party was sentenced to an 18-month prison term for the 'crime' of publishing a pamphlet condemning the government for not pressing charges of statutory-rape against a former politician of the ruling UMNO party. Mahathir and others use anti-western chauvinism for the same purpose that capitalist politicians around the world whip up nationalism - to shore up their own political base and to divide the working class along national and ethnic lines.

3. Finally, to assert that the WSWS is collaborating with 'the big boys of the press' is ludicrous as any examination of the history of our party - the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement - will show. In country after country our party has been subject to everything from police harassment and intimidation to jail and murder for campaigning for our principles.

As socialists we intransigently fight for the interests of the international working class against the ruling class in every country and seek to unite workers internationally in a powerful movement for the abolition of capitalism. As the material available on the WSWS demonstrates, we have exposed the anti-working class policies and programs of governments in the US, Europe and Australia just as comprehensively as we have the regimes in the countries they oppress like Malaysia. Moreover, we have vigourously opposed

the machinations and open aggression of the imperialist powers against more backward capitalist countries - such as the US preparations for war against Iraq.

I trust that these points assist in clarifying our political positions.

Regards,
Peter Symonds.
WSWS Editorial Board

See Also:
Economic crisis fuels tensions in Malaysian government
[2 July 1998]



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact