

The state of education 10 years after the fall of Suharto

10 Years after the Fall of Suharto – Views from the People’s Organisations

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This is the ninth translation from of a series of 13 interviews with leaders of labour, peasant, fisherpeople, urban and rural poor, environmental, student and social-political organisations in Indonesia around the theme “Ten Years after the Fall of Suharto - Views from the People’s Organisations”, which appeared in the first edition of Jurnal Bersatu} (Journal of Unity). Earlier interviews in the series can be found under the Focus section at www.asia-pacific-solidarity.net.

Additional interviews will be posted as they are translated - James Balowski.

[For the complete set of translations as reproduced on ESSF website, see: [10 Years after the Fall of Suharto - Views from the People’s Organisations](#)]

Introduction

The following discussion was written based on interviews conducted by *Jurnal Bersatu* (Journal of Unity) editorial staff with a number of people’s organisations. The spectrum and “political groupings” along with the sectors and class of organisation were several of the considerations in the choice of the groups that were interviewed. Nevertheless there were two organisations – the People’s Movement Alliance for Agrarian Reform (AGRA) and the United People’s Party (PPR) who on the eve of the publication of this journal were unable to be interviewed.

Student organisations

Ken, Indonesian Student Union (SMI)

The education sector in Indonesia is increasingly moving towards privatisation. This appears in the form of regulations, such as the Law on the National Education System. The impact of the implementation of these regulations is first, depoliticisation both in the form of prohibitions on student mass organisations developing their activities on campus and because education is being turned into a simple business, so that it neglects quality education with a populist character, which in its turn becomes an obstacle for the development of progressive forces on campus. Secondly, the draft Law on the Education Legal Board (BHP) that will close the opportunities for low-income people to obtain a tertiary education. All of this will further impede the strength of the productive forces in Indonesia.

The principle issues facing the student movement

The most urgent issue is how to campaign for the broadest possible capitalisation (sic) of the education sector, because this is closely linked with the state of productive forces in Indonesia, which is a prerequisite to strengthen the national industry. There have been two organisations that have been quite consistent over the issue the draft BHP law - the SMI and the National Student Front (FMN). The difference between them is that the FMN's focus is on providing 20 percent of the budget for education, while the SMI's focus has been on education that is free, scientific and has a populist vision.

The current state of the student movement

In terms of issues, there are still student movements that take up general issues that very distant from students level of consciousness. If the student movement wants to win a certain demand, so that concretely it can become a basic experience that demonstrates the effectiveness of the student struggle, these general issues must be combined with concrete issues.

In terms of the movement, generally, the student movement is indeed weak, but it still exists. At the national level, there is still the SMI and the FMN which are progressive in character, while at the local level, many student organisations are still emerging that do not have an affiliation with an organisation at the national level. The perspective of local struggles must indeed be changed into a

national perspective. Now, issues of the capitalisation of education cannot radicalise students as it did in 1998 because the student movement at the moment does not yet have a clear perspective in reading the state of society.

Aims of the struggle

For the SMI the aim of the struggle in national liberation, which will be achieved only by means of developing a strong national industry with a populist character, genuine structural agrarian reform, the nationalisation of vital assets and the abolition of the foreign debt. All of this can be carried out through the mass movements by the people's sectors and organisations.

Student movement unity

The need for solidarity in the student movement is already understood. The SMI itself has already succeeded in building a strategic consolidation with a number of local organisations. In late 2007 for example, the Liberation Study Group (KSP). In the North Sumatra provincial capital of Medan merged with the SMI. Currently, the SMI is also in the process of developing a more strategic consolidation with the Unikarta Student Action Front (FAMU) and other local organisations that exist in Jakarta, Lampung (South Sumatra), Lumajang (East Java) and Jember (East Java). So ideas about struggling separately are starting to disappear, the problem is how can all of this be united.

In order to achieve the aim of national liberation, it requires that the student movement unite with the other people's sectors. The SMI itself is currently undertaking joint work with a number of other people's organisations, both at the national as well as the local level, such as the Workers Challenge Alliance (ABM), the Karawang Peasants Union (Sepetak, West Java), the Greater Jakarta Workers Federation of Struggle (FPBJ) in Cikarang (West Java), the Batang Farmers Federation of Struggle (FPPB, Central Java) and the Pekalongan Farmers Federation of Struggle (FPPP, Central Java).

Political parties

The SMI is not allergic to a political party, but the problem is what kind of political party. Political struggle through mass organisations does

indeed have its limits. The SMI itself along with a number of organisations that have similar views are endeavouring to change the character of the social movements into a political movement. As a tool in the future it will of course be more revolutionary compared with the mass organisations.

The 2009 elections

The 2009 elections should be addressed as a way to enlarge the strength of the mass movements in the context of challenging the hegemony of the existing bourgeois parties. Here, there are many methods that could be undertaken, but this is dependent upon the reading of the territorial situation. What is more important than the 2009 elections is understanding the national situation in order that it can become a basis to propagandise more broadly in the context of building a bigger mass movement.

P.S.

* From Journal of Unity – May 2008.

* Ken is from the Indonesian Student Union (SMI).