

Asia Pacific Solidarity Conference 1998

# Defeating Neo-liberalism, Prospects and Projects

Wednesday 4 July 2007, by [LANE Max](#) (Date first published: 13 April 1998).

**This talk was presented to the Asia Pacific Solidarity Conference, April 10-13, 1998 by Max Lane, conference convenor and foreign affairs spokesperson of the Democratic Socialist Party.**

Comrades, during the conference welcome I put forward the proposal that one of the purposes of organising this event was to facilitate all of us taking further steps forward in building confidence between the organisations of the Asian and Pacific region. It was about building confidence between each other so that we can take further concrete steps in forging a closer cooperation and coordination in the struggles that lie ahead.

I am already convinced that the conference has been a success in getting that process started. I should say though, that this coordination and cooperation has not just been about making this conference a success — it is also because this coordination and cooperation is necessary and that we're all aware it's necessary.

It's necessary because throughout the region we're all facing the same kinds of offensive from the ruling class, from the ruling class of our own country and the ruling class of the larger imperialist countries and countries like the United States outside of the region.

There's more and more uniformity in the kind of attacks that we have to fight, not just in the region actually, but everywhere around the world. Everywhere the struggle against privatisation is on the top of the agenda. Even in countries like the Philippines suffering terrible poverty, the World Bank, the IMF and local governments are pushing things such as the privatisation of water. This is in a country where water is already scarce, where in major cities, more than half the population have no access to clean drinking water.

Everywhere around the region there's more and more deregulation of the activities of big capital, big business and the multinational corporations. There is deregulation right around the region and indeed around the world as far as the environment goes.

And of course there is more regulation of us. More regulation of workers, of what workers can do, more regulation of what farmers can do. More regulation of what students can do.

We must not fall into the trap of letting the ruling class get away with this mythology of deregulation. Because for us, the regulation of our activity by the ruling class in the end means repression.

Of course in our region, it's fair enough to say that the most severe repression at the moment is in countries such as East Timor, Indonesia and Burma. Fascist like brutal military dictatorships or

regimes backed up by military violence. But this regulation of us, of our class and moves toward further repression are increasing everywhere.

In some places, they already mean that people struggling for change face military and police violence regularly. And in the so-called better off countries, countries like Australia and New Zealand, the regulation of our activities is approaching levels of repression.

When the Howard government backs up an employer trying to sack their whole work force, when there are laws preventing unions and other people from striking in solidarity with the MUA workers, when the civil courts can be used to bankrupt trade unions, we have a situation where there is already repression.

Comrades, these laws as they're implemented, if they're not broken, will turn all of us, the whole of our class into slaves and to this we resolutely say no''! We affirm fully and without qualification that we will resist right to the end to make sure that this process is stopped. In the most immediate term, we are extending our solidarity and continuing our solidarity with those most under attack at the moment, those at the forefront of the struggle against the Howard government, namely the workers of the MUA. From the point of view of us in the DSP and in Resistance, I suppose it's fair enough to say also, that as far as the need for solidarity in the Asia and Pacific region goes, we acknowledge and recognise that there is a lot of work to be done. We've already had resolutions passed in this session, statements of what is happening in the Pacific, the movement throughout the Pacific islands, as well as statements on Indonesia and East Timor. In Indonesia, be under no doubt that the Suharto dictatorship totters on the brink of being overthrown. I notice the PRD comrades in their new publication 'Free Indonesia' the title on the front cover is: 'The road to overthrowing Suharto is open''. This is clear – the new government has formed a cabinet circling the wagons – where only the closest cronies of the regime get a place. Only the most trusted lieutenants in the repressive apparatus get into the cabinet – no concessions are being made at all any more. Just in the last couple of days, we can get a sense of the fear the regime has for the movement as it develops. As the student demonstrations unfold, take place in city after city, the minister for education was forced to announce that all practical politics on all campuses in Indonesia was now banned. This announcement was made just three days ago. And then he went on to define what practical politics meant – any attempt to change society. Well, we can be reassured from what we've heard over the last few days from our comrades in the PRD, and from our observations of the larger and larger number of people coming out onto the street, that efforts to change society, that efforts to transform society are going to continue in Indonesia. There is going to be no halt even as leaders are captured and disappeared, such as Andi Arief on March 28, the PRD in Indonesia and other pro democracy groups have reaffirmed once again that they're going to continue their struggle. The disappearance of Andi Arief on March 28 only provoked larger mobilisations as 25,000 students demonstrated on March 28. There's another reason though while we here in Australia should continue to pay attention to the struggle in Indonesia and the prospects there are for this transformation. It's because of the role of the Australian government, of Australian imperialism. Many examples have already been given of the Australian government's support for the Suharto dictatorship. I just want to emphasise one issue because it's one

that we all have to face doing something about in the very near future. It is the despicable, disgusting and inhumane position that the Australian government has taken towards the 1000 East Timorese refugees who are still trying to seek asylum in Australia. But the Australian government continues to ridiculously assert that they should go to Portugal because they're Portuguese citizens. Despite the fact that the Australian government remains the only government in the world to give formal recognition to the Indonesian occupation. Not only are they trying to send them to Portugal, they're about to implement policies to prevent the vast bulk of them from receiving aid from the red cross while they await the outcomes of their appeals against being knocked back for political asylum. We have to redouble our efforts of solidarity with the East Timorese as well as the Indonesian people. I think giving crucial support to the East Timorese people in the near future is going to help to strengthen the democracy movement in Indonesia. That's why we're strongly supporting ASIET's People's Power Fighting Fund Campaign. I should announce that within the 24 hours since the Fighting Fund has been started we've already collected more than \$1500 in cash and pledges. That's why we also support the initiative by Resistance and other student organisations around the country to hold a national mobilisation outside the Indonesian embassy in Canberra. It will be held on April 24 and will be demanding the release of all political prisoners and demanding the release of the disappeared student leader from SMID, Andi Arief. This is extremely important comrades. An international campaign against the disappearances can determine whether or not Indonesia moves quickly into a period of death squads. So far, this has not been a systematic or regular feature of the situation in Indonesia, except in east Timor where death squads have been operating for a long time. We need to stop this escalation. We need the strongest possible international campaign against the disappearances and we need to call for the release of all political prisoners. That's why we also endorse the call by ASIET to hold an international day of protest against the disappearances and for the release of all political prisoners to be held on August 22, the weekend at the end of the week where Indonesian independence day falls. Comrades there's another solidarity task which is very important for us and lies ahead. It's one that was referred to in the speech I think made by comrade Morihara from the Japanese Communist Party. He in fact ended his speech by saying that one form that their solidarity would take would be to struggle for a democratic government in Japan. In Australia, the challenge we face is to overcome the domination of the major parties, of the labor and liberal parties over Australian politics. We all here know that the major parties in Australia are bankrupt. They're bankrupt on all the issues that relate to foreign policy towards the Asia Pacific region. We know that there's bilateral policy in supporting the Suharto dictatorship. We know there is bilateral policy in trying to save the Suharto dictatorship as its decades of economic mismanagement, corruption and cronyism lead the country to economic crisis. We know that there's bilateral policy in support of the occupation of East Timor. We know that there's bilateral wishywashyness on the question of Burma. We know that there's bilateral support for the US bases in Australia. We know that there's bilateral support for holding down the trade union movement in Indonesia even though the Australian Labor party alleges to be a labour party and has trade union connections. We know in fact that there's bilateral support for privatisation with both Labor and Liberal

governments bringing in privatisation and the Labor party leadership in NSW struggling to privatise the electricity system here. We know that there's bilateral support for doing nothing as far as bringing in reform on the right to choose for women on abortion goes. We know that there's bilateral support for no kind of wage indexation for workers and the list could go on and on and on and on. Of course, we have to acknowledge that in the parliament there is a source of different views than those of Labor and Liberal. We've already referred to the motion put in the Senate by Senator Bob Brown from the Australian Greens. And on some international issues the democrats have also come forward with motions in line with a humanitarian and a humane approach to the Asia Pacific region. But this is not enough. A progressive stance reflected in press releases or speeches in parliament is not adequate to the task. This is not the time for such band aid solutions. Band aid solutions are no solution in this period. We have to have a strategy that can build on our existing strengths. We face strong opponents in this country and around the region. We have to be strong too. We have to find ways to build up our strength. This means building an organisation. It means building an organisation amongst the youth, amongst workers, amongst women, an organisation that can combine its different components, that can mobilise people, that can punch, that can wage campaigns on a national basis, that can expose the government, that can impose political costs, that can build solidarity and awareness amongst all those involved and give us the strength to face a strong opponent and bring the policies of the government to an end. These campaigns can also win us reforms. But it is not simply enough to campaign for reforms in this period. We have to wage every single campaign, around every single issue, whether it's one of solidarity with the region or solidarity with workers in Australia struggling for their rights. But we have to make sure that all these campaigns are built within a framework realising that in the end the people themselves, the working people have to have power. I don't know how comrades and friends here think about this. But to me, even the most militant protest, even the most militant confrontation with an employer or with the government, if it's not part of an overall strategy to put the people in power, it in the end means we're still beggars, however militant. All our chants that we shout as we march in even the most militant demonstrations will be reduced in the end to another chant, if our struggle is not built into a longer term strategy to win power for the people. Otherwise, the chant simply becomes, 'Change your spots, change your spots, change your spots!'. But, a leopard doesn't change its spots. The Labor party and the Liberals will not change their spots. Yes, sometimes we can win reforms as we have in the past and we'll win reforms again in the future, but in the end the only solution is to get rid of the system altogether, to get rid of the ruling class altogether and put the people in power.

Well comrades, of course this is not easy and we've had examples from around the region of how it's even harder in countries where there are military dictatorships and where the ruling class has an even more vicious hold on the political system. It means a lot of hard work. It means being willing to struggle for a long time. It means there must be more of us building an organisation to do this.

There are campaigns to be run, funds to be raised, education to be done and to be had, a newspaper to be distributed and I was particularly inspired by the comment from one of the Japanese comrades, the head of the Japan press service, who gets up 5am once a week and distributes his paper to his subscribers. We need that here too. He was right, if we don't have our own press, our own media,

our voice will never get out. We have to build a stronger people's media in Australia, that again means more people involved, more people building the organisation and building the movement.

A lot of things to do comrades, an important task building such an organisation, such a party, such a movement.

Moreover, it has to be done now while we make sure that all our most immediate campaigns continue. We have to make sure that all our immediate campaigns to build solidarity are a success. We have to make sure that the international campaign for the Indonesian democratic revolution goes ahead and gets stronger and stronger and gains support from more and more parts of the world. We have to make sure that our solidarity with the East Timorese people build and builds.

I need to make an appeal here to all the comrades from around the region to include this next demand in your protests outside the Australian embassy. Make sure that the Australian government doesn't get away with the totally uncivilised policy of harassing East Timorese who have fled the most brutal and vicious occupation in East Timor. Of harassing them now they are in Australia, where there's already been cases of suicide because of the psychological pressure they're under and where they can't even get assistance from the Red Cross, we have to make sure that that solidarity grows.

We have to make sure that the call from Matt Robson for a strong anti-APEC conference against the Suhartos and Clintons and others that will gather in Auckland in 1999 is a success.

We have to make sure that the call for closer collaboration between all the organisations from around the region who are here and those who are not yet involved grows stronger. We have to make sure that it actually results in stronger and stronger actions such as has already started with the demonstration in Manila today in solidarity with the MUA.

Let's also make sure that there are more conferences like this. More Asia Pacific Solidarity Conferences, more unity, more coordination, and comrades we have to make sure that this all leads to more victories.