

# From New to Human Order in Indonesia?

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*The significance of the July 27 events is not that they mark the beginning of the end of Suharto's New Order, but that they signal the devastating ways in which political transition in the country may come about.*

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ON June 20 a government-sponsored faction of the officially recognised Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) met in Medan, North Sumatra, to do away with its legally elected leader Megawati Sukarnoputri. Around the country, however, Megawati and her increasingly many supporters refused to give up. In Jakarta they held on to the party headquarters on Jalan Diponegoro. The situation became increasingly tense. At about 6 o'clock in the morning on July 27, policemen and soldiers stood by in the streets nearby the PDI office as several yellow painted army-like troop transport trucks drew up in front of the building and unloaded hordes of young, muscular men with short-cropped hair wearing caps and red T-shirts saying they were supporters of the government-sponsored faction. The red-shirts attacked with rocks, tear gas, and acid. There was panic inside the house and some tried to get out but many stood up and responded by throwing rocks. The police did nothing to put an end to the attack but instead harshly prevented upset people who gathered in the streets from doing so. Negotiations followed but broke down as the police finally even helped the thugs to advance. Hence the red-shirts could charge the office and chase the PDI members inside, after which the police entered and took away the Megawati supporters, including many seriously injured and several possibly dead. However, more and more concerned people came to the area. Megawati's representatives tried new negotiations. These failed and the police violently attacked the masses, arresting and injuring bystanders as well. People had to flee in various directions, primarily towards Jl Matraman and Salemba Raya, where devastating riots followed. New demonstrations on Sunday were confronted with brutal police and military force.

Only on Monday was there some (distorted) news in the papers. Thereafter, however, the military stated they would shoot troublemakers 'on the spot'. And Suharto, soon accompanied by his loyalists, invented a scapegoat to prevent the pro-democracy forces from uniting and capitalising on the crackdown. All the trouble, it was stated, had been instigated by the young pro-democracy activists of the new small Peoples Democratic Party (PRD) who were labelled

communists. And what was more, these 'subversive elements' in turn had been 'masterminded' by all the other pro-democrats. Thus, the witch-hunt was on, no matter if even the US government, for the first time that I am aware of, expressed serious concern over the treatment of so-called communists.

And the hunt goes on. If somebody manages to hide, the authorities pick at the parents or wife/husband and even children instead. Hundreds are arrested, including independent trade union leader Muchtar Pakpahan. Many more are intimidated. For instance, even the official human rights commission has been told to keep 'national interests' in mind when reporting on its findings; independent human rights monitors, like Bambang Widjajanto, head of the Legal Aid Institute, have been summoned for questioning by the police; and as I am writing this on September 1, an incoming e-mail says that the authorities have also summoned Gunawan Mohamad, editor of *Tempo* (the country's most reputed liberal weekly that was closed down in 1994) and currently chairman of the independent electoral monitoring committee (KIPP).

To my understanding the significance of the July 27 affair is not that it does mark the beginning of the end of Suharto's New Order, but that it signals the devastating ways in which succession may come about.

Before leaving for Indonesia in early July, I had concluded a tentative version of a long essay on problems of democratisation in the country, primarily based on interviews in late 1994. By now, however, I realise that while my conclusions on the outright pro-democracy movement fared well, the more basic ones on what kind of transition is plausible were too optimistic.

My valid argument was that while the pro-democracy movement is potentially significant, the character and dynamics of the different groups point in the direction of divisive politicisation – which in itself does not generate an opening, in spite of devoted work and good intentions. Hence, I predicted, it is more likely that 'external' rallying points will give rise to a more general movement for transition from authoritarian rule. And within this broader movement many of the outright democrats will relate

to legally accepted populist democrats while others hold on to fragmented activism and development work, or insist on rather isolated top-down party building. Once the government tried to get rid of Megawati this, thus, proved true (aside from the fact that PRD actually acted in a less sectarian way than expected and also threw its lot behind Megawati). More and more people came out in support of Megawati, including the many workers who went on strike for better conditions. Even well placed government loyalists complained about their wives supporting the courageous woman who stood up against the old ruler. And taxi drivers taking me via Jl Diponegoro carefully slowed down outside the peaceful free speech forum at the PDI office compound offering themselves to carry along posters or flyers.

My second argument, however, must be revised. It is still true that a growing inability to regulate conflicts both within the elite and in its relation to new social forces (primarily the middle and working classes) makes transition from the old authoritarian rule inevitable – and that much of the additional factors which elsewhere nourished democratisation (including in the Philippines) are missing. But it is no longer possible to argue that the most likely scenario is orderly transition to a slightly more open and well regulated society through horse-trading among post-Suharto elites – an orderly transition which the outright democrats could take for granted and try to improve upon.

Actually this perspective began to fade away already as the government decided to block the attempts by the pro-Megawati people to mobilise people in the context of the 1997 elections, set up an electoral watch movement, and thus find a way of promoting democratisation by relating to the existing political system. It is true that the renewed populist blend of Sukarnoism and Muslim pluralism still calls for negotiated pacts with disenchanted factions among those in power. But those proved wrong who said that the government and the army were divided enough not only to allow Megawati to become leader of the PDI but also to tolerate that most outright pro-democrats would come along. It is also true that less pluralistic but reformist Muslims have realised that the clientelist government Golkar Party is a shell that is likely to vanish with its super patron Suharto and, therefore, still try to turn instead the pro-government Association of Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI) into a more genuine forum to modernise clientelism into Malaysian-like state-corporatism. But at no point from mid-June till July 27 am I aware of any sign that enlightened reformists, or slightly dissident officers, seriously tried and could have been able to accommodate the pro-democrats and to 'handle' them within a more open political framework. By

now a leading ICMI reformist says instead that "this is a terrible setback for us as well ...there are dynamics within the army which we cannot do much about...[and] the old man doesn't listen and is getting paranoid". And when I ask how ICMI – which is not in favour of a transition based on multi-party negotiations and elections – shall accommodate other views and forces, such as those who rally behind Megawati and Gus Dur, Muslim pluralist Abdurrahman Wahid who is the leader of the world's largest Muslim organisation Nahdlatul Ulama, there is no other answer but "well, that's a good question".

So what happened on July 27 was 'only' that the regime displayed its total incapacity to reform itself, having instead to crack down on demonstrators and the pro-democracy movement in general with brutal force.

It is true that increasingly many reformists as well as business men now realise that this cannot go on, that clashes cost too much, that there must be more openness, a better regulated economy, and new institutions and organisations that allow for efficient and reliable negotiations among the elite as well as with the people at large. (It is better, for instance, to have a moderate union to deal with than to have 10,000 angry workers in the street who constantly have to be repressed by the army.) But what is the use of those insights if the reformists cannot start building the institutions and allowing the organisations until Suharto is gone? What can ICMI do, if its chairman technology minister Habibie always has to be on speaking terms with Suharto? Or what can enlightened military officers do, if the only way to sustain their positions is to be loyal to Suharto? Mean while the fundamental social and economic conflicts are getting worse.

Some might add that sensible compromises and gradual democratisation are anyway inevitable because capitalism is flourishing and some kind of civil society has emerged. But a few individual liberties are not enough. It is fine if people like to have democracy, do not trust what is in the papers, and criticise the government in coffee-shop discussions. But to make a difference they must also be able to organise on the basis of common ideas and interests. And this they cannot. Indonesia today is way behind the Philippines 10 years ago, not to talk of South Africa five years ago. There is no mass organisation from below. The only option is incorporation of people into politics based on populism and what remains of the old pillars – Sukarnoism and Islam. And now July 27 displayed the risks in terms of poorly organised and angry masses that run wild and invite more repression. Moreover, the regime is rather successful in dividing

the Muslims. Independent and pluralist Gus Dur is probably next on the list, if necessary.

However, July 27 also testifies to the fact that even the more genuine pro-democracy movements that aim at integrating rather than incorporating people into politics cannot make much difference. Their honest attempt to relate to the recognised political system by mobilising as many as possible in the context of the 1997 elections behind Megawati failed primarily because of the lack of space for more openness and gradual change. And then one must add that the basic weakness of the pro-democracy movement itself also proved to be a serious drawback – its fundamental separation between top-down activists who tend to run offside and grass roots activists who have not yet been able to generate interest-based mass organisations from below.

Hence I am afraid that the July 27 affair points in the direction of more unrest, more failures, and more crackdowns. Only when Suharto falls or steps down will the many actors who have remained loyal in order to survive try to handle transition. By then, therefore, the army remains the only solid organisation. But the generals can no longer run the country on their own. They must

look for support among businessmen and politicians – who are likely to compete with each other in offering different generals finance and mass support. And since most of the competing actors have not been able to prepare an institutional framework for a negotiated transition, they may not be able to settle their disputes in a smooth way either.

What can be done to alter this scenario? If the main points in this analysis are accepted, the only clear-cut path, even for businessmen with a strategic perspective, is the narrow one – that is to strengthen the position of the pro-democracy forces that do not depend on remaining loyal to the regime till the bitter end. And the only way of improving the independent position of these pro-democracy forces is to promote their attempts at bridging the gap between top-down activists and those working at the grass roots level. If various governments, agencies, and NGOs, especially those in the third world, develop at least a similarly enlightened understanding of these problems as have sections of the US administration, it should be possible to develop an urgent international movement in support of basic democratisation in Indonesia.

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