

Historic conference begins new era of left cooperation

Wednesday 4 July 2007, by [LANE Max](#) (Date first published: 14 April 1998).

SYDNEY — More than 750 people participated in a historic event, the first Asia Pacific Solidarity Conference, held here April 10-13, 1998. The conference was characterised by an electric atmosphere of solidarity and struggle, with both in-depth discussions in workshops and plenary sessions and also packed-out evening cultural and solidarity events.

On the last day, more than half the conference also mobilised for a 7.00am solidarity rally with the waterside workers picketing outside Darling Harbour docks.

In addition to Australian activists, there were 67 representatives from Asian, Pacific, European and United States organisations.

A delegation of Aboriginal speakers came from the Capricornia Lands Council, the Sydney Metropolitan Lands Council, the Kumarangk coalition of South Australia and the Canberra Tent Embassy. A representative of the Torres Strait Islanders also read protest poems to the conference.

There were intense discussions among the international and local participants on a wide range of issues, including the nature of the economic crisis in Asia, the appropriate responses from popular movements, the developing negative role of many non-government organisations, struggles against the military dictatorships of Indonesia and Burma, self-determination struggles in East Timor, Tahiti, Kanaky, Burma, Aceh, West Papua and Bougainville and the role of the women's movement in the struggles of the region.

International participants came from the Japanese Communist Party; the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions; the Sanlakas national democratic federation, the Union for Socialist Ideas and Action (BISIG), the Women's Health organisation, the socialist youth Kamalayan, the Akbayan peoples party, Initiatives for International Dialogue, all from the Philippines; the Thai Assembly for the Poor; the Malaysian People's Party; the Singapore Workers Party; the Singapore Democratic Party; the Indonesian People's Democratic Party (PRD); the Free Aceh Movement; Fretilin; the All Burma Students Democratic Federation; the All Burma Students Democratic Organisation; Karen and Mon representatives; the Cambodian Documentation Centre; the Cambodian Women's Development Agency; the Pakistani Labour Party; the Sri Lankan New Socialist Party; the Communist Party of India-ML (Liberation); Melanesian Solidarity from Papua New Guinea; the Bougainville Interim Government; the New Zealand Alliance and NewLabour Party; Maori representatives from the New Zealand NGO Corso; the Polynesian Liberation Front from Tahiti; and the Free West Papua Movement.

The conference also received a special video message of solidarity from Jose Ramos Horta, Nobel Peace Prize laureate. The New Zealand East Timor Independence Committee also sent solidarity greetings.

From outside the Asia Pacific region there were representatives from Solidarity, a US socialist organisation; Indonesia Alert!, a support magazine for the Indonesian democratic movement; the

Party of Democratic Socialism of Germany; the Revolutionary Communist League of France; the United Left in Spain; and the Norwegian Indonesian and East Timor Committee.

A representative of the organisation of Indonesians in the Netherlands, the Coordinating Movement in Support of the Peoples Resistance, also attended. The conference also received solidarity messages from the Socialist Party of the Netherlands.

A conference highlight was the speech by Dorotea Wilson, a member of the National Directorate of the Sandinista National Liberation Front of Nicaragua.

Academic researchers and commentators from Malaysia and Sri Lanka and journalists from Japan also attended the conference.

The conference was organised under the auspices of the Asia Pacific Institute for Democratisation and Development (API-DD) and hosted by the Democratic Socialist Party of Australia.

New beginning

The conference represented the first step in building a network of progressive organisations throughout the region.

There was an unprecedented exchange of information between organisations and individuals. Many major political organisations met for the first time or engaged in their first in-depth exchanges. Many new relationships were established.

At the end of the conference the Pakistani Labour Party, the CPI-ML and the New Socialist Party of Sri Lanka announced that a conference of all left parties in south Asia would be held at the end of 1998. No such gathering has ever taken place before, and the idea was directly facilitated by the Asia Pacific Solidarity Conference.

Also at the conference, a gathering formalised the composition of the API-DD.

The group's council began with a membership of representatives from the Malaysian People's Party, Sanlakas and BISIG, the People's Democratic Party of Indonesia, the Democratic Socialist Party of Australia, the New Zealand Alliance and the New Socialist Party of Sri Lanka.

It will now expand to include a representative of the Labour Party of Pakistan and the Indian Institute of Marxist Studies, which is under the umbrella of the CPI-ML, and Professor Suthy Pratasert, a radical political economist from Chulalongkorn University in Thailand.

The council decided that its first tasks were to further expand the institute's membership, to build the communications infrastructure to allow a better exchange of information between all progressive parties and movements in the region and to prepare for a gathering of party and movement representatives for more in-depth working discussions.

International solidarity

Important practical steps were taken in carrying out international solidarity with the Australian waterside workers under attack by the Howard government, the National Farmers Federation and Patrick Stevedores.

A representative of the PRD read a statement of support for the MUA, and the conference passed a strong motion condemning the Howard government for its anti-worker attacks. More than \$1000 was collected and presented to the MUA picketers at Darling Harbour when conference participants rallied at site.

Speakers from the DSP, Sanlakas, the PRD, the Sandinistas, the Pakistani Labour Party, the New Zealand Alliance and US Solidarity addressed the rally. Jake Haub, secretary of the Darling Harbour MUA rank-and-file committee, responded to the solidarity speeches.

Later in the conference, a meeting between several Asian and Pacific leaders, industrial organisers from the DSP and Jim Donovan, secretary of the NSW branch of the MUA, confirmed that there would be solidarity actions around the region. The first of these actions took place on April 13 in Manila, in the form of a picket outside the Australian embassy. Other actions are already being planned in Pakistan.

April 24 Indonesia action

Solidarity with the PRD in Indonesia and the East Timorese resistance was a special feature of the conference. Several workshops and panels discussed the situation in both countries and worked out plans for campaigns in Australia and internationally.

The socialist youth organisation Resistance announced a national mobilisation of students outside the Indonesian embassy in Canberra on April 24. The protest has already been supported by numerous students representative councils around Australia and the National Union of Students.

The conference was the venue for launching the Indonesian People's Power fund.

The fund, organised by Action in Solidarity with Indonesia and East Timor (ASIET), will provide financial assistance to the Indonesian democratic underground, mainly the PRD. Within the first 24 hours, \$1500 was raised from conference participants.

Educational material has been produced, including leaflets and new protest postcards, to spread information about the situation in Indonesia, including the new phenomenon of disappearances of political activists. The first funds collected will be publicly handed over to the PRD outside the Indonesian embassy in Canberra on April 24.

View online : <http://www.dsp.org.au/apiaustralia/...>