

Free jailed Indonesian activists!

ON 12 December the trial began in Indonesia of SBSI union leader Muchtar Pakpahan, jailed by the strong-arm Suharto dictatorship following the strikes and demonstrations in July last year. Starting on 12 December, about 20 members of the People's Democratic Party (PRD), including Dita Sari, president of the other main independent union organisation, the PPBI, were also brought to court.

Both Pakpahan and the PRD members are charged with "subversion", which can carry the death penalty. The indictment against the PRD members

charges that they "undermined the ideology of the state", made "political speeches which criticised the government", and conducted "demonstrations demanding an improvement in the political system".

A tremendous lead in international working-class solidarity for the Indonesian labour activists has been given by Australian dockers, who have taken industrial action on several occasions since September to delay Indonesian shipping and cargoes. Thirteen ships have been affected to date, and the latest action was in the port of Newcastle

on 14 December. Now that the Australian government has pushed through a new labour law outlawing "secondary" action, the dockers' boycotts are illegal, but union National Secretary John Coombs declares: "The Suharto government is using the subversion laws to crush, imprison, and possibly even execute any of its opponents engaged in peaceful, legitimate political and labour activity".

Wilson, one of the PRD activists on trial, has managed to get a letter "to the workers of Indonesia" out of jail. In it he declares:

"Our worker friends are also in a prison like us. You are imprisoned by a wage system that is unjust... you are imprisoned because you are not allowed to establish a free trade union!

"It is the rulers and businessmen that have created this situation. And it is the rulers who have imprisoned us too. And all so that business's profits expand, oblivious of the misery of the workers... The factories are like prisons, with their own grim-faced security forces and great high walls...

"Workers of Indonesia whom we love, when we were first arrested we were gripped by fear. But after months of interrogation, we have come to understand that it is the rulers who are afraid of us... the rulers are afraid when they see the workers increasingly confident in the PPBI and SBSI...

"We know we are present in the hearts of the workers. And in these fearful and uncertain times, what is in our hearts can be the light of our life...

"We pray this will not be our last letter. While workers suffer, there will always be in the prisons those who have defended the workers. Here inside the prison, we know that as long as we struggle together, the workers will win their prosperity..."

It is up to the labour movement internationally to make sure that this is indeed not the jailed Indonesian labour activists' last letter. Fax letters of protest to the Indonesian Minister of Justice, Uahi Utoyo Usman S.H., on 00 62 21 525 3095, and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ali Alatas S.H., on 00 62 21 380 5511. Send copies to the Indonesian Embassy, 38 Grosvenor Square, London W1, and to Action in Solidarity with Indonesia and East Timor, 00 612 9690 1381.