

# Committee for a Workers' International

PO Box 3688,  
mail:inter@dircon.co.uk  
London,  
E9 5QX

*CWI web-site at:*  
*<http://www.clubi.ie/dojo/cwi/inde>*

e-

Tel: ++ 44 181 533 0201  
Fax: ++ 44 181 985 0757

## CWI statement

# The future of East Timor

**Indonesian Troops Out!**  
**No trust in 'United Nations'!**  
**Support a democratically  
controlled Armed Defence Force!**  
**Build the struggle for an  
Independent Socialist East Timor!**

**2-4 September 1999**

## **Momentous decision**

The East Timorese people have made their voice heard loud and clear for independence from Indonesian rule. The proposal of the Habibie government for autonomy within Indonesia was rejected by 78.5% of those who voted - a margin of four to one. This long-suffering and courageous people overcame a bloody, counter-revolutionary campaign to prevent them from voting and deciding their own future. Now, in the face of anarchy and a developing civil war, they embark on the monumental struggle to establish democratic rights and build genuine representative government.

Indonesian forces are doing nothing to stop frenzied armed 'militias' from trying to block this process. Thousands of people are fleeing for their lives as the gangs shoot, burn and terrorise. They are reported to have taken control of a number of towns and to be massing on the outskirts of the capital Dili. The Indonesian government is talking about evacuating nearly a quarter of a million people - one third of the population if the situation does not ease.

Independence leader, Xanana Gusmao, has called for the immediate intervention of United Nations Forces, which would anyway take some time to mobilise.

## **United Nations – no solution**

The orgy of violence already unleashed in East Timor has exposed not only the outright collusion of Indonesian forces with these gangs but also the incompetence of the United Nations itself. It has had an unarmed monitoring force, Unamet, in place for some weeks now but proved incapable of stopping the killings which have included a number of their own staff. The record of armed interventions by the United Nations elsewhere is also not a good one. It has failed to solve the underlying conflicts - be it in the Balkans, the Middle East, Africa. They act only when the big powers decide and even then only if their immediate interests are involved.

The Committee for a Workers' International welcomes the momentous vote for independence and believes it should mean independence from now. That means the withdrawal by the Indonesian government of all its armed forces and all forms of their aid to the murderous anti-independence 'militias'. It also means, in our opinion, opposition to any UN or other foreign intervention.

## **Armed defence force**

This does not mean leaving the East Timorese people defenceless to face another round of wholesale genocide. Without support from outside, the armed thugs would be severely weakened. The reactionary mobs could be quickly defeated and disarmed if, from amongst the general population, armed defence forces were constructed. They should be deployed and democratically controlled by elected bodies of workers', students' and poor farmers' representatives.

This is what the leaders of the independence struggle in East Timor should be urging on their supporters. The task of truly liberating the East Timorese people from wars and oppression, after all, lies with the people themselves, organising and seeking assistance from the workers and fighting poor of the rest of the world. They will need to struggle not only for total national independence, but for an end to the domination and ruination of their lives by private capitalist ventures and big land-owners.

The Committee for a Workers' International supports every struggle for self-determination of oppressed peoples but believes the whole battle is not won until a socialist independent state is established. Even then, it would need to try and carry the struggle wider by appealing to workers in neighbouring countries to follow their example. The establishment of a socialist federation of independent states in any region of the world would act as a beacon to workers everywhere in the struggle against capitalism and oppression and for world socialism.

**This statement, with the outline at the end of a programme for struggle, was drafted on September 2nd.** The situation in East Timor was deteriorating and the debate intensifying over sending in some kind of 'peace-keeping' force. The blood-curdling attacks of the integrationist militia had then reached the very gates of UN headquarters in Dili and now also in a number of other towns. From here down, in the interest of getting the material out quickly, the text has not been changed to take account of the very latest developments

## **Violent reaction**

It became clear last Monday, 30th August, that the barbaric pro-Jakarta 'militias' had failed to stop the East Timorese (Maubere) people from voting against Indonesian rule. The defeated 'integrationists' have been back on the streets with vengeance. Wielding machine-guns and machetes they have run riot - killing, maiming and burning - unchecked by police or newly-reinforced Indonesian troops. They have singled out as special targets the unarmed UN staff and the media personnel sent in to cover the transition to 'democratic' self-rule in this tortured half-island country.

The uneasy 'cease-fire' observed on the day of the historic plebiscite was shattered within hours. Eurico Guterres, leader of the biggest and most venal militia, Aitarak (Thorn), declared war on UN workers, claiming they had been "intimidating" voters to cast their ballot against Jakarta. The Dili headquarters of the independence front - CNRT - was ransacked. Journalists and cameramen have been viciously attacked and many are joining the exodus from what is now due to become the newest state in Asia.

Their own reports testify to the inaction of Indonesian forces in the territory while the politicians in their 'home' countries continue to mouth empty words about the responsibility of the Habibie government to 'control' the situation.

The Committee for a Workers' International believes that the re-emerging independent state of East Timor will continue to be wracked by poverty and violence unless a force can be created that fights every manifestation of class, national and imperialist oppression.

## **Role of Imperialism**

It was revolution in far-away Portugal in 1974 that brought an end to centuries of colonial oppression in East Timor. This is a factor missed out in current reports about Portugal 'abandoning' East Timor. So too, with one or two notable exceptions, is the approval, even collusion of US, Australian, British etc. imperialism in the coming to power of the murderous dictator, Suharto in Indonesia in 1965 and his destabilisation and military invasion of newly independent East Timor in 1975.

At that time, it was deemed strategically beneficial to the interests of imperialism to have bulwarks against 'communism' in Asia. Even Whitlam's Labour government in Australia, in the early '70s, and now that of Cook/Blair in Britain, have turned

rights organisations have recently protested about British Hawk aircraft sold to the Indonesian regime being used over East Timor in the past few weeks and about the invitation to Jakarta to send representatives to Britain's largest arms fair).

The governments of Britain and Australia are not in favour of any action even today, without the approval of the very regime that is responsible for the crisis! The US administration has so far limited itself to verbal condemnation of the excesses of the 'militias' and to calling on Jakarta to exercise more control.

Since 1975, the people of East Timor have suffered a nightmare of bloody repression that has amounted to genocide, with over 200,000 of the population - one third - being wiped out in the early years of Indonesian occupation. The army massacre of unarmed civilians at Santa Cruz in 1991 only briefly flashed across television screens outside East Timor because journalists were there (and paid with their lives). The massive publicity for today's atrocities in East Timor comes in stark contrast to the two and a half decades of silence and virtual media black-out. (One Television journalist started his report by accurately commenting that, "Violence is nothing new in East Timor").

The debate is on amongst the world's bourgeois commentators about how far whether the suffering of the East Timorese is on a par with that of the Kosovar Albanians that prompted the NATO and UN action in Europe. The intervention there has anyway proved incapable of solving the dire problems of the mass of the population. For most of the big powers, East Timor seems a long way off but they may nevertheless be forced to act. They have been reluctant to get involved in a costly exercise 'the other side of the world', especially one which could prove ineffective and further discredit the United Nations as a 'democratic' cover for policing the world.

The alternative to intervention - just letting things go - could be equally costly in terms of destabilising the region. Either way, there is speculation about the eruption of a new Asian crisis. (The Indonesian currency, the rupiah, has lost its value quite severely and the IMF's £43 billion bail-out operation is under review). A new economic crisis in that region could this time deal a fatal blow to the prolonged but fragile, credit-fuelled boom still underway in the biggest world economy - the United States.

The New Zealand government has been pressing hard for a UN intervention (and for a non-UN intervention if necessary). Australia has said the

in assisting the evacuation of refugees, although it would not now be opposed to participating in a UN peace-keeping force, if one is set up with the approval of Jakarta. Australian companies stand to gain (or lose) the most in terms of contracts with a new East Timorese government for the extraction of oil from the sea-bed under the Timor Gap.

Indonesian warships have also been seen off the coast of East Timor. But as time goes by, and international pressure builds up, it looks increasingly as if the crisis-ridden government of BJ Habibie in Jakarta is preparing to accept a UN force and begin to pull Indonesian troops out of East Timor. The economy of the world's fourth largest country is heavily dependent on the IMF in providing billions of dollars to keep it afloat and is battling against the demands of an aroused and angered working class for jobs, pay and a social security net.

As in relation to Kosova and Chechnya, imperialism is not keen on the idea of allowing an oppressed nation total independence if it threatens a region with further break-up and instability. Commentators have pointed to the particular anxiety of the business lobby in the USA about a downward spiral and a new Asian crisis.

### **Suharto's overthrow**

Another factor being left out of the present media discussion is that the referendum on autonomy and Habibie's resignation to the loss of East Timor is a direct result of the revolutionary overthrow of the hated military dictator, Suharto. As soon as he was forced by the hugely popular 'reformasi' movement to resign his position in May of 1998, celebratory demonstrations swept through East Timor in the form of declarations that the people of East Timor would at last be free. They refused to give the representatives of the Jakarta government a hearing and booed the governors from the stages of public 'consultations'!

The momentum built up. Nothing short of full independence would satisfy the masses of East Timor once the yoke of military dictatorship was lifted. As with every aspect of the movement of that time, it threatened to go beyond the bounds of capitalism.

The Habibie regime was forced to make numerous partial concessions from the top to try and prevent a full-blooded social revolution from below. In the case of the renewed demands for national liberation, some resistance fighters were released from Jakarta's prisons - though not the main leader - Xanana Gusmao. Promises of autonomy and troop withdrawals were made.

### **Indonesian Armed Forces**

Huge contrary pressures bore down on the post-Suharto government of Habibie from within an army and ruling elite left much as it was during the long and bloody years of dictatorship. Their prestige and privileged life-styles were at stake. One section had 'settled' in East Timor and was living quite comfortably, not prepared to uproot. Others in the army felt acutely the loss of over 1,400 of their number in what they had come to regard as a fairly sacred cause. Others felt a climb-down over East Timor would undermine the authority of the army elsewhere.

In spite of the public declarations, the Army presence in East Timor was actually increased. Local militias were recruited, armed, trained and financed by Jakarta - to assist in the terror campaign to maintain Indonesian hegemony. Similar tactics have been employed elsewhere, if, as yet, on a smaller scale - Aceh, Irian Jaya, Ambon and even on the streets of Jakarta against student and worker demonstrations. Over the years, police and military inaction and collusion in East Timor have prompted angry protests from political and church leaders which led in turn to some brutal reprisals, particularly now from the 'militias'. Tens of thousands of Timorese have been made homeless - refugees dependent on hand-outs instead of growing and raising their own food.

Talks between the ex-colonial power - Portugal and Indonesia - brokered by the United Nations agreed on an unarmed UN operation for overseeing the referendum announced in January and due at the beginning of August. The Portuguese government actually promised to finance the whole budget of an independent East Timor for 5 years to guarantee stability.

Can it be said that an unarmed UN presence was behind the relative peace on polling day?

It certainly proved unable to prevent the atrocities and bloody intimidation carried out by the army-backed militias in the whole period before the referendum. The referendum was twice postponed because security could by no means be guaranteed. Hundreds of people were killed.

### **Historic vote**

This in itself fuelled the determination of the courageous Maubere. The personal tragedies of this year came on top of the humiliation and loss suffered during the centuries of Portuguese colonialism and Indonesian subjugation and they were going to vote, even if it killed them. "We've been looking forward to this for a long time," one voter told a CNN reporter on the eve of the

The campaign of intimidation failed. The turn-out was massive - 100% in some places, 98.6 on average!. Scenes at the polling stations were reminiscent of the South African general election of 1994. People walked for miles to participate, camped out, formed queues hours before the booths were opened and wore their best outfits in honour of the very special occasion. Confident by noon of s big 'No' for Habibie, the voters celebrated enthusiastically in the scorching sun.

Counting by Unamet officials would take a week or so. The renewal of the terror campaign by the obvious losers was aimed to disrupt the result itself and to wage a rear-guard action to prevent the granting of independence. Undoubtedly the vote will show a massive rejection of the Habibie 'solution'. This is supposed to be followed by a vote on rescinding the 1976 annexation by the newly elected parliament, possibly as late as November of this year. In the intervening period, Indonesian forces are still supposed to 'keep the peace' in East Timor. This they will patently not do.

If the plebiscite is declared to have gone in favour of limited autonomy, the Maubere population will take to the streets. Actual fighting against independence may well be left to the notorious militias on their own. As they blocked the Dili airport the day after the vote they were complaining about being deserted by their military and political leaders who would soon be "sitting in restaurants in Jakarta or Bali eating fat juicy steaks!"

Army tops have been heard to swearing that "If they win by the ballot, we will win by the bullet!" But if civil war develops, even with covert or overt support from elements of the Indonesian army, the 'integrationists' will not be able to win in the long run,

Many in the Jakarta regime will remain opposed to a pull-out, especially in the military which has lost around 1,400 of their number while 'serving' in East Timor. Major-General Zacky Anwar Makarim, who was part of the repressive occupying force from 1983-89 talks about the "Javanese sense of shame". He and is quoted by Xanana Gusmao as saying, "As a military man, as an intelligence officer, as a veteran, I can't accept losing East Timor" (Far Eastern Economic Review 2/9/99).

The leaders of all the main parties have been opposed to independence for East Timor - including the most popular - Megawati Sukarnoputri. They fear the break-up of Indonesia, in the recent period held together by military might and relative economic success. But

inevitable and not block its path in the new assembly.

Rogue or discontented elements in the army could try and attempt to turn the clock back with an outright military coup but it is unlikely such a move could

succeed and would serve only to spur the movement on to more radical measures to prevent the return of dictatorship. There have been suggestions that, as a last resort, sufficient troops could be maintained in the west of East Timor to force a partition with that part remaining attached to the Indonesian ruled west. This also seems unlikely.

### **"Special case"**

Most likely now, is that the still 'interim' Jakarta government and the new administration when it is formed will settle for total withdrawal from East Timor but try to limit the damage with references to the 'special case' of East Timor - different historical back-ground, part of Portuguese rather than Dutch Empire like Indonesia proper etc. But it could already be too late to prevent the 'infection' spreading. The movement for independence in oil and gas-rich Aceh has been active since the '70s and suffered enormous and bloody repression, including in the last few weeks. A two-day strike at the beginning of August has taken the struggle into a new phase. The movement in Irian Jaya has also drawn strength from the holding of as referendum in East Timor. Elsewhere, as the economy and society fail to climb out of the abyss, other centrifugal tendencies will develop and ethnic and national tensions be exacerbated.

Will the UN be able to solve the problems? Its record elsewhere is not a happy one - finding itself embroiled in conflicts that are insoluble on the basis of capitalism, and that is the only system all the major UN member nations adhere to - apart, in words perhaps, from the Republic of China. The UN inevitably proves to be either ineffective, one-sided or a democratic smokescreen for pursuing the interests of capitalism. It is dominated by the world's big capitalist powers and will oppose any movement that tries to take things into own hands and away from the owners of land, manufacturing and mineral rights. The UN is already talking of staying in East Timor for the next five years and the most probable leader of an independent East Timor - Xanana Gusmao - is agreeable to this.

### **Xanana Gusmao**

What is the best scenario for the imperialist powers?

in the world will be to continue looking to Gusmao to play the role of a Mandela. Habibie has announced his release from house arrest for 15th September. He has been attentively courted by businessmen and politicians who are particularly concerned that a 'cold', smooth transition can be achieved towards an East Timor safe for capitalism.

Given the whole history of relations with Indonesia, it is impossible to imagine Indonesian troops being able to play the main policing role now that the vote for freedom has been taken. Most, if not all will have to leave. Gusmao is probably the only person who could convince the one-time liberation fighters to do the job, possibly even to agree to the participation in such a force of the "brother" militias, as he calls them. He is already appealing to both sides in the fratricidal struggle of the past quarter century not to think of taking revenge.

Given the deals he has no doubt already agreed from his prison cell, he can promise help from abroad towards rebuilding his poverty-stricken country. Assurances have already been made to companies like BHP of Australia that agreements already signed for exploiting the Timor Gap oil-field will be honoured.

However charismatic the head of an independent government of East Timor, he will not, over time, be able to fulfil even the modest expectations of the majority of the Maubere people if the economy is run on a market, capitalist basis. They did not make all the sacrifices of the past and struggle to determine their own future just for a new elite to steal the fruits of victory. Nor will, in this context, Gusmao's "brothers" who have fought arms in hand against independence, feel their safety is guaranteed by the ex-leader of the mountain guerrilla fighters.

### **The fight for socialism**

So what are the forces fighting for a socialist alternative in East Timor? And what kind of programme is needed to link up the all-important demands for basic democratic rights with those for fulfilling the needs of workers and poor of town and country?

"The socialist forces should come out from the underground and declare their presence," says the chairperson of the Timorese Socialist Party (PST), Saruntu. His organisation, has a few hundred 'cadres', including dock-workers, construction and transport workers as well as small coffee farmers and labourers in East Timor and branches

Timor and "bases itself on Marxism". Saruntu says "We also try to learn from revolutionary leaders such as Lenin and Trotsky, but we are short of reading materials".

Although the PST has been heavily involved in the struggle for independence and argued for a transitional "coalition" government, it declares its fundamental goal as laying the basis for a socialist East Timor. It regularly discusses the prospects for the social revolution in Indonesia and the prospects for socialism "in the region as a whole". It is undoubtedly an urgent task to develop the debate and dialogue already begun between representatives of the CWI and the PST as well as other left organisations in the country and seek ways of giving practical and political solidarity.

Early this year when the Jakarta government announced its offer of autonomy or independence, the PST was among those who came out onto the streets on demonstrations to welcome the restoration

of the independence stolen from them 24 years ago. The CNRT, effectively headed by Gusmao and other Falintil leaders, gave out leaflets telling people not to join in as the time for demonstrations was not now!

This is a bad portent of difficulties ahead for a genuine socialist movement under a Gusmao government. For now we can only reaffirm that the end of Indonesian rule over East Timor is a mighty step forward on the road to the liberation of workers and all the exploited poor world-wide.

**The demands below are suggested by the CWI as a socialist programme, put forward for comradely discussion with activists in East Timor and elsewhere. Please contact us (at address and numbers at head of document) with any comments and suggestions.**

# **A Fighting Programme for Democratic Rights and an Independent Socialist East Timor**

- \* For the withdrawal of all Indonesian troops now. For the immediate implementation of the referendum vote for full independence.**
- \* No trust in the United Nations to resolve the East Timorese crisis. No foreign intervention and no arms, planes, ships or tanks for the Indonesian regime.**
- \* For the creation of a democratically run armed defence force under the control of elected committees of workers, poor farmers and students.**
- \* For the disarming and elimination of all reactionary militia gangs.**
- \* For the defence of all ethnic, religious and other minorities, the safety of workers, teachers etc. from Java and other islands and the safety of ordinary people in East Timor who may have voted against independence but accept the democratic decision.**
- \* For elected committees of workers, poor farmers and students to link up nationally and become the organs for guaranteeing the democratic functioning and running of society including convening a constituent assembly to which all parties, except fascists, can present themselves for election.**
- \* For a government of genuine representatives of working and poor people.**
- \* No to privileges; for all elected representatives to be subject to recall and receive no more than the average skilled wage. Necessary expenses to be under the scrutiny of those they represent.**
- \* For complete freedom of speech.**
- \* Jobs, homes and education for all.**
- \* Take over all land and big businesses and democratically plan the use of resources for the benefit of the impoverished majority of the population.**
- \* Full support to the struggle for a socialist independent East Timor.**
- \* For a massive allocation of funds as compensation to East Timor from Jakarta for the re-building of homes and the development of the country's devastated economy. Resources to come not from the pockets of ordinary people but from the funds embezzled by Suharto Inc.**
- \* Appeal to the rank and file of Indonesian troops in East Timor to support the struggle and to demand the democratic rights to organise their own unions and elect their officers.**
- \* Spread the struggle for a democratic socialist East Timor to the rest of the archipelago. Appeal to the workers, the poor and the students of Indonesia to take up the struggle against imperialism, capitalism and for socialism.**
- \* For the right of all oppressed nations and nationalities to self-determination**
- \* For a socialist federation of independent socialist states in South East Asia.**
- \* For the workers' movement internationally to support the above demands. the right of the Timorese people to**

**to struggle for freedom from all imperialist,  
capitalist and national oppression.**