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Indonesia

# Interview with PRD leader

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### **PRD Central Committee member, Edwin Gozal, 24, talks to B. Skanthakumar about the anti-dictatorship movement in Indonesia and the particular role of the PRD.**

*After a year of heavy repression, [1] the Suharto regime organised a "festival of democracy", culminating in fixed elections on May 29th. The victory of the ruling GOLKAR party was never in doubt. But the democratic opposition has never been more visible.*

*Progressive forces used the election campaign to mobilise support for the "Mega-star" coalition of democratic forces led by Megawati Sukarnoputri, daughter of the country's first President, who was deposed in a coup in 1965. Up to one million suspected Communists were slaughtered in the ensuing violence. Today, many poorer Indonesians associate Megawati with her father's populist policies. She was so popular that the ageing dictator, General Suharto, manipulated her removal from the presidency of the opposition Democratic Party (PDI) last year.*

*Many PDI militants continue to support "Mega", who has become a symbol of the pro-democracy movement. In many homes her picture is displayed as a declaration of opposition to the dictatorship. Supporters of the moderate Islamic PPP front also participate actively in election protests against the dictatorship.*

*The far left Partai Rakyat Demokrasi (Peoples Democratic Party) also played a role in these protests. Leaders of the PRD, one of the few Indonesian groups supporting the independence of East Timor, recently recieved harsh sentences in high profile subversion trials. [2] The party is now banned. Membership or association with it as well as possession and circulation of its materials is an imprisonable offence.*

### **The show trials of PRD leaders ended harshly. Thirteen years for Budiman Sudjatmiko and lesser sentences for Dita Sari, Petrus Hariyanto and others.**

We were fully aware of the nature of the Indonesian justice system so we didn't waste our time complaining about the unfairness and bias of the legal system. Instead we planned on using the trials as a platform to make propaganda about the PRD and its political program and our analysis of the real condition of Indonesian society. [3]

PRD President Budiman made a political speech in front of the court, exposing the anti-democratic "five political laws". [4] Dita Sari, President of the PPBI trade union (Indonesian Centre for Labour Struggles) didn't make a legal defence but instead she read out the political manifesto of the PRD; educating the court as well as the public about our party and what it really stands for.

Our comrades were prepared for the death penalty. However Suharto's 'New Order' regime was faced by an international solidarity movement with the political prisoners and pressure from the international community over their human rights record and other abuses and so didn't impose the maximum penalty.

I believe that everyone in Indonesia knows of the trials of the PRD leaders and the sentences that were handed down.

**In addition to the PRD members, the leader of the independent SBSI trade union was on trial for subversion in relation to these same events.**

Mochtar Pakpahan was imprisoned for a year after the Medan riots in 1994 and then released on appeal by the Supreme Court. But in Indonesia the judgement of the Supreme Court may be reviewed. After the July crack-down the Supreme Court revoked its own decision and then re-imposed the previous four year sentence.

Pakpahan's trial on the new charges has been postponed because he is in poor health. He is extremely ill and wants to travel to the United States for medical treatment but has been prevented from doing so by the New Order regime.

### **What are prison conditions like?**

The prisoners don't have free access to their families and friends. They aren't able to read the newspapers and magazines they would like but only officially approved materials. Even these are censored of their political news. Up to now they have had some limited freedom but recently Budiman Sudjatmiko was warned that if he continued to give interviews to the press he would be transferred to Nusa Kambangan. This is an isolated island which is off-limits to most people.

The families of the PRD prisoners have formed a committee to publicise the injustice of the trials and sentences and prison conditions. This is an important development. Even in 1965 after the massacres, [5] people were too afraid to do anything like this. This could be quite embarrassing for the regime as these are elderly, devout and respectable people and don't look like the parents of "Communist subversives" - which is what their children are supposed to be.

### **Are the comrades in contact with the Party outside?**

We had to reorganise ourselves after the military crack-down because many of our leaders are in prison but the new leadership maintains close contact with the jailed comrades and they are kept fully informed of our activities and campaigns.

### **The results of the General Elections of May 29th were a foregone conclusion...**

The ruling party, GOLKAR, won over 70% of the vote, as it had "predicted." The purpose of these elections so far as the regime is concerned is to invoke some legitimacy and constitutional respectability for its authority. The PRD's response was to call upon the people to boycott this farce.

### **Election related violence hit a new high in these elections. GOLKAR supporters were attacked as were police stations and official buildings. The PRD was blamed. What happened?**

These incidents of violence are an expression of the anger of the masses at this electoral charade. The Indonesian people know about their civil and political rights and their anti-Suharto dictatorship consciousness has also increased rapidly.

However what they don't yet have is an idea of a solution to this situation. How to overcome this dictatorship? They don't see a way out and so they make riots instead. It is a spontaneous outburst of anger and frustration and has nothing to do with conspirators or masterminds!

We are used to these baseless accusations being made against the PRD by the regime and don't bother replying to them. We support the masses who have been agitating for a "Mega-Star-People" coalition between Megawati Sukarnoputri, the leader of the PDI who was removed by the Government and in whose place a regime loyalist was

imposed, the other main opposition party the PPP (whose symbol is a star), and the aspirations and demands of the popular sectors.

We share their demands for the repeal of the Five Political Laws and to end the doctrine of Dual Function of the armed forces.

This demand reflects our own goal of building the widest possible coalition for the overthrow of the dictatorship and for popular multi-party democracy in its place. This is an informal coalition which was sparked from the grassroots when the leader of the PPP branch in Solo went to visit Megawati. He proposed that the opposition instead of fighting each other should combine against GOLKAR. He was reacting to the sentiment of Megawati supporters who unable to bear supporting the legal faction of their own PDI preferred to support the PPP instead.

Mega gave no direct reply to this suggestion. She just smiled. When this was reported to the masses they began carrying portraits of Megawati to PPP rallies and an unofficial 'smile coalition' was established. The PRD decided to become involved in this mass movement and supported it during the campaign. This coalition had seven basic demands:

- Build a coalition to oppose Suharto
  
- Ending dual function of the military
  
- Withdraw the five political laws
  
- Investigate the wealth of the Suharto family
  
- End corruption
  
- Increase the daily minimum wage
  
- Lower the prices of basic commodities

### **What is your analysis of the results?**

Well ,we were not surprised that GOLKAR won the elections! The PDI vote collapsed to under three percent which shows how discredited their new leadership is even among its own members and is a vindication for Megawati supporters of her popularity and the illegitimacy of her removal. The PPP vote received 23 per cent which was good considering the electoral malpractices. This vote doesn't reflect their real support.

### **The PRD called for a boycott...**

It appears that our boycott call was not very successful when in spite of the hostility towards the government and knowing the result would be manipulated, most people saw no option but to vote on the day. For the opposition parties where possible but many millions were intimidated into voting for GOLKAR by their employers (voting is compulsory in Indonesia).

What we did accomplish was mass political education on the true nature of these elections. We also explained that there are many ways people can oppose and struggle against this dictatorship and that the 1997 General Election is an artificial exercise.

We had called on people to protest in the streets on polling day instead. However when it became clear that the people would be voting we joined with the PPP and PDI (Megawati) in setting up election monitoring offices so that people could report malpractices and manipulations.

### **What is the PRD's strategy now?**

In the next eight months (until the presidential election) we intend to make more propaganda through the media that this high anti-dictatorship consciousness must be channelled into some political outlet. We are agitating for the currently divided pro-democracy movement to come together in a Popular Democratic Coalition on the basis that everyone is committed to the overthrow of Suharto.

We believe that every sector of society should be represented and involved ranging from workers and peasants, to the urban poor, NGOs, the Partai Uni Demokrasi Indonesia of Sri-Bintang Pamungkas, Nationalists, Catholic Church, the middle class and of course those involved in the "Mega-Star-People" movement in recent months.

Our aim would be to overthrow Suharto and form a coalition government to introduce multi-party democracy. I must stress here that the PRD regards this as a transitional arrangement not a permanent electoral or programmatic coalition .

We have a major struggle ahead even after the removal of Suharto to create a political framework for open and free political competition. We need a transitional government to lead these changes with the objective of organising the first free election.

In a liberal democratic situation there will be the space for us to freely voice our own views and to organise ourselves and our mass organisations. We will go into that election with our own political programme which is anti-capitalist and for popular democracy and is based on mass action and aspirations of the workers and peasants.

### **The PRD has consistently taken a stance in favour of the self-determination of East Timor, illegally occupied by Indonesia. [6] How did you arrive at this courageous position?**

The Indonesian people and the Maubere of East Timor have a common enemy, the Suharto regime. Only the overthrow of the regime will create the opportunity for the freedom of the East Timorese. The Indonesian Government spends billions of rupiah on military hardware to crush the East Timorese resistance and to maintain its control there.

When some Indonesians disagree with us, one of our responses is to ask why the Government can find so much money for western arms but cannot fund our education system.

We try to use examples and arguments like this drawn from the everyday experiences of the masses to politically educate them and raise their awareness of this issue. Among students and youth there is a progressive attitude but the older generation is more difficult to convince.

However, when their fathers, husbands and sons come back dead from East Timor, they start to question the war there. Also many people are aware that the Indonesian government is frequently criticised in international fora for its abuses and occupation of East Timor so they realise something is very wrong.

When we sent an open letter to 15 leading pro-democracy individuals asking their support in our boycott call, the only one who replied was the jailed FALINTIL leader Kay Rala Xanana Gusmao. He said he supported us and that the East Timorese too should boycott these elections. We have good relations with the East Timorese resistance in Indonesia and abroad.

The PRD sees our struggles as linked and we often say that we must intensify the pro-democracy movement in the main islands to divert the Indonesian military from East Timor and thus give more space for the resistance there.

### **What do you hope to achieve in your summer '97 European solidarity tour?**

We intend by the end of the year to have an office and permanent representative in Europe. We already have an international office in Australia. Our intention is to build a network of like-minded individuals and parties in solidarity with Indonesia and East Timor.

We don't have much faith in the United Nations system or the international community of nations. If they genuinely support the freedom of East Timor they could have prevented Indonesia's occupation twenty years ago. If they support democracy in Indonesia they could have made it possible thirty years ago when Suharto took power. Western countries have their own economic interests in Indonesia and that is their priority.

The experience we are trying to learn from is that of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign in the 1960s and 1970s when across the world there were mobilisations against US intervention in Vietnam.

It is that kind of protest that we would like to see develop around Indonesia and East Timor. In countries which supply arms to Indonesia, activists should be campaigning against the sale of weapons and military supplies or any military training.

Western trans-nationals which invest in Indonesia should be confronted on the human rights record of the regime and their support for it. Similarly western governments should be pressurised about the illegal occupation of East Timor and asked what they are doing about it.

Suharto's time is running out. There will be change in Indonesia. We have learned from the experiences of anti-dictatorship movements in the Philippines in 1986 and elsewhere. We don't want democracy for the few. We need your solidarity and support.

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## Footnote

# The repressive framework

## The Five Political Laws and the Dual Function

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The Indonesian regime rests on a barrage of repressive legislation. Restrictions on democracy are codified in the Five Political Laws of 1985, while the repressive function is assured through dwifungsi, the Dual Function doctrine of the role of ABRI (Armed Forces).

The first law gives authority to the Government to administer elections and screen candidates thus allowing them to interfere and manipulate the process and the result.

The second law creates two legislative bodies. The Peoples Consultative Assembly (MPR) and Peoples Representative Council or Parliament (DPR). These elections were for the DPR. Of its total membership 425 are directly elected while 75 members are drawn from the Armed Forces and appointed by the President. These 500 become members of the 1,000 strong MPR. The remaining seats are appointed by the President. In total 575 members are directly appointed by the President which gives the ruling GOLKAR Party and the Suharto regime an in-built advantage. The MPR also act as an electoral college to elect the President. So he never need fear losing his office!

The third of the laws permits only three legal political parties. They are the ruling party GOLKAR, the United Development Party (PPP) and the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI). No one else can form alternative legal parties. All three parties are under the control of the Minister of Home Affairs.

The fourth law is on referendums and stipulates that there must be a ninety per cent vote in favour of a proposition if any changes are to be made to the Constitution or legal system. So an unfair law or constitutional provision can never be modified in a democratic way.

The fifth law regards mass organisations. It states that in every sector of society from students and peasants to workers there can only be one organisation representing their interests. So only the state approved organisation is allowed to exist which of course represents the interests of the ruling class.

The doctrine of dwifungsi or dual function means that the military is permitted to have a role not only as a professional army but also to be in the fore-front of social life in politics, business and state administration. So for example the Head of the Supreme Court is from the military, as is Head of the Parliament, University Rectors and regional Governors. At every level of society from the village to the Cabinet, the military must be represented.

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[1] Max Lane, "Massive repression of the new left", International Viewpoint # 281, October 1996.

[2] B. Skanthakumar, "Indonesian Show Trials: Act now to free the detainees!", Socialist Outlook (London) January 1997.

[3] For information about the PRD and its political positions see, PRD/ASIET (ed.) The Struggle for Democracy in Indonesia: Introducing the Peoples Democratic Party (PRD), September 1996. Available from ASIET ,PO Box 458, Broadway 2007, Australia.

[4] see footnote

[5] In October 1965 the military led by Suharto crushed an abortive putsch using it as a pretext to extinguish the Left through the killing of between 500,000 and one million people mainly members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and the jailing of tens of thousands, some of whom remain in prison till today. For analysis of Left strategy see Joseph Hansen (ed.) The Catastrophe in Indonesia, Merit Publishers; New York 1966; Olle Tornquist, Dilemmas of Third World Communism: The destruction of the PKI in Indonesia, Zed Books: London 1984.

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[6] Will McMahon, "East Timor: Eighteen years of resistance", International Viewpoint # 250, November 1993.