



## ASIA-PACIFIC COMMITTEE IN MANILA

Manila, capital of the Philippines, was the venue for a meeting of the Socialist International Committee for Asia and the Pacific on 11 and 12 February, hosted by the Philippines Democratic Socialist Party, PDSP. Delegates of SI member parties in the region were joined by others from Europe, by representatives of Socialist International Women, the International Union of Socialist Youth and the Party of European Socialists Group in the European Parliament, and by a number of guests from Asia-Pacific countries. The committee's agenda focused on the progress of democracy in the region, on strengthening social democracy in Asia and the Pacific, and on priorities for the International's work in this part of the world.

After a dinner hosted by President Fidel Ramos on the evening of 10 February, delegates were welcomed the following morning by Norberto Gonzales,

chair of the PDSP, to this first SI meeting in the Philippines. The SI secretary general, Luis Ayala, who took the chair at the opening, pointed out that the International was no stranger to the country, however, having supported the aspirations of the Filipino people for democracy over many years and been present at the first democratic elections, before welcoming the PDSP as a member in 1992.

Reviewing the committee's preoccupations since its establishment at the end of 1993 in Kathmandu, the secretary general highlighted the gains for democracy in the Asia-Pacific region, but also the democratic deficit in many countries and the link between economic development and social and democratic development. 'Economic growth', he said, 'must be accompanied by a fair distribution of wealth... by policies that promote employment. There must be social justice, and there must be

a strong message of solidarity. We social democrats are the movement which carries that commitment for solidarity within society. Development assistance must be accompanied by improved market access for exports from developing countries'. He also laid emphasis on the SI's commitment to defending, promoting and consolidating human rights, which must be regarded as indivisible, and to the establishment of new structures for peace and security.

Norberto Gonzales spoke of the forthcoming elections in the Philippines, where the PDSP would be standing a number of candidates for the first time and gaining valuable electoral experience in advance of the general elections due in 1998.

Taranath Rana Bhat of the Nepali Congress Party outlined the recent political developments in Nepal, where the Congress Party had gone into opposition after a narrow

electoral defeat. He described some of the problems facing a country where, so soon after the restoration of democracy in 1991, most of the people were uneducated, unskilled and living in extreme poverty.

According to Perumal Patto of the Democratic Action Party, DAP, Malaysia, 'What we have today in Malaysia, after 38 years of independence, is a highly mutilated and maimed democracy'. Impressive statistics of economic growth stood in contrast with political and human rights abuses. He urged other SI parties to exert international pressure on Malaysia for further democratisation, which would no doubt assist even greater economic achievements.

Kamal Azfar of the Pakistan People's Party, PPP, described

some of his party's political priorities since the election in 1993 of a national government led by Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, the PPP's leader, and of PPP-led governments in three of Pakistan's four provinces. These included reducing inflation and unemployment, promoting population control, increasing literacy and providing greater opportunities for education, and a greater devolution of power to local levels.

The development of this, the SI's newest regional committee, was warmly welcomed by Maryan Street, president of the New Zealand Labour Party, who went on to talk about the impending introduction in New Zealand of a new electoral system of proportional representation, which her party saw as an opportunity to clarify

exactly what they stood for, to re-state their social democratic principles, their identification with working people, and their place within an international movement for democratic socialism.

The present strength of the Australian Labor Party, after its fifth successive election victory and the disarray of the conservative opposition were stressed by Terry Cameron, representing the ALP. In a country with a strong democracy and strong economic growth, the main problem - and thus a political priority - for the party and the Labor government was unemployment, he said. He affirmed his party's roots in the labour movement and desire for good contacts and cooperation with SI parties in the region.

Losolyn Byambajargal of the Mongolian Social Democratic Party, MSDP, referred to the ongoing political and institutional reforms in Mongolia since the end of the one-party system in 1990 and the struggle of the MSDP to make its voice heard in this process.

The committee went on to adopt a declaration which acknowledged the steady advancement of democracy in Asia and the Pacific but noted with grave concern that, while in many countries of the region there were longstanding and deeply rooted democratic institutions and practices, in others democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms were still absent and women, in particular, remained marginalised and subordinated.

It stressed that democracy was not just the periodic celebration of elections, but an ongoing and continuous process in which political institutions were strengthened, human rights respected, democratic

**Makoto  
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committee  
chair**



constitutions defended, people's organisations, trade unions and peasant associations empowered, women's position strengthened, and people's active participation in all levels of decision-making institutionalised.

The declaration condemned the continuing violation of human and political rights in Bhutan, Burma, East Timor and Tibet. It expressed alarm at militarisation in some countries of the region, which posed a threat to peace and democracy. Support was affirmed for the ministerial-level talks between the Bhutanese and Nepali governments on humane repatriation of 100,000 Bhutanese refugees from Nepal to Bhutan. Congratulations were extended to Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga, the recently elected president of Sri Lanka, on her election victory and her action towards ending the civil war.

The committee reiterated its commitment to the principle of peaceful settlement of international conflicts, as stated in particular in the 1992 ASEAN Declaration of Manila on the South China Sea. It welcomed, finally, the efforts for intra-regional cooperation and understanding within such fora as ASEAN and APEC.

Among guests at the meeting were Chairman Win Khet and other representatives of the National League for Democracy of Burma. Win Khet reported that democratic forces in Burma had been quite successful in preventing the military SLORC regime from gaining international legitimacy, but that the regime was still clinging ruthlessly to power and rejecting any political solution to the country's problems. He appealed for the maximum international solidarity and the committee adopted a resolution urging



wider action by the international community to exert political and economic pressure for peace and democratisation in Burma and resolved to send a high-level mission to Burma in the near future.

The committee also agreed that a planned SI mission to Fiji should take place soon. It established two working groups, the first on election campaigning, to be chaired by Terry Cameron, and the second, to be chaired by Norberto Gonzales, to study developments in Asian countries under communist rule and to formulate proposals for SI policies towards those countries. A seminar on election campaigning will be held in the Asia-Pacific region during 1995, while the next meeting of the Asia-Pacific Committee, to be held later this year, will include in its agenda questions of regional security.

During the Manila meeting, the committee elected Makoto Tanabe as its chair and Maryan Street and Kamal Azfar as vice-chairs. Tanabe briefly outlined his priorities for the committee:

'There are areas where we need to continue our efforts to build

peace. It is our duty to continue doing so.

'We have friends engaged in a long struggle for democracy. We need to spread the importance of democracy even to those nations with antiquated institutions which disregard human rights.

'The discrepancies in lifestyle within developing economies run counter to the aspiration of countries for modernisation.

'Peace, democracy and economic progress must be promoted together.

'There are not a few countries in the region where there are not yet members of the Socialist International or friends of our organisation, like China, North Korea and Vietnam. We need to make friends in these countries and through them create structures for the social democratic movement.

'We need to form a new solidarity. We should not emphasise our differences, but rather focus on our common principles and unified goals. We need to establish practical objectives within a unified movement.'

*Win Khet*