

Dita Sari, labour activist faced to unfair trial

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Trade Union Action

Labour Activists

1 May 1997

Prisoner of conscience/unfair trial

Dita Indah Sari

INDONESIA

Dita Indah Sari was arrested on 8 July 1996 as she took part in a labour demonstration in the East Java town of Surabaya, in Indonesia. Dita Sari is now being tried under the Anti-Subversion Law for crimes which carry the death penalty. Her involvement in the labour demonstration was entirely peaceful. Her trial is a reflection of the tightening repression in Indonesia, in particular a resurgence of the Anti-Subversion Law as a mechanism to crush peaceful political and labour activism.

Dita Indah Sari, 24, is the leader of the Centre for Indonesian Worker's Struggle, (Pusat Perjuangan Buruh Indonesia, PPBI) an organization which is affiliated to the unofficial Peoples Democratic Party (Partai Rakyat Demokratik, PRD). On the day of her arrest, Dita, other activists and workers from around 10 different factories gathered outside the Barindo Anggun factory located in Tanjung Sari, Surabaya to march through the streets. The demonstrators carried banners calling for a rise in the national minimum wage and an end to the Indonesian Armed Forces role in political life in Indonesia. The march was blocked by a heavy military and police presence and the demonstration was violently dispersed. It is believed that at least nine student activists and five workers were arrested. Many were beaten, including Dita Sari. Most were later released, but Dita and Coen Husein Pontoh, from the National Peasants Union (Serikat Tani Nasional, STN) were held in police custody. The following day other labour and student activists were arrested in Surabaya including Mochamad Sholeh, an activist from the Indonesian Students Solidarity for Democracy (Solidaritas Mahasiswa Indonesia Demokrasi - SMID). Both SMID and STN are affiliated to the PRD.

After their arrest, the head of the military Coordinating Agency for the Maintenance of National Stability (Bakorstanas), Lieutenant General Suyono, said that Workers were agitated to stage a demonstration against their will. This clearly indicated a subversive act to change the state system (Media Indonesia, 10 July 1996). The accusations against Dita, Mochamad and Coen became yet more serious following riots in Jakarta on 27 July 1996. The PRD was accused by the authorities of instigating the Jakarta riots and Dita and her two friends were also accused of involvement in the riots despite the fact that they were in custody in Surabaya at the time. This specific accusation appears to have not been sustained. However, the link that the PPBI, SMID and STN have with the PRD is being used by the authorities to strengthen the accusations against the three.

Their trials began on 16 December 1996 at the Surabaya District Court. All three activists are being tried under the same charges: Article (1), sub-section 1 a, b and c of the Anti-subversion Law which

punish "Distorting, stirring up trouble or digressing from the state ideology Pancasila [1] or the course of the state", "Overthrowing, damaging, or undermining state power or the authority of the legal Government or the State Apparatus" and "Spreading feelings of hostility, dissension, conflict, chaos, instability or restlessness among the population or society in general in between the Republic of Indonesia and a friendly state", all of which are punishable with the death penalty, life imprisonment or 20 years' imprisonment. The fourth charge is Article 154 of the Indonesian Criminal Code which punishes "spreading hatred" against the Government of Indonesia with a maximum imprisonment of seven years.

The specific accusations against Dita Sari and the two others clearly indicate that they are being tried for their entirely peaceful political activities. These accusations are based on publications from their organizations and affiliated groups, including the PRD; attendance at meetings at which unofficial organizations were formed, and the use of anti-governmental slogans at demonstrations. An activist document which states that the main problem for Indonesian society is capitalism and another which says there is no democracy in Indonesia, are both considered to undermine the national ideology of Indonesia, Pancasila. Advocating the struggle of workers towards increased national wages, freedom of organization and an end to the role of the military in industrial relations, are all acts which are considered to overthrow, damage or undermine the state.

Amnesty International is concerned that Dita, Coen and Mochamad are being denied a fair trial and considers them to be prisoners of conscience. Since the trial began there has been a heavy military and police presence which Amnesty International considers to be intimidatory. One witness prior to the trial attempted to retract his pre-trial statement because he claimed that it had been embellished by an intelligence officer. Despite having brought this to the attention of prosecutors, his testimony has still been submitted.

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* From <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGACT730011997?open&of=ENG-394>

Dita Sari

Against the background of the 32-year Suharto dictatorship in Indonesia, Dita Sari was born in Jakarta in December 1972. She first became involved in political activism when she took part in a student demonstration in support of human rights in 1992. Shortly after, she gave up her studies and took to organising workers in an illegal trade union- the first independent union in Indonesia- and leading strike actions for economic and social justice.

Having been detained, harassed, beaten and sexually abused by the military on numerous occasions, she was sentenced to 5 years in prison in 1996 for 'sedition,' after leading 20000 striking workers in a non-violent march on the Tandes industrial area to protest labour conditions.

From prison she continued to lead her movement, and on her release in 1999 was unanimously elected Chairperson by the Congress of the National Front for Indonesian Workers Struggle (FNPBI). She continues to hold that post, and earlier this year refused to accept a \$50000 human rights award from Reebok, in light of their poor treatment of workers in Indonesia and Mexico.

* From <http://www.onlinewomeninpolitics.org/indon/indoleads.htm>