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Indonesia: A Short Review

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by Richard W. Franke

"Seven workers from Hotel Bali Hyatt were brought to trial, accused of having organized a strike. . . . Eighty workers from Hotel La Taverna Bali were arbitrarily dismissed. . . . One hundred and fifty workers from PT Putra Sijati spinning mill went to the House of People's Representatives (Indonesian National Parliament) after eight of their fellow workers had been arbitrarily dismissed. . . . 65% of the employees at the American Club in Jakarta struck to protest the dismissal of a worker trying to organize a union there. . . ." These are among the incidents from the 62 case studies of worker organizing and harassment in 1979 and 1980 alone that are presented in this informative collection of documents and analysis.

Indonesian Workers provides materials from the Indonesian press as well as documents smuggled out of the country to indicate that, despite a well organized government effort to stop them and a bad general bargaining position for labor, workers have organized to protest and in some cases have been able to improve on the appalling conditions of life in the country's small but important industrial sector.

Along with the 62 brief case histories gleaned from the press, one case, PT Textra spinning and weaving mill in East Jakarta, is presented in detail, showing the high level of cooperation between the government security apparatus, the employer and the pliant trade union leadership allowed under the Suharto regime.

Indonesian factory workers struggle under difficult conditions both economic and political. Since 1967, the special investment incentives for both foreign and national capital have produced fewer than two million jobs, or fewer jobs in a twelve year period than the growth of the work force—now totalling fifty-nine million—every two years. This slow rate of investment and industrial employment dovetails with the massive *outflow* of people displaced from the countryside by the highly unequal landholding system and the spread of some modern technology as a result of the green revolution. Workers thus face a market in which supply of labor is overwhelming compared to its demand.

Economic conditions are exacerbated by the political stance of the Suharto regime. After annihilating all left-oriented unions in 1965 and 1966, the regime finally settled

INDONESIAN WORKERS AND THEIR RIGHT TO ORGANISE. Indonesian Documentation and Information Centre (INDOC), P.O. Box 11250, 2301 EG Leiden, The Netherlands, 1981, 148 pp. Hfl. 17.50.

INDOKUMENTA, Untranslated documents from Indonesia, and *Maandoverzicht Arbeiders in Indonesië* and *Mensenrechten in Indonesië*, quarterly document collections translated into Dutch. Also available from INDOC.

in 1973 on a national labor federation created in part with the assistance of the AFL-CIO affiliated International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation associated with the West German Social Democratic Party. The new "All Indonesia Labour Federation" (FBSI) is heavily staffed with military appointees and has little power other than that granted by the government. It's philosophy and actions demonstrate a corporatist approach to labor relations. Most strikes have been wildcats, denounced by the Federation as inimical to the "development" process (a convenient ploy also used against political parties by the military as a way of stifling debate) and the Federation's attitude is perhaps summed up in a banner, a photograph of which is reproduced in the book and on which is painted "Workers are the Partners of Entrepreneurs and the Government."

But what has the partnership meant for the workers? Even the head of the government-controlled Federation admits that "60% of Indonesian laborers receive less than a living wage." The low wages are compounded by harsh conditions: day or piece work hiring that circumvents pensions, sick pay, and other requirements; use of very young women who are easier to control; frequent arbitrary firings, whether for shop floor militancy; pregnancy; unwillingness to provide sexual favors to the boss and so on. The study documents several cases of unsafe and unhealthy working conditions as well, and illustrates that many workers, despite the difficult economic and political situation in Indonesia, are willing to struggle against such conditions with wage and union recognition demands.

The harsh reality of industrial work in Indonesia is, however, that even the most determined struggles are up against extremely difficult odds. Employers have no difficulty in calling out security forces against workers, with beatings, jailings and shootings as results. The FBSI has no strike fund and the only legal help comes from the understaffed and overworked Legal Aid Institute (LBH). In February, 1981, even this minimal assistance was outlawed by fiat from the country's (military) security organization, KOPKAMTIB, which was responsible for organizing much of the 1965 anti-Communist massacre and the holding for fourteen years of thousands of political prisoners.

KOPKAMTIB, the Command for the Restoration of Order and Security, followed its ban on legal aid to strikers with an official ban on strikes in August of 1981 and, in September and October the press was silent about workers actions. These most recent events have taken place in an atmosphere of generally increasing repression in the country.

Indonesian Workers concludes with a summary and analysis of the conditions of work and the obvious violations of ILO (International Labor Organization) convention no. 98 guaranteeing basic rights to organize trade unions, that was signed by the country's leaders in 1956.

Gross neglect of the welfare of Indonesian workers and their families characterizes all types of company, whether large, medium or small, private or state-controlled, owned by Western, Japanese, "overseas Chinese," or domestic interests. This sacrifice of the workforce is sanctioned by the Government in the interests of increasing and encouraging capital investment.

The "gross neglect" is analyzed through a description of recruiting practices, wage levels, dismissals, health and safety conditions, forced labor, and the government's support for an almost total right of employers to set wages and conditions of work.

What does all this mean to the individual worker? Four brief case histories are provided. They do not pretend to be exhaustive, but suggest what life is like for many if not all industrial workers in Indonesia today. An excerpt from the case of Maryam is illustrative:

When I first met Maryam, she had only been in the factory for three months. She was lively, with bright, flashing eyes.

Openly friendly, she attracted people, and seemed never short of friends and admirers. Just under a year later, her spirit was broken. First, a needle on one of her machines snapped, and the manager said she must pay. They would dock her wage by Rp. 2,000 a month for three months. She could either agree or find another job. She decided to stay and foot the bill. . . . One night the bus to collect her for the night shift didn't turn up. The factory counted this as a day off, and she lost a further Rp. 1,000 from her bonus. Then, the endless round of shift work and inadequate food began to take its toll. Talking with me during her rest hours, she was obviously exhausted. She would lose the thread of conversations and nod off, her eyes still open but glazed. She began accusing other workers of getting at her; she got involved in a row with a security guard. She appealed to her manager—she felt she had worked hard and loyally, so he was bound to support her. Her loyalty was not returned. She was sacked with one day's notice.

For those who want to follow the development of the Indonesian workers' movement, *Indonesian Workers and their Right to Organise* provides valuable data and useful source documentation. The study is currently being supplemented and updated by five related publications of the Leiden-based Indonesian Documentation and Information Center. INDOKUMENTA is a collection of Indonesian original documents on social, cultural and economic issues, appearing about four times per year. A quarterly bulletin of documents on human rights (including a special collection on the Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer), and a separate quarterly on workers' issues are also published in Dutch. The Center has also issued 1982 and 1983 updates which further add to the immense value of the publication to students of Indonesia. ★

Sources on Indonesia

INDOC: Indonesian Documentation and Information Center
Postbus 11250
2301 EG Leiden
The Netherlands

Stichting Informatie Indonesië
Postbus 4098
1009 AB Amsterdam
The Netherlands

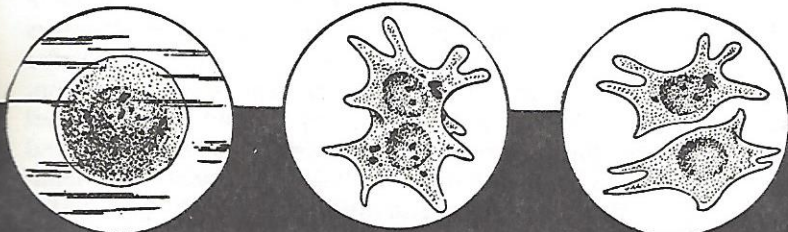
Tapol
8a, Treport St.
London SW18 2BP
England

East Timor Human Rights Committee
Box 363
Clinton Station
Syracuse NY 13201

Timor Newsletter
Rua Damasceno Monteiro, 14A R/C
1100 Lisbon
Portugal

Two sources in Indonesian are:
Dialog Nusantara
Admiralengracht 126 (IN)
1057 GE Amsterdam
The Netherlands

Kancah
c/o Emil
29, rue Berthe
75018 Paris
France



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