Support East Timor's fight for independence!

Tue, 07/09/1999 - 22:00

In East Timor thousands of unarmed civilians are being massacred and driven from their homes. The world is witnessing yet another attempted genocide as pro-Jakarta militias organised by the Indonesian military go on the rampage.

In Indonesia itself the security forces have sidelined the government of B.J. Habibie effectively voiding his promise to recognise East Timor's independence should its people vote for it. The world's imperialist powers have uttered empty protests while the slaughter becomes more frenzied. It is not words that the people of East Timor need, it is weapons.

Their desire for independence could not be clearer. In the UN sponsored poll 98% of them voted despite horrific ongoing intimidation by the militias. More than 78% opted for complete independence, confirming the 1975 declaration of independence by Fretilin. All states should now recognise East Timor as an independent country and the Falintil guerrilla forces as its army.

The working class movement around the world and all democratic and progressive forces must take direct action to arm and support the East Timorese resistance to Indonesian occupation and on the other hand to take all measures necessary to force an Indonesian withdrawal. All workers and democratic forces in Indonesia must likewise mobilise for East Timor's independence which is immediately linked to the defeat of Wiranto and the Army's intended assault on their own democratic rights.

Attempted Genocide by the Indonesian state

As soon as it became clear that the population had voted for independence a wave of murders and deportations by the pro-Indonesian militias swept the country. Hundreds have been murdered and up to 300,000 driven from their homes. All this has taken place under the eyes of the UN observers and in front of the cameras of the world's press. Most of these having now been withdrawn it is all too likely that these horrors will escalate into a full-scale attempted genocide such as that which marked Indonesia's seizure of the country in 1975 where 200,000 perished.

This repression is not simply the result of right-wing militias running amok. The Indonesian army is behind it. The deportation of thousands of people in just a few days is not a spontaneous but an organised action. Even imperialist diplomats acknowledge this one correctly describing it as "authorised anarchy, organised by the military". It could have been stopped immediately by the Indonesian garrison of 23,000 soldiers and policemen. But, in fact it is they who are. are supporting, and even co-ordinating, the militias' actions. Without this support they could and would be smashed in a few days by the East-Timorese national liberation forces who are supported by the overwhelmingly majority of the people.

The results of the referendum sent the entire Indonesian ruling class into turmoil. While the exact divisions within the Indonesian ruling class is unclear it is obvious that within the army different factions are aiming for the following goals.
Some who see that they will have to withdraw simply wish to exact revenge: to leave the people of East Timor with little or nothing with which to construct an independent state. Hence the destruction of the power stations, the telecommunications and much of the capital, Dili, and the concentration of looted property in the harbour areas ready for shipment.

Others may want to annex parts of East Timor to Indonesian West Timor. The border zone includes important economic areas including coffee plantations and lands owned by ex-dictator Suharto (who seized for his personal use up to 40% of East-Timor's land!).

It is possible too that Wiranto and the heads of the secret police see this as an opportunity to set up a military regime perhaps with the facade of some nationalist politicians in Jakarta. In one stroke they would hope to crush the Indonesian democratic and working class movement and keep Indonesia including East Timor together, under their iron heel.

Undoubtedly the entire military elite want to set a terrifying example the other oppressed nationalities in Indonesia: the inhabitants of Aceh and West Papua; "If you seek independence we will annihilate you!"

**Imperialist interests**
The imperialist world powers are getting more and more nervous. Not primarily because of the genocide though having used such events as pretexts for action in Iraq and the Balkans to let another genocide pass without comment would expose their humanitarian war propaganda in these cases for what it was: a pretext for defending their own economic and political interests. They did nothing in the 1970s and 1980s when their puppet Suharto slaughtered one third of the East Timorese people. Indeed they rewarded him with massive loans and weapons. In fact they are still doing both right up to and during the present moment.

But the Indonesian regime is not the powerful monolith it once was. It has just about survived the terrible economic crisis of 1997-8 and the profound revolutionary situation of last year. It is still fragile. Under these conditions an attempted military take-over in Jakarta, a genocidal offensive in East Timor, a strong counter-offensive from the national liberation movement, and the response all this will create internationally, this can only deepen the revolutionary crisis in Indonesia. It could also escalate the other national struggles in Indonesia turning the whole vast country, with its 220 million strong population, into a powder keg.

Given that Indonesia is of extraordinary geo-strategic importance: controlling the shipping lanes of Southeast-Asia and is a near neighbour to the huge financial centre of Singapore: it is no wonder that the world's rulers are extremely alarmed. For them the most important thing is stabilisation. They have just lent Indonesia $43bn to protect their banks and multinationals' huge stakes in the country. They want to help pull it out of crisis to prevent East Asia's crisis impacting on the European and North American economies. The giant oil multinationals hope to exploit the oil and gas resources of the seas off Timor. The US, Britain, France and Australia have armed and trained Indonesia's huge army as a regional gendarme to protect all these imperialist investments. In the final analysis it is these interest which will determine the policy of the powers which control the Security Council of the United Nations.

**The treacherous role of the United Nations**
It is extremely understandable that the terrorised civilian population of East Timor are hoping against hope that UN forces will intervene to save them from genocide. After all the UN promised that their civilian observers would stay after the elections. For this reasons thousands of pro-independence supporters have taken refuge in the UN compound in Dili. Yet now the UN personnel are being withdrawn and leaving them to their fate. This is an act of the most shameful betrayal! The refugees would be fully justified in detaining them. Hearing the words of outrage and sympathy by US, British and Australian leaders they imagine that...
the UN Security Council exists to stop such genocides and punish their perpetrators. But this is not at all the purpose of the UN Security Council.

The present genocide shows why no oppressed people should place their hopes in the United Nations. It has teeth only when it serves the interests of the imperialist powers who dominate the Security Council. It is utterly powerless when it comes to defending the lives and homes of an impoverished, semi-colonial people. The East Timor people were told by their own leaders and by the world media that UN would come to help them and secure a peaceful transition.

As a commentator of the conservative British daily Financial Times commented: "... some 800,000 Timorese ... trusted the UN to bring them not just a ballot, but a future." Now their hopes are drowned in blood. Whoever relies on the United Nations is in effect relying on the "democratic" imperialist powers. And whoever relies on them rather than on their own struggle and the help that it can attract from the exploited and oppressed world wide is courting certain disaster.

Portugal and, more recently, Australia, the powers talking of intervention have made it clear that they will only do with Security Council backing and Indonesian agreement. The Western "socialists" and democrats and human rights activists who are calling for an UN intervention should know that the UN only sanctions interventions when the economic and strategic interests of the great powers are directly affected.

All recent experience confirms this. The imperialist control of the oil wealth of Gulf states like Kuwait is why the sanctioned the war against Iraq and imposed a blockade was has led to 1.5 million death from disease and malnutrition. The danger that the ethnic cleansing in Kosova would ignite a pan-Balkan war, embroiling Nato allies Greece and Turkey, was why Nato launched its "humanitarian war" -one which itself led to nearly a million refugees and tens of thousands of deaths. In Rwanda on the other hand the UN and its masters did nothing whilst a million Tutsis perished. East Timor falls into the Rwanda category-despite its mineral wealth. The US, Britain, France and Australia train and arm the Indonesian armed forces and supported Suharto's vile dictatorship almost to the end. It is their principal gendarme for keeping the profits of the multinationals in South East Asia safe They will do nothing to seriously destabilise Indonesia.

If the Indonesian regime eventually allows UN forces in this will only be to prevent the East Timorese workers and peasants from seizing the full fruits of their independence-the land, the factories, the mines, the oil and gas of the surrounding seas- and to stop them from punishing the perpetrators of the second attempted genocide.

Only armed mass resistance can defeat the mass murder!
The LRCI supports wholeheartedly the struggle of the people of East Timor for independence. We supported the vote for independence in the UN referendum. We supported and still support the armed struggle of the Timorese national movement . But as the last days have shown that the political leadership as embodied in the National Council of Timorese Resistance (CNRT) has pursues a disastrously wrong strategy in to trusting the UN and is now wrong to call for UN intervention .

The CNRT is a popular front of petty bourgeois and bourgeois forces, plus the catholic Church. It includes other more conservative leaders like José Ramos-Horta and Bishop Belo. But Xanana Gusmão , Fretilin's historic leader, captured and imprisoned from 1992-1999, has enormous prestige-similar to that of Nelson Mandela in the 1980s. But this does not mean his strategy is correct. After decades of guerrilla struggle Gusmao and the leaders of Fretilin (Revolutionary Front of Independent East Timor), the most radical of the post-1975 independence movement finally initiated this strategy of reliance on winning the support of democratic imperialism.
The price of this was the concentration of the guerrilla forces in designated cantons and their disarmament (fortunately the latter scarcely took place). The reason for this fatally wrong strategy is that these leaders? despite their heroic past? have fixed their eyes on the being the government of a formally independent but semi-colonial East Timor. In reality this would be a protectorate of the imperialist powers.

But there is an alternative strategy: a war of national liberation. Alongside the permanent guerrilla forces, revolutionaries must fight to build councils of peasants, workers and the urban poor and militias answerable to these councils. Only the armed people can defend itself! Only such a mass mobilisation of the entire population can halt the genocide, crush the reactionary militias and drive out the Indonesian army.

Only the organised armed mass resistance of the Timorese people can push the right-wing militias and the army back. Though the Indonesian forces are a hundred times better armed than the Timorese forces their wholesale destruction of the country's infrastructure shows that they know they have little hope of holding on to East Timor.

The leaders of the armed forces and the politicians in Jakarta know that the outrage of working class and progressive people throughout the world will make a full scale genocide and retention of East Timor impossible, even in the short term. That is why Habibie and sections of the ruling class want to disengage. Timorese resistance and the unchallengeable democratic right of the people to independence can crack the will of Jakarta to go on.

But it is the organised struggle of the workers and peasants which alone can open the road to real independence East Timor. If the workers and peasants take the power, then and only then, can East Timor not pass into the hands of other and perhaps even more efficient exploiters? the Australian, US and European corporations.

**International solidarity NOW!**

It is the urgent duty of workers, students and youth, all progressive and democratic forces worldwide to come to the aid of the people of East Timor. The Australian trade unions have set a good example for mounting pickets, demonstrations and boycotts. The Communications, Electricity and plumbing Union of Australia have called for "blacking" of Indonesia. Such actions must be extended and actively imposed worldwide. Workers sanctions, by factories working on orders for Indonesia, by dockworkers, by communications workers, by banking and finance sector unions- such actions can grip the Indonesian ruling class in a vice of steel and force them to let go of their victims. At the same time the same movements led by the unions and socialist parties must raise millions to arm the Timorese resistance.

In Indonesia itself the trade unions, the democratic and anti-imperialist youth must mobilise to support the freedom of East Timor. Marx's dictum that a nation which oppresses another can not itself be free applies with special immediacy to Indonesia. Wiranto and Co will use the same troops, the same martial law, to stifle the revolution which began in 1998 and which is still far from achieving its goals. On the other hand a defeat for the military in Timor will open the road to victory for the Indonesian masses themselves. Indonesia can be protected against fragmentation into dozens of mini-states only by becoming a free federation whose members can secede if they so wish. Yet the Indonesian bourgeois nationalists like Megawati Sukarnoputri show their true anti-democratic colours by opposing the granting of independence to East Timor or even a referendum to the people of Aceh.

In reality it is only an internationalist working class in power which will be able to realise all the main democratic questions; the right to self-determination, land to the poor peasants, and the unity of the people's of South East Asia against imperialist exploitation within a Socialist Federation.
Every day where the Indonesian and international workers' movement does not act against the ruling class in Jakarta means hundreds and thousand dead and expelled people.

The workers of the world must act NOW!

* Indonesian army and police out of East Timor! Crush the right-wing militias!
* Impose workers sanctions against Indonesia!
* Halt all arms sales to the Indonesian regime!
* Arms to the fighting organisations of the Timorese!
* Recognise East Timor as a sovereign state? no to a UN/imperialist controlled "four year transition".
* No to a UN protectorate and occupation by the Australians, British or Portuguese!
* Self-determination for all other oppressed nationalities such as Aceh or West Papua!
* Convene a sovereign, revolutionary Constituent Assembly under the protection of the fighting organisations and pro-independence militias
* For councils of workers peasants and the urban poor!
* For an independent Socialist Republic of East Timor!
* For a Socialist Federation of South East Asia

International Secretariat of the LRCI
8 September 1999

Source URL: https://fifthinternational.org/content/support-east-timors-fight-independence