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Literature, Labor Movements and Nationalism in Indonesia

The World Experts Lecture Series Featuring Max Lane

9–11 March 2023
1:00 - 4:00 PM
University of the Philippines Diliman, Quezon City
Metro Manila, Philippines

upcids Alternative Development

UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
CENTER FOR
INTEGRATIVE AND
DEVELOPMENT
STUDIES

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ABOUT THE PROCEEDINGS

Dr. Max Lane is an astute observer and analyst of Indonesian politics and culture, including its vibrant social movements and trade unions. He is a prolific writer, with numerous short essays published by the ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute of Singapore, where he is a Visiting Senior Fellow. These proceedings do not only add to his body of work but also serves as a take-off point for discussions that interrogate the role of literature and nationalism and even labor in nation building and social transformation.

I first met Max in the early 2000s when he was on a solidarity visit to the Philippines. Little did I know then that he has been a frequent guest in our country to observe Philippine affairs up close and personal. He was not just a disinterested observer of current events in our country but also an engaged activist in support of embattled social movements.

In the years since, I have occasionally kept in touch with Max through the vicissitudes of the movements that he was involved in Indonesia and Australia, and of the struggles here in the Philippines in which I was engaged. He was every bit as curious of the developments in the country as those in Indonesia and Australia. And while our assessments of national, regional and global situation did not always coincide, there was enough convergence, and there was always respect. So we kept communicating and exchanging notes.

When we first met, I believe he was a full-time cadre in his political organization in Australia while I was also a 24/7 activist in the Philippines. Since then, he has devoted more time to writing, with several books on Indonesia published in the 2010s. Meanwhile, I became a graduate student, then an assistant professor, at the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman. While we may have one foot out of social movements today, I still consider us scholar-activists who remain very much committed to the advocacies and struggles of the labor and social movements.

It was in that context that I, as a faculty of the School of Labor and Industrial Relations, invited Max to come and visit our country again for a lecture in UP Diliman. While it was SOLAIR which initiated the invitation for Max for a talk about the Indonesian labor movement, we later expanded the scope to additional lectures on the novels of Pramoedya Ananta Toer and the national question in Indonesia.

The UP World Expert Lecture Series (WELS) provided a convenient platform to bring him over to the country and share his knowledge, expertise and perspectives on Indonesian literature, politics and the labor movement. The WELS aims to enable UP's efforts at internationalization; it creates a space for renowned scholars abroad to give a talk, or several lectures, in UP for a week or so.

I wish to thank the Office for International Linkages of UP System and Diliman for their support for the WELS of Dr. Max Lane. Likewise, my appreciation to SOLAIR, Departmento ng Filipino at Panitikang Pilipino of the College of Arts and Letters of UP Diliman, and the Program on Alternative Development (AltDev) of the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (CIDS) for co-sponsoring the three lectures. Special thanks to Dr. Teresa Encarnacion Tadem, then CIDS Executive Director, and Dr. Melisa Serrano, Dean of SOLAIR, for graciously hosting the lectures in their facilities. Thanks also to Dr. Ronahlee Asuncion for kindly approving the invitation to Max when she was then SOLAIR Dean. To the transcriber (Ma. Veronica Yvette Yapit) and documenter (Hadikka Etabag) whose tireless work served as foundation for these proceedings, I am very grateful. Finally, I express my gratitude to the faculty and staff who helped me prepare the lectures: Dr. Eduardo Tadem, Assistant Professor Jose Monfred Sy, Ananeza Aban, Honey Tabiola, Arvin Dimalanta and Ryan Martinez of AltDev CIDS; Rowena Melican, Joseph Sulla, Brian Gumiran and Mikhail Aggabao of SOLAIR. The successful WELS of Dr. Lane would not have been possible without your enormous energy and creativity.

Benjamin Velasco
Assistant Professor, School of Labor and Industrial Relations
University of the Philippines Diliman

Day One

Indonesia Out of Exile:

Pramoedya Ananta Toer and the Politics of Unfinished Ferment

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09 March 2023
1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Conference Hall Open Space, Center for Integrative and Development Studies

Opening Ceremonies

- **Assistant Professor Benjamin Velasco**
  Co-Convenor, Program on Alternative Development
  UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies

  Director
  Center for Labor and Grassroots Initiatives
  UP School of Labor and Industrial Relations

Benjamin Velasco started his opening remarks by disclosing the hybrid nature of the event. Some attendees were present at the venue while some joined through the Zoom video conference. He then introduced the lecture as the first of the three-part World Expert Lecture Series (WELS), a program of the UP Office for International Linkages. The topics for the lecture series were as follows:

1. Dr. Max Lane's recent book, *Indonesia Out of Exile*;

2. The question of democratization, the national revolution in Indonesia, and its relevance to the Philippine context; and

3. The labor movement in Indonesia.

Introduction of the Speaker

Asst. Prof. Schedar B. Jocson

Chairperson, Departamento ng Filipino at Panitikan ng Pilipinas
College of Arts and Letters
University of the Philippines Diliman

"Literature serves as a reflection of society and of social movements, as a catalyst of social movement and social development," Prof. Schedar B. Jocson said. He introduced the guest lecturer as an expert on Indonesian politics, someone with deep knowledge and an analytical perspective on one of the Philippines' closest neighbors, geographically and culturally. Prof. Jocson ended his introduction with words of thanks to the Program on Alternative Development of the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS), and to the College of Arts and Letters (CAL), for the opportunity to take part in the implementation of the WELS lecture series.

Main Lecture

Dr. Maxwell Lane

Visiting Senior Fellow
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies–Singapore

Dr. Maxwell Lane opened his lecture declaring that his book, *Indonesia Out of Exile: How Pramoedya's Buru Quartet Killed a Dictatorship*, was written as a result

of his promise to convey the full details of their struggle—a promise made to Pramoedya, to his publisher and editor, Joesoef Isak, and to Hasjim Rachman, all of whom had been political prisoners under the Suharto dictatorship.

One of Dr. Lane's initial contacts with the Philippines happened in the early 1980s, at a meeting coordinated by the United Nations (UN) Institute of Training and Research in Bangkok. In this meeting, the Filipino delegation included the historian, Renato Constantino, Sr. The UN personnel from Vietnam, who headed the meeting, was sympathetic to progressive movements in Southeast Asia. The agenda was to discuss the question of how regional and alternative histories of the Southeast Asian societies could be supported and encouraged. The Malaysian economist, Jomo Sundaram, highlighted that the people involved in the effort to publish Pramoedya's novels were best suited to represent Indonesia at this meeting. Dr. Lane was chosen to represent Pramoedya and his editors, since they were forbidden to leave the country. In this instance, the Philippines and Indonesia cooperated on the issue of "rediscovering and reexplaining a region of dispute that's different and counters the dominant visions of history." This issue was resonant not only in Southeast Asia, but also in Dr. Lane's native country, Australia.

Praxis: A Book as Intervention

As Dr. Lane mentioned, *This Earth of Mankind* (*Bumi Manusia* in Bahasa Indonesia) was published in 1981. It was an intervention into the political process at that time. From 1978 to 1982, Indonesia was facing a contradiction. All student-initiated political activities were banned in 1978. Student leaders were put on trial, and then to prison. Pramoedya, Isak, Rachman, and 15,000 others were released from jail in 1979. Many of these releases were the result of the pressure on the Suharto administration, as well as the logistical impossibility of fitting 15,000 people in jail. They were freed at the height of repression. By 1981, Pramoedya, Isak and Rachman had published a book which had "Karya Pulau Buru"[1] on the front cover. Back then, when journalists were commanded by authorities to withdraw an article, they had to comply. In an act of defiance, Pramoedya's group, which was accused of being "evil communists," took a stand.

---

[1] This translates to "A Work from Buru Island." Buru Island was the main location where male Indonesian political prisoners, including Pramoedya, were held. There were about 13,000 of them.

They demanded a formal letter from authorities, asking them for a clear reason for their compliance.

Dr. Lane noted that it took several months before the regime banned the book. The delay arose because of the following reasons:

> **1.** The government was caught off guard. No one thought that people associated with the Communist Party of Indonesia, in less than a year after getting out of prison, could publish a book in such a defiant way. The movement used the regime's uncertainty to buy themselves several more months.
>
> **2.** They took advantage of the fact that Adam Malik, then Vice President of Indonesia, had been part of a left-wing anti-Dutch activist group. Pramoedya, Isak, and Rachman contacted Malik and took several photos with him, which were published on the front pages of newspapers. Malik mandated that every school student in Indonesia read Bumi Manusia, making it more difficult for then President Suharto to ban it.

Dr. Lane emphasized that there was a psychological war (psywar) between the three men behind *Bumi Manusia* and the government. One was incarcerated again for months for defending the book, which was eventually banned after several months, as were the three other books in *The Buru Quartet*. Hasta Mitra ended up publishing 70 of their titles over the next fifteen years, including the Indonesian translation of the three volumes of Marx's *Das Kapital*.

Impact of Pramoedya's Works

The anticommunist propaganda in Indonesia did not focus on critiquing communist or socialist thinking. Instead, it concentrated on black propaganda: "Communists were evil, killers, rapists, liars, etc.," as Dr. Lane shared. Pramoedya wrote a book that directly opposed the black propaganda against him and the others who had been detained in 1965. *Bumi Manusia* read as a work that could not have possibly been written by the communists. This helped counteract the anticommunist propaganda and renewed the image of Pramoedya and his contemporaries among young students in the 1980s.

In 1965, Suharto's military crushed the Indonesian Left. Right-wing student organizations supported the his administration and joined anticommunist

demonstrations. Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Indonesia (KAMI), an organization run by conservative students, was absorbed into the political machinery of the dictatorship. However, as high school students entered ~~into~~ universities, they began meeting teachers and scholars associated with the Socialist Party of Indonesia (PSI), a social democratic party. Students grew increasingly critical of the authoritarian measures, especially of state harassment and the concentration of wealth among a select few. Despite their growing discontent, the students remained silent on the 1965 killings and the widespread imprisonment of roughly 20,000 people. They were critical of the government, but remained anticommunist.

■ Dr. Max Lane expounding on the "emergence" of Indonesian nationalism through Pramoedya's Buru Quartet with reactors Prof. Ramon "Bomen" Guillermo and Asst. Prof. Amado Mendoza III. Photo credit: Program on Alternative Development.

When Pramoedya's books were published, they reached a new generation of students. As they read his works and became exposed to political prisoners, they began breaking away from their anticommunist mentors. They retraced and reread the history of Indonesia, most of which was falsified by the administration. They learned from Pramoedya's novels that they alone could not change society; they needed to ally with the masses. By the late 1990s, this struggle for alliance birthed a new student movement that was actively partnering with rural farmers. Dr. Lane argued that breaking away from conservative teachings and

introducing leftist ideas to students led to the formation of new political groups and movements, which would later overthrow Suharto.

Indonesia as described in Pramoedya's works

Pramoedya's genius as a historian lies in his retracing of Indonesia's origins as a nation, as Dr. Lane remarked. Prior to this, Dutch historians determined the understanding of the nation's emergence. Pramoedya's novels reclaimed an authentic sovereignty over the country's history. His works asserted that it was not the Dutch that created Indonesia, and that "Indonesia", as a national project, is not a continuity from the past.

In the chapter, "The Absence of Indonesia," in his book, Dr. Lane argued that the word "Indonesia" did not exist in the early twentieth century. This is the same period when Pramoedya's books are set. During this period, material developments in the archipelago slowly began the creation of Indonesia. A new kind of people also emerged: Indonesians. These new people were represented by Minke, the main character in Pramoedya's *Buru Quartet*.

The Creation of Indonesia as a Nation

Dr. Lane asserted that Pramoedya's quartet can be divided into two sections. On the one hand, *This Earth of Mankind and Child of All Nations* present the interaction of social and economic processes in the early twentieth century. On the other hand, *Footsteps* and *House of Glass* focus on the emergence of Indonesian agency: the characters struggle to change things in their society, which is the first stage of nation-creation.

In *Footsteps* and *House of Glass*, Minke, who was based on the Indonesian journalist, Tirto Adhi Soerjo, tries to form the first anticolonial organization, Sarekat Priyayi, or the Official's Union. It is a failure. After that, Minke is involved in forming another organization, *Sarekat Dagang Islam* or the Islamic Traders' Association. It would eventually garner a membership of two million *dagang* or merchants, which included everyone who was not dependent on the colonial state for their income. This supposedly became the largest mass organization in the world during the early twentieth century. By the end of the book, the main character does not yet see himself as an Indonesian because the idea has still not yet evolved. This process emphasizes the concrete real experience of people.

There is a theory about the origin of a nation as a process connected to its formation as an imagined community. Dr. Lane disagreed and said that a nation is "experienced" by a community. The mind conceives an interpretation of this experience, and Dr. Lane argued that *This Earth of Mankind* and *Child of All Nation* discuss that concept. A myriad of factors, including people's personalities, experiences, and responses, push along the development of a new national consciousness.

Pramoedya's analysis reveals that at the turn of the century, the vanguard of change was coming from the local bourgeoisie who were monetarily independent from the colonial state. In the first book, Nyai Ontosoroh, who was a concubine of a Dutch businessman, learned how to run a business despite her difficult circumstances. As a teenager, Minke himself was selling furniture. Dr. Lane noted that by the end of the four novels, the characters' experience of failure signals the emergence of new agents of change.

Figures connected to the first manifestation of the Indonesian Communist Party appeared in *Footsteps* and *The House of Glass*. There was a shift from the merchant Minke, a representative of a local bourgeoisie of the early twentieth century, to such new figures in the end, embodying a new agency more connected to the masses of the proletariat and the peasantry.

Introduction of Reactors

- **Asst. Prof. Jose Monfred Sy**
  Project Leader, Program on Alternative Development
  UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies

- **Deidre Morales**
  Instructor, Departamento ng Filipino at Panitikan ng Pilipinas
  University of the Philippines Diliman

Dr. Ramon "Bomen" Guillermo is the Director of the Center for International Studies of the University of the Philippines Diliman. His current research projects include the transmission, dissemination, reception, and translation of radical texts and ideas in Southeast Asia using techniques and approaches of translation studies and digital humanities. He is also the author of several books, such as *Translation and Revolution: A Study of Jose Rizal's Guillermo Tell* (Ateneo De

Manila University Press 2009), *Pook at Paninindigan: Kritika ng Pantayong Pananaw*[2] (Place and Commitment: A Critique of Pantayong Pananaw), which came out in 2013 from the University of the Philippines Press (UP Press), and the novel, *Ang Makina ni Mang Turing* (The Machine of Mr. Turing) again by UP Press in 2023.

Professor Amado Anthony Mendoza III teaches Literature and Creative Writing courses at the UP Diliman Departamento ng Filipino at Panitikan ng Pilipinas. He has translated Eka Kurniawan's short stories into Filipino, some of which are included in the collection *Mga Himutok sa Palikuran* published by Savage Mind and Ateneo de Naga University Press in 2021.

Reaction

■ **Dr. Ramon "Bomen" Guillermo**
Director, Center for International Studies
University of the Philippines Diliman

■ **Asst. Prof. Amado Mendoza III**
Departamento ng Filipino at Panitikan ng Pilipinas
University of the Philippines Diliman

The panel for reaction began with a personal reflection from Dr. Ramon Guillermo, who recounted their own transformative experience with his encounter of the translated works of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's This Earth of Mankind. Recalling his time as an undergraduate at the university, he described how this encounter profoundly impacted their understanding of literature, revolution, and society. This experience, they noted, profoundly powerful for many students who had the opportunity to engage with these translations – beyond the intended Indonesian readership. He expressed his sincerest appreciation and gratitude to Dr. Lane for making such a powerful contribution in sharing Pramoedya's life's work that has the potential to shape and influence minds across the Southeast Asia region.

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[2] *Pantayong Pananaw* literally means "From-Us, For-Us" perspective. It is an intellectual movement that seeks to decolonize Philippine historiography, and urges historians to write for Filipinos, and not foreigners, particularly Westerners.

He reminded, particularly to the Filipino audience, that till this day the novels by Pramoedya are still legally banned in Indonesia under Pancasila, because any form of so-called transmission of Marxism-Leninism is still illegal in Indonesia. Yet despite the restrictions, the reality on the ground is that you can buy copies of these books almost anywhere in Indonesia.

For example, the biggest bookstore, Gramedia, always has a shelf dedicated to Pramoedya's works. The editions from Lentera Dipantara—the ones on display with colorful covers and artistic covers —are easily available. And in those same bookshelves are more works of Pramoedya that have not yet been translated from Bahasa Indonesia, which may be the reason that some of these works haven't been widely disseminated outside of Indonesia.

■ The panel speakers Dr. Ramon "Bomen" Guillermo and Prof. Amado "Arlo" Mendo III. Photo credit: Alternative Development Program

During his fieldwork experience in Indonesia over a decade ago, Dr. Guillermo noted a striking observation about the availability of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's works. He highlighted that while Pramoedya's books could be easily purchased across various bookstores throughout Indonesia, they were notably absent from the library of the Universitas Indonesia. This absence illustrated a form of control

over the literary resources accessible to students. He may not be certain if this remains the current state of the library, which is known for its extensive collection, but he confirmed that at the time of their fieldwork, Pramoedya's works were not available in the university library.

A few years later, he returned to Universitas Indonesia after being invited to give a lecture on Pramoedya's novels. After his lecture, someone asked him why he chose to talk about *Bumi Manusia*. It was a very strange question for him. For him, it was like if Filipino unknowingly asked him why he would give an important lecture on Jose Rizal's significance in his own country. This retelling signifies and support that within Indonesia's own academia, the study of Pramoedya is nowhere significant as its absence in its own state libraries and archives.

Another point from Dr. Guillermo came from his reading of Dr. Lane's final chapter of his book, *Indonesia Out of Exile*, which discusses the potential future dissemination, popularity, and spread of these novels among Indonesian youth. Dr. Guillermo was quick to point out the 2019 movie adaptation of *Bumi Manusia*, directed by Hanung Bramantyo. It was a very popular film, with about 1.5 million people watching it through Netflix. While he had some reservations about the movie – that the film had some artistic liberties and how it falls short to capture a certain critical spirit that was present in Pramoedya's work, he thinks it had an impact on the Indonesian public in popularizing Pramoedya's works among younger generations which takes full advantage of what film has to offer.

To the benefit of Dr. Lane, there was also a recent adaptation of José Rizal's novels - Noli Me Tangere and El Filibusterismo - as a telenovela, which garnered around 6 million viewers per episode. Even though both adaptations took liberties with the original material, he believe it performed a positive role in sparking interest for young people in both context and places to read Rizal and Pramoedya and gain deeper appreciation for history and literature.

After watching the movie adaptation of Bumi Manusia, Dr. Guillermo had a conversation with Hilmar Farid, now an official in the Indonesian government and a scholar on Pramoedya, and Ronny Agustinus, one of Indonesia's most important leftist publishers. They all reached an agreement that while the movie may not have been the most artistic or faithfully transmitted as politically charged adaptation, it could still serve as a bridge to encourage young people to read Pramoedya's books.

However, not everyone agreed. After watching the movie, he spoke with a young Indonesian woman who said it ruined Pramoedya's novels, and that young people shouldn't watch it because it would ruin their taste in film. But Dr. Guillermo thinks that there must be a proper balance between artistry with the need to reach a broader audience. Even if the film isn't perfect, if it encourages young people to pick up the book, then I think it has done its job.

Dr. Guillermo made a poignant critique on the perils of historical revisionism or distortions through popular media. He made an example of President Ferdinand "Bong Bong" Marcos, Jr.'s election machinery which took advantage of social media and other channels to quickly spread his revisionist narrative. Though a positive impetus from this phenomenon, it nurtured a more critical audience that examines facts and validates multiple sources in the interest of surfacing truths in our histories.

Finally, a question that has intrigued Dr. Guillermo for a long time: "Was Pramoedya's writing of the *Buru Quartet* influenced by José Rizal?" He knows Pramoedya refers to Rizal historically, but he wonders if Pramoedya ever acknowledged that Rizal's novels influenced his own work. There are parallels, yet there is no direct source that says Pramoedya's work took inspiration from Rizal. It seems more like a political influence. Both Pramoedya and Rizal were heavily influenced by Max Havelaar written by Maltatuli (Eduard Douwes Dekker) on the colonial influence of the Dutch East India Company – being both passionate and astute critical observers of colonial legacies in the region.

Prof. Amado Mendoza III's feedback on Dr. Lane's new book highlighted the political tensions between competing moral forces in Indonesia during the 1950s and 1960s. He noted that the period was "flanked by a great cultural debate," mainly between the Communist artists and intellectuals and anticommunist intellectuals and artists. The anticommunist side was represented most notably by the signatories of the Cultural Manifesto, or *Manikebu*. The debate centered on the role of art and literature in effecting revolutionary change. He highlighted that Pramoedya was a central figure in that debate. During this period, Pramoedya chose a side and began to practice the idea that literature could serve the aims and aspirations of the revolution. Mendoza also mentioned that Dr. Guillermo translated into Filipino Pramoedya's famous communist book, *Sekali Peristiwa Di Banten Selatan* [An Incident

in South Banten],[3] as "Minsa'y Nangyari sa Timog Banten." When the New Order ("Orde Baru") regime took power, Pramoedya suffered because of his beliefs and convictions. Intellectuals and writers who were once his opponents had mixed feelings. However, the prevailing stance of anticommunist writers and intellectuals was that of a victor: writers and intellectuals who tried to place art and literature under the command of politics were excluded from Indonesian public life and that, at long last, the "*semboyan*" [slogan], "*politik adalah panglima*" [politics is the commander], became a thing of the past.

Prof. Mendoza noted that what happened in Indonesia in 1965 is also taking place in the Philippines at present. The Commission on Philippine Language banned the publication of five books for allegedly containing subversive ideas. The National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) is designed to operationalize the Whole-of-Nation approach of the Duterte administration against communism. It endorsed and ordered the removal of "communist books" from the library shelves of state universities and colleges. Philippine local bookstores were also attacked, an event similar to the widespread book raids across Indonesia, which were conducted by anticommunist and conservative groups.

"What's evident [in our discussion of Pramoedya and other enduring writers] is that books remain [to be] a powerful instrument [that speaks] truth to power," Mendoza said. "And may we continue to speak truth to power, whether through books or active participation in social movements, despite all odds and forces that militate against our visions of a just future."

3 The translated draft of Prof. Ramon Guillermo can be accessed here https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340738392_Translation_Minsa'y_Nangyari_sa_Timog_Banten_Isang_Nobela_ni_Pramoedya_Ananta_Toer

Discussion Among the Speakers[4]

Dr. Lane:

I'm tempted to start with that terrible film, *Bumi Manusia*, the first film adaptation of Pramoedya's *This Earth of Mankind*. The movie is available on Netflix. But I won't begin with that. You mentioned, for example, that you could not find Pramoedya's books in the libraries and that, even at the University of Indonesia, somebody asked why anyone would be interested in finding copies of his books. This is a significant effect of what happened after 1965.

After the 1965 killings, the military terrorized people who were allied with the Left. One million people were killed, and 25,000 were incarcerated. All radical works were banned. I like to describe that process as a "counterrevolution." However, it was not a "counterrevolution directed against the socialist revolution simply because the government before 1965 was not revolutionary. Neither the Communist Party nor the left wing of the Nationalist Party had any representatives in that government. They were all excluded from power, so it wasn't a counterrevolution against a left-wing government. Instead, it was a counterrevolution against nation-formation—that is, the process of creating and finally consolidating a nation.

Sukarno, who served as the main spokesperson of the revolutionary left at the time, reiterated that nation-building and character-building were not yet complete for Indonesia.

But a part of this "counterrevolution" against the nation was the exclusion of literature in the school curriculum. Indonesia is arguably one of the very few countries where the literature of the nation is not being taught in schools. There's a subject in junior and senior high school called Indonesian language; you study the Indonesian language, and you learn a list of literary works and their authors. The list excludes writers who were allied with the left, including Pramoedya. Students are not encouraged to read their works or discuss them in class. The national literature is being wiped from collective memory. It was a

4 This section represents a near-verbatim account of the discussion. Brackets and minor edits were done for clarity and readability.

necessary act against the nation that the Suharto regime effected, in order to minimize the resistance to foreign incursions.

At present, literature is starting to expand rapidly. If you ask me about social conditions in Indonesia, I can't answer you. But its social unrest is also a product of excluding literature from the educational system for half a century. I asked people in the Philippines and in Malaysia if they teach literature in high school. They answered yes. In Singapore, Pramoedya is included in the high school curriculum. In my native Australia, we also teach literature. But it's a criminal act against the nation to discourage students from reading and studying important literary works. Now I'm beginning to see a backlash against that in Indonesian society.

Students are turning to the online messaging platform, *WhatsApp* to discover new books to read. They ask each other, "Have you read this, have you read that?" Contrary to popular belief, the platform does not reflect an aversion to reading.

Around 1.5 million people watched the film *Bumi Manusia*. I think this huge reception is mainly because of the heartthrob young actor. Was there a big surge in book sales? No. Pramoedya Ananta Toer is an internationally acclaimed Indonesian author whose works garnered praise from the *Washington Post, New York Times,* and the *Los Angeles Times*, among others. However, there is not a single book in English about Pramoedya, even after 40 years since the publication of *This Earth of Mankind*. Aside from Southeast Asian scholars and specialists, are there people writing or thinking about Pramoedya? It's difficult to mainstream his books among the youth without confronting or challenging prevalent beliefs. His books seemingly ask the reader to take a side.

The film did not challenge anyone. Engaging with Pramoedya's works necessitates challenging the reader's worldview. This is why the liberal academe in the western world doesn't concentrate on his books; you can't take a neutral stance about social reality in Indonesia. Some of them may even say that Pramoedya was great, but not his *Bumi Manusia*, because of their fear of interrogation.

Dr. Guillermo:

I have one question about the movie *Bumi Manusia*. A few years before it was filmed, there was a movie adaptation of another Indonesian novel, *Laskar Pelangi*, by Andrea Hirata. Upon its release, there was a massive demand for copies of the

novel. Hirata's publisher produced millions of copies to meet the demand. You can watch it when you get the chance; I think it has English subtitles, since it was highly popular.

I speculate that if this had been done with Pramoedya's novels, they might have had a similar impact on their reception. Riri Riza, the director of *Laskar Pelangi*, was offered to direct the film adaptations of Pramoedya's novels. Other critically acclaimed directors were also asked, but none of the plans fell through. A commercial director, Hanung Bramantyo, eventually filmed the adaptation. It may be a factor for its lackluster reception.

You also mentioned the Indonesian poet Wiji Thukul in your book. Thukul's Filipino translators are also present in this lecture. They include Mark Garcia, another one of our colleagues, and they translated all of Thukul's works from Bahasa Indonesia to Filipino. As of now, I don't think there's a complete English translation of his works. So what can you say about Thukul and emerging writers who wish translate his works in different languages?

Dr. Lane:

It's interesting you asked about Wiji Thukul, because I think that Indonesia, specifically from the 1970s to the 2000s, had an iconic writer. In the 1970s, the writings of the poet, Willibrordus S. Rendra, mobilized the youth against the Suharto administration. He also enriched the genre of poetry. I attended some of his plays and poetry readings in the 1970s, and he would get an audience of five to ten thousand people. They roared in excitement as he sharply criticized the New Order. One of his poems became a part of student manifestos during demonstrations.

Thukul had a very clear concept of the divisions in society. As I discussed in my book, he was anticommunist, but he also strongly voiced his opposition to Suharto—perhaps more so than students and political organizations ever did. Meanwhile, in the 1980s, the significant writers included Pramoedya and Hasta Mitra. They were literary vanguards.

In the 1990s, one of the most prominent writers was Thukul. A line from his poem became the slogan of an entire movement: "Only one word: Resist." He was an active member of the People's Democratic Party. He was also a theater organizer. My partner—my wife, Faiza Mardzoeki—was involved in his theater group in the

early 1990s, during which Thukul also served as a labor organizer. His poetry became manifestos and battle cries during rallies. This was after he disappeared, allegedly murdered, in 1997 or 1998. To this day, his poetry is shouted on streets.

Beginning in the 1970s, Rendra, Pramoedya, and Thukul accordingly represented a renewed vision for Indonesia. I think this Indonesian vision has not yet crystallized. Maybe I'm biased, but I think my partner, Faiza, has a significant role in developing the literary and artistic scene in Indonesia. This is particularly evident in her play, *The Silent Song of the Genzer Flower*. Other important works include the essays of Linda Christanty. But, as I mentioned, I don't want to single out a few literary works, because I haven't read much literature from Indonesia. There's too much.

Dr. Guillermo:

You mentioned in your book that Pramoedya refused to write about his experience during the New Order. Obviously, there were writers who emerged, especially from A*ngkatan Kontemporer*,[5] who wrote about the legacies of the New Order. So, I wanted to ask how you regard the novels of, for instance, Ayu Utami, Laksmi Pamuntjak, or other writers who tried to write about *Nam Lima* or the events of 1965?

Dr. Lane:

I think works that genuinely tackle the events of 1965 are still very limited. Most characters of the authors you mentioned are only a part of the Left through circumstance. Some of them even regret their leftist affiliations. There must be no regret. Those who are allied with the left must be characterized in novels as people with agency, not dragged into the movement by accident. That kind of literature is arguably not developed yet in Indonesia. When we see more of those works, then we know the unfinished ferment is heading towards completion. So, I'm not really a fan of the books of the authors you mentioned.

5 The phrase literally means "Contemporary Force."

Open Forum[6]

Voltaire Veneracion (Human Rights Lawyer):

I was an editor for our campus paper, and Professor Bomen was my teacher in Rizal. I bought your (Maxwell Lane's) translation of *This Earth of Mankind*. I read about this in John Nery's book, where he discussed the impact of Jose Rizal in Southeast Asia. That's why your name sounded familiar, and why I was attracted to your lecture. Bomen told me that you translated the *Buru Quartet*. I love your translation. While you said the series is not about Indonesian identity, I still felt it depicted some sort of identity crisis. There may be no Indonesian identity just yet, but the book showed a young man who was trying to find himself in an emerging order. That's something I could relate to. You translated it while you were Secretary of the Australian Embassy. After your translation, you were recalled to office in 1981. Can you share with us the story of how that happened? How was your experience of translating all four books, during and after your diplomatic service?

Dr. Lane:

Yes, I translated the first book, *This Earth of Mankind*, while I was working in the Australian Embassy. Back then, I thought I should tell my boss, the ambassador, once I finished translating the Penguin Books version. He told me, "You have to leave Indonesia within 24 hours." Naturally, I asked why. "Well, if I let you stay after translating and publishing a banned book, the Indonesian government will demand why." I tried to reason that the English translation of an Indonesian work may assist cultural relations. But he wouldn't concede. I lost my diplomatic career. When I returned to office, I was assigned to an empty room, given work that didn't exist. If you are a diplomat, your opinion needs to be whatever is the government's opinion.

In any case, I did not agree with the opinions of the government. So I left, and in the next few years, I concentrated on translating Pramoedya's novels before my savings ran out. And then I had to start finding a job. I also got involved in organizing political activities. Pramoedya said to me once, "Max, [you] seem to

6 This section represents a near-verbatim account of the discussion. Brackets and minor edits were done for clarity and readability.

be left-wing." And I answered, "Yeah, I suppose I am left-wing." He disagreed and asserted, "You don't belong to a party. Don't tell me you're left-wing if you don't belong anywhere." After the downfall of Suharto, Pramoedya immediately joined the People's Democratic Party, even though he was old and he wasn't a political organizer. He told me, "I'm joining them. You also should." So when I got back to Australia, I joined.

■ Voltair Veneracion led the open forum discussion with a more personal question on Dr. Max Lane's experience in writing the book. Photo credit: Program on Alternative Development.

Dr. Guillermo:

You mentioned in your book *Indonesia Out of Exile* that Pramoedya asked you to also translate one of his very thick works, *Arus Balik*, or *Reverse Flow*. I think that novel would be very interesting for Filipinos to read because it's about ancient archipelagoes similar to Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. May I ask why you haven't finished translating *Arus Balik*? I think your translation will find a Filipino readership. The novel discusses many ideas that may interest our historians and writers.

Dr. Lane:

Yes, I feel very guilty about not having translated this 800-page novel. But I needed to focus on other things. At the moment, I've committed to work on two books for my publishers. One is a memoir that details my experience working with the social movements in Indonesia, the Philippines, and East Timor. The other book tackles the new history of modern Indonesia. But if my energy allows, I would like to finish translating *Arus Balik*. When Penguin in America overtook the publication of my translations, the publisher decided that I translate the essays that Pramoedya wrote in prison, and the other works he penned on Buru Island or in the 1950s. I eventually translated *Arok Dedes*, but that was published with a small print run in Singapore and is now out-of-print. Translating *Arus Balik* is a debt I still owe.

Jamil Christian Eliza (Bachelor of Arts in Filipino Education student):

I have a question for each speaker. I am fascinated with your discussion on including Pramoedya's works in the school curriculum. At present, Southeast Asian literature, including Indonesian literature, is being taught to Grade 9 students in the Philippines. Dr. Guillermo and Prof. Mendoza would probably agree that when it comes to translation, the Filipino language remains to be overlooked. My question to Dr. Lane is: which works of Pramoedya can we teach in junior high school, specifically to students aged 14–16?

This is my question to Dr. Guillermo: *If ever man na isasalin po natin sa Filipino iyong mga akda ni Pramoedya Ananta Toer, ano po 'yung mga hamon na kakaharapin po natin sa pagsasalin nito?* ("If ever Pramoedya Ananta Toer's works would be translated into Filipino, what possible challenges would the translator face?")

And finally, to Prof. Mendoza: *ano naman pong teoryang pampanitikan ang maaaring gamitin upang suriin ang mga akda ni Pramoedya, para makabuo po ng mga gabay na katanungan para sa mga batang nasa baitang-siyam? Salamat po.* ("What literary theory can we use to read and analyze Pramoedya's works? This is so we can draft guide questions for Grade 9 students who wish to study his work. Thank you.")

Dr. Lane:

I'm not sure which books to recommend for that age. I would need to know more about the Philippine education system, the students' levels of familiarity with literature, and many others. Possibly, they can study Pramoedya's short novels, or even *Bumi Manusia*, which can be read by different grade levels. It can be read as a story about the history of a nation, or about strength of character. The whole concept of the "novel" seems very weak in Indonesia. Pramoedya wrote the first two books knowing that his Indonesian readers were not used to reading lengthy works. While he himself translated wordy Russian literature, he knew his readers were unfamiliar with novels. So, if the book is read slowly, it can be taught at an early age and to whatever grade level.

Dr. Guillermo:

Unfortunately, only a few people have really done translations of Pramoedya's works to Filipino. We do have Thelma Kintanar's translation of *Bumi Manusia* as the *Daigdig ng Tao*. Few Filipinos take pride in our language. It's good that young people are translating more works from Indonesian to Filipino. These writers include the contemporaries of Prof. Mendoza. They studied the language, and they're capable of translating even poetry into Filipino. Bahasa Indonesia or Malay are, in a way, closely related to Tagalog, so translations are possible. This is in contrast to the cultural and linguistic gaps between English and Bahasa Indonesia. English translation requires explaining cultural context. I think it's easier for us, Filipinos and Indonesians, to undertake translations because of our linguistic and cultural affinities. I think we need to professionalize translation, because we're doing this now [only] on a very individual level. When you're doing this, sometimes it's hard to ask each other, "Did I translate this correctly? Can I do it better?" It's better if we collaborate with people. Unfortunately, this kind of interest is mostly one-way. I hardly see Indonesians translating Philippine material from our languages into Bahasa Indonesia. Arlo translates Eka Kurniawan, who is a popular writer in Indonesia. We are informed of their literary trends. But Indonesians are unfortunately unaware of Filipino works, including those written in our many languages.

We also need help from Indonesian writers and translators, so that we can strengthen our own translation practices here in the Philippines. We [also] have to develop this in a collaborative, two-way process. I'm sure Max Lane would

agree that this is a form of internationalism—a collaboration between Filipinos and Indonesians. We're able to do a lot more now than in the past. For young people, if you are interested in studying Southeast Asian writers, study each other's languages. This is so we can help each other translate prominent works into our mother tongue.

I mentioned earlier that the 800-page monster, the novel *Arus Balik*, is very important for Filipinos to read, but there's no English translation yet. I think it's a challenge for us to translate this in the future. Indonesia gives us various opportunities to learn their language. Filipinos don't have a solid initiative that [teaches] Filipino or Philippine languages to foreigners. We don't have that kind of program, but Indonesia does. You can also pursue further studies in Indonesia. I'm optimistic about the future of translation. Hopefully, Indonesia will do better in reading, studying, and translating Philippine and other Southeast Asian literatures into their own language.

■ Prof. Ramon Guillermo gleefully responding to the question raised during the open forum. Photo credit: Program on Alternative Development

Prof. Mendoza:

You can look at Noel Teodoro's translation of Pramoedya's collection of short stories titled *Sunat*. The title in Filipino is *Pagtutuli* (Circumcision). That's a story you can teach to Grade 9 students. However, I always regard most of Pramoedya's writings, even his novels, as *Bildungsroman* or coming-of-age [stories]. You can include most of his works in your curriculum. Another such story is *Kemudian Lahirlah Dia*, or *In the Twilight Born*. It's a semi-autobiographical piece that tells the story of a pre-adolescent boy who is witnessing his parents and his older sibling's involvement in the burgeoning anticolonial movement against the Dutch in the 1930s. It's an interesting way to teach or at least introduce to Grade 9 students how people of their age can [be] involved in social movements.

I chose to be a translator from Bahasa Indonesia to Filipino, instead of following the lucrative route of translating from Indonesian to English. I want to vanquish what Benedict Anderson and Jose Rizal mentioned as the *antu perbandingan*, or specters of comparison between two cultures that have similarities with each other. By translating works from Indonesian into Filipino, I tried to see the relationship or affinity between such cultures. I'm not a teacher of Grade 9 or 10 students, so I can't suggest which books to teach them. I understand that teaching literature in those levels require using theories, trends, or styles, so they can be included in the curriculum.

I think translating literary works from their source language to your own language gives translators and prospective readers further insight on the possible convergences between Philippine and Indonesian cultures. I can't answer your second question, but teachers in that level could respond. Thank you.

Mr. Veneracion:

As an exercise, I suggest the use of ChatGPT for literal translation; it does a quick and decent job. After all, we already have Dr. Max Lane's translation. Using ChatGPT is also a way to work with A.I. tools instead of constantly fighting against them.

I want to ask Dr. Max Lane what the legal basis was for banning Pramoedya's *This Earth of Mankind*, which I recently read. I don't see anything subversive or revolutionary about it. As Prof. Mendoza mentioned, it's a coming-of-age story.

It doesn't seem seditious. I also want to ask what Australia's legal basis was for violating your academic freedom or your freedom of speech?

Dr. Lane:

At that time, the Attorney General of the Government of Indonesia issued a statement saying the book was banned for spreading the Marxism-Leninism ideology. They warned that Pramoedya Ananta Toer was a very clever writer. It would be impossible to point out evidence of Marxism and Leninism in his book, because it was all disguised. That was the formal justification. But I think the book, especially in the Indonesian context, contains subversive elements. It teaches rebelliousness and independence from authority. In addition, it includes the existing histories of Indonesia. Without a deep reading, it may come across as a democratic spirited humanist novel, which helped counteract the black propaganda that people like Pramoedya were "evil." The book had a deep impact on young people and led to the radicalization in the 1990s. The government's fears were justified; the novel helped in this radicalization process.

Dr. Guillermo:

Some of us, including my students who are present today, have read the other books in the series. My favorite is actually not *This Earth of Mankind*; it's *Anak Semua Bangsa*, or *Child of All Nations*. That's the second book. It says a lot about the Philippines: about Andres Bonifacio and Jose Rizal, and about organizing a revolutionary movement. In the novel, Minke's Dutch friend discusses ideas which parallel those of Marx. In fact, some sentences are actually paraphrases of lines from the *Communist Manifesto*, if you study it properly. So, if the Indonesian authorities surveyed these works and knew anything at all about Marxism-Leninism, they would have seen some evidence in the *Child of All Nations*. I think Indonesian authorities were just ignorant. They didn't even read the novels; it was all about the author whom they were trying to persecute, as Prof. Mendoza said. Just because Pramoedya was an ex-Tapol,[7] the government didn't allow him to write. His works were banned, since former political prisoners were continuously demonized. It didn't matter what was written in the novels; what

7 Tapol, or *tahanan politik*, is an abbreviation that means "political prisoners."

mattered was that they were written by someone accused of being a communist. His works could not be read. If you study the novels, they contain progressive ideas that question authority and challenge a feudal and authoritarian rule. You can read them in that light. As a Filipino, my favorite is *Child of All Nations*. Hopefully, one day, a translation will come out.

Lance Romulos David (Bachelor of Arts in Philippine Studies student):

You talked about the unfinished ferment in the social movements in Indonesia. You noticed trends in humanities and newspapers about Pramoedya, and also an emerging interest among the youth in studying him. What can the Filipino national democratic movement learn from the social movements in Indonesia in terms of overcoming censorship and building their forces?

As Prof. Mendoza mentioned, there is a pressing need for these movements to evaluate themselves to further advance their cause. In Indonesia, there's news that mobilizations number into hundreds of thousands. However, you also said that there is no center that can hold them. There is no movement that is really interested in knowing history or nationalist values. Thank you.

Dr. Lane:

I think it's a tough ask to identify which Indonesian social movements are relevant to the Philippines. But it's a question that may come up more concretely in my next lecture. On the question of censorship, the conditions in the Philippines were very different from those that Pramoedya faced in the 1980s. This was the same period as the Marcos dictatorship. Overcoming censorship requires a combination of defiance and tactical moves. I will discuss more concrete comparisons during the lecture tomorrow. If you come, you can also buy my new book.

Day Two

Class, Nation, and Social Revolution

in Indonesia and the Philippines

10 March 2023 (Friday)
1:00 p.m.– 4:00 p.m.
Conference Hall Open Space, Center for Integrative and Development Studies

Opening Remarks

■ **Dr. Teresa Encarnacion Tadem**
Executive Director
UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies

Former UP President Francisco Nemenzo, distinguished speaker, discussant, guests, colleagues, and friends, good afternoon. On behalf of the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS), I wish to welcome you all to this lecture on class, nation, and social revolution in Indonesia and the Philippines.

This lecture is part of the activities of UP CIDS, which is the research policy unit of the UP System. Founded in 1985 by then–UP President Edgardo Angara, the UP CIDS is currently under the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

Since its inception, the UP CIDS has sought to encompass various perspectives, methodologies, and ideologies in conducting basic and policy-oriented research. Under the strategic trajectory of the University since 2017, UP CIDS aims to contribute to national development and knowledge creation through enhancing research, publication, and creative work. Its channels to implement this vision include workshops, forums, and lectures, like this afternoon's. They also include publications, such as policy briefs, discussion papers, monographs, conference proceedings, and the *Philippine Journal of Public Policy: Interdisciplinary Development Perspectives*. These are all available on the UP CIDS website and in print.

To attain our UP CIDS objectives, the Center presently has 12 programs which constitute the following clusters:

- Education and Capacity Building Cluster, which consists of:
  - Education Research Program
  - Program on Higher Education Research and Policy Reform
  - Assessment Curriculum Technology and Research Program
  - Program on Data Science for Public Policy
- Development Cluster, which consists of:
  - Program on Escaping the Middle-Income Trap: Chains for Change
  - Political Economy Program
  - Program on Alternative Development
- Social, Political, and Cultural Studies Cluster, which consists of:
  - Program on Health Systems Development
  - Program on Social and Political Change
  - Islamic Studies Program
  - Decolonial Studies Program

- Strategic Studies Program

Among the UP CIDS Programs, it is the Program on Alternative Development (AltDev), as noted in our year-end report, which aims to look at paradigms, policies, and projects that are largely marginalized and excluded from the mainstream.

■ Executive Director Dr. Teresa Encarnacion-Tadem delivered her welcoming remarks and introduction to the World Experts Lecture Series with Dr. Max Lane. Photo credit: Program on Alternative Development

As they challenge dominant modes, these alternatives do not figure prominently in national and international discourse. Moreover, AltDev aims to bring these voices from the margins into the mainstream, leveling the playing field so [that] they may be regarded on an equal footing with dominant discourses and thus offering an alternative to the existing system.

This afternoon's lecture will be led by our distinguished speaker, Dr. Maxwell Lane. He will discuss the matters of class, nation, and social revolution in Indonesia and the Philippines. This topic highlights an aspect of the UP CIDS AltDev Program's rationale to provide a Global-South perspective on anticapitalist social revolution, which has always been understood from the Western and Japanese perspective.

We are most fortunate to also have Dr. Joel Rocamora as our discussant. As a Filipino expert on Indonesian politics, he will give his insights ~~to~~ on this lecture, which seeks to explore further the relationship of class and nation as agencies for transformational change.

I have no doubt that this lecture will generate an interesting and relevant dialogue during the open forum, which will be a response to Dr. Lane's question: what forces can be an agency for completing a national revolution?

Introduction of Speaker

■ Anna Maria "Princess" Nemenzo

National Coordinator
Women's Health Philippines

Princess Nemenzo gave an overview of Dr. Max Lane, his background and credentials, and his well-known works. To this day, Dr. Lane continues to pursue his interest in Indonesian studies, despite being dismissed from his diplomatic mission by the Australian government. She detailed how Dr. Lane and the Nemenzo family met each other at the Australian National University (ANU), after he was detained during martial law in the Philippines.

At that time, Dr. Lane was also involved in the Committee Against Repression in the Pacific and Asia (CARPA). He advocated for the liberation of East Timor, in support of the campaign led by the current president, José Ramos-Horta. Filipino activists, headed by the historian, Renato Constantino, Jr., also supported this campaign. Princess Nemenzo explained that they marched in solidarity with the people of Timor Leste and Southeast Asia, and against repression by the dictatorships.

While both campaigning against the dictatorships of Marcos and Suharto, the Nemenzo family and Dr. Lane engaged with other solidarity struggles across the world. Princess Nemenzo highlighted how her family's friendship with Dr. Lane contributed to his interest in the Philippines. Dr. Lane's integration of both his academic interest and political activism drove him to continue his writing.

Lastly, she talked about Dr. Lane's Indonesian wife, Faisa Mardzoeki, who is a cultural worker, theater director, writer, and artist. Faisa might join him in his world tour for the promotion of his book, *Indonesia Out of Exile: How Pramoedya's Buru Quartet Killed a Dictatorship*, and also of Pramoedya's books.

Lecture

■ **Dr. Maxwell Lane**
Visiting Senior Fellow
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies–Singapore

Class, Nation, and Fundamental Social Transformation/ Revolution

Dr. Maxwell "Max" Lane prefaced his lecture by stating that the ideas he will present are not finished yet; they are a work in progress. He would focus his lecture on Indonesia while also discussing points relevant to the Philippine situation.

The Militancy of the Anti-dictatorship Struggle in Indonesia in the 1990s

Dr. Lane asserted that the energy of the 1990s movement against the Suharto dictatorship was inspiring. He was amazed by the effectiveness of the intervention of political vanguard groups at the time. Progressive activist movements played a significant role both in the fall of Marcos and of Suharto. In the Philippines, thousands of people remained organized even after the fall of the US–Marcos dictatorship in 1986. In Indonesia, the People's Democratic Party (*Partai Rakyat Demokratik* PRD) was an activist vanguard group with a clear perspective of promoting, leading, and developing a movement against the dictatorship that only formed six years before the fall of Suharto in 1998. In contrast to the Philippines, the number of activists in Indonesia was smaller, especially for a country with 250 million people.

Despite its size, the energy of the movement was tremendous. Data sources reveal how militant the spontaneous uprisings were in 1996 and 1997. Despite the banning of public campaigning on the streets, the People's Democratic Party distributed leaflets across the country. As a result, hundreds of thousands of people marched on the streets. They burned police stations, defied authorities, and garnered a momentum that lasted until May 1998.

Among these people were powerful actors and writers who electrified the atmosphere of Indonesian activism. Bawana Rendra was active in the 1970s, Pramoedya Ananta Toer in the 1980s, and Wiji Thukul in the 1990s. One of the

lines in Thukul's poems became the slogan not only of the activists, but also of the youth: "There is only one word: Resist."

Factors in the Slow Growth of a Progressive Movement in Indonesia

Dr. Lane presented the hypothetical reasons that might have caused the delay in the development of an enduring progressive movement in Indonesia. Among these reasons were the following:

- The small size of the vanguard group, PRD, due to the rapid development of the situation;
  - Compared to the social movements in the Philippines, the mobilized group in Indonesia was tiny.
- The limited political and life experience of the vanguard;
  - Most of the activists were young and politically inexperienced. Despite the six-year intensity of the movement, it was not enough to consolidate agendas.
- The small size of the modern proletariat with stable employment;
  - In Indonesia, 90 percent of workplaces employ less than twenty people, and half of those only employ less than ten people. The very small working class in medium and large workplaces were organized, but the struggle for a wage increase was not prioritized by the anti-dictatorship movement.
- The weakness and shallowness of the left wing of the elite;
  - The Philippines had Ninoy and Cory Aquino and Jose Diokno in the liberal wing of the bourgeoisie, and they played significant roles in the social movement. In Indonesia, alliances between the political elites and the People's Democratic Party (PRD) were not established during the Suharto dictatorship.

- The victory against the Suharto dictatorship
  - After ousting Suharto, the urgency of the struggle disappeared. Indonesia actively tried to establish a democratic multiparty system. However, the country prohibited the revival of the Communist Party of Indonesia (Partai Komunis Indonesia, or PKI) .

The More Fundamental Problems: The Legacies of the 1965 Defeat of the National Revolution

Dr. Lane also underscored the more fundamental problems that are rooted in the defeat of the National Revolution in 1965. He discussed the legacies of the downfall:

1. The elimination of transformative agency

All class-based mass organizations were destroyed, including communist groups, the left wing of the national party, and other small leftist parties. All of them were subjected to murder, arrest, and terror.

2. The elimination of transformative ideology

The left-wing aspects of the ideas of Sukarno and the Communist Party were censored. Sukarno's writings and all the literary works of left-wing writers were prohibited from circulation. These artists and their works were excluded from the school curriculum for half a century.

Dr. Lane said the elimination of transformative agency and ideology was institutionalized through legal measures during the Suharto administration.

Deeper Lessons from the Counterrevolution Against the Nation

Dr. Lane used the concept of "counterrevolution" to describe what happened from 1965 to 1967. However, he clarified that the term could lead to confusion; it was a counterrevolution neither against a socialist revolution nor a socialist government. Sukarno's government was still centrist with some left-wing

elements. No member of the Communist Party became a part of the Indonesian cabinet or the major institutions of the national government.

Dr. Lane clarified that it was instead a counterrevolution against the nation itself. He emphasized two separate but related processes of Indonesia's nation-creation. This argument is based on the national revolutionary process that began in the early twentieth century and continued through Indonesia's independence in 1945.

The first part was the very creation of the "nation" during the early moments of the revolution. This became the subject of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet*. The second part was the expulsion of the colonial power so that the newly created community, "the Nation," could have its own state and independence. Dr. Lane considered the process of nation-creation incomplete up to 1965.

Compared to the Philippines, Indonesia's nation-creation process was much shorter, according to Dr. Lane. The Philippines was able to establish a stable class sytem, state institutions, and universities earlier than Indonesia. The latter was able to do this only after its independence. He argued that Pramoedya Ananta Toer and Jose Rizal should not be compared, because their writings depicted different historical periods. Rizal wrote against colonialism during the Spanish colonial era, while Pramoedya wrote in retrospect, long after the downfall of Dutch colonialism. Dr. Lane argued that the Philippines had a much longer "national" history than Indonesia.

Dr. Lane concurred with what Sukarno had reiterated in the 1950s and 1960s: that Indonesia's nation-building, and its formation and consolidation of a national character, was not yet finished during that time.

The Unfinished Nation-Creation of the National Revolution

Dr. Lane presented two key ideas, supporting his argument that Indonesia's nation-creation is yet to be complete:

1. There was no such thing as Indonesia.

Indonesia did not begin to emerge as a national community until the 1920s. Neither the idea nor the word existed; their material reality was still in an early

stage of development. In his novels, Pramoedya had to write about characters who had no inkling that there would ever be an Indonesia.

When the Javanese prince, Diponegoro, rebelled against the Dutch colonial rule in the nineteenth century, Indonesia did not exist yet. When the feminist and Enlightenment thinker Raden Adjeng Kartini—"*the woman enlightenment intellectual of the turn of the century*"— started to use the term bangsaku or "my people," but the term was only related or in use in Java and was very vague. Tirto Adhi Suryo, the journalist on whom Pramoedya's main character was based, had also not conceptualized "Indonesia" yet. *Footsteps*, the third book in the quartet, was inspired by real historical events. He started to think, "What if we were to have a country of our own? Where would it be? What geographical region?" These questions made him contemplate traveling to Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, Malaya, and even as far as Sri Lanka. However, the Dutch arrested him before he was able to do this.

Many people argue that the Indonesian Communist Party was the first political party to use the word Indonesia. Sukarno was the preeminent propagandist for Indonesia. In 1928, the youth vow, *Sumpah Permuda*, was used by many organizations around the country: "One language, one nation, one people."

Indonesia did not exist then, yet there was already a process of its coming into being. Understanding the reality of this process is necessary in tracing how Indonesian history developed.

2. How do we understand what a nation is?

Joseph Stalin, the former dictator of the Soviet Union, defined the word nation, in *Marxism and the National Question*:

> A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture. (1954, 16)

Vladimir Lenin publicly reaffirmed this definition. However, Stalin's disrepute upon seizing power overshadowed his early writings, which he wrote when he was still a part of the Bolshevik Movement, the Russian far-left faction.

After the Russian Revolution in 1917, the formulation of the nation was revised in the Soviet Union. Stalin's definition was later elaborated by the Communist International into the idea that a nation has a common language sufficiently developed to be the basis for a national literature. However, a common language was arguably seen as useful for trade or administration, and not sufficient enough to produce a "national literature." Dr. Lane argued that the memory of one's experience of the nation is reflected through its national literature.

Dr. Lane presented six elements that constitute a nation which, according to him, are also present in Pramoedya's *Buru Quartet*.

Six Elements of a Nation	**Elements in the *Buru Quartet***
Is historically constituted—that is, it did not exist before but is produced through social processes	The nation is depicted in Pramoedya's works from being "not there" to "there."
Has a stable community	There was no stable community yet. It was still in formation at the turn of the twentieth century—the same period when Pramoedya's *This Earth of Mankind* is set.
Has a common territory	The Dutch's wars for expansion subjugated recalcitrant territories.
Has a common economic life	The economy in the community mimics that of a national economy.
Has a common language as a basis for a national literature	Malay is used in fiction and polemics.
Has a common psychological outlook, unique spirituality, i.e., a common culture (often characterized by nation-specific contradictions within the nation's cultural life)	Mass organizations and literature served as the bases of a new culture.

Objective Process and then Agency

According to Dr. Lane, there are two stages in the development of a nation. These stages are evident in the case of Indonesia:

1. Through organic social processes

Economic changes take place and bring with them new social processes that make a common language necessary for the rise of literature. While still in the embryonic stage, these social processes must be seen as revolutionary. The common language becomes the language of literature and not just of the administration, the marketplace, or the economy. These processes destroy preexisting ones and create something new; thus, they can be characterized as "revolutionary processes."

2. Through conscious leadership

The social changes produced by shifts in economy require leadership. Conscious leadership is needed to complete the revolutionary process.

A Conscious National-Revolution Strategy

Dr. Lane explained the two stages of the national-revolution strategy. All the ideological streams from the right and left wings, and all the literature, started to develop during the first stage of organic social processes. All the political parties were propagandizing, and the novel emerges as a discourse that potentializes social transformation. Dr. Lane emphasized that the key element common to all the ideas propounded by parties and contained in the novels and other writings are the "polemics of the future," which is based on the ideologies that explained the different alternatives advocated for. Groups, especially intellectuals, systematically developed these alternatives which also help understand the situation during that time. Dr. Lane shared that during the 1950s, Indonesians would respond with their political affiliation when asked where they're from: "I'm from the Communist Party"; "I'm from the Muslim Party." Hence, the trajectories of their future—"What kind of Indonesia do you envision?"—is related to their ideological orientation.

After independence, the second stage of the national-revolution strategy started. The revised educational system reduced illiteracy and helped spread the use of the national language. However, language also developed through debates and polemics over Indonesia's future in mass political organizations. Such debates, whether they were for socialism, communism, or an Islamic state, needed strong arguments in order to convince people across the archipelago. In the 1950s, political parties established cultural organizations that accelerated the production of writing in all kinds of genres. Indeed, with the development of the national language, literature, and the arts also thrived.

■ Dr. Max Lane and Dr. Joel Rocamora share the stage for the second day of the WELS on Class, Nation, and Social Revolution. Photo credit: Program on Alternative Development

The 1965 Counterrevolution Against the Nation

Dr. Lane discussed how all the processes involved in the various stages of nation-creation were eventually destroyed in 1965, when Sukarno was overthrown and the Indonesian left was terrorized and slaughtered. Mass politics was eliminated. The regional processes that tried to consolidate the nation disappeared; literatures were censored and banned from schools. Students were not

encouraged to read a novel or debate in class. Rote learning of falsified history became normalized, ending only very recently. The nation's territory was stable except for West Papua. With the disappearance of polemics about the future, discussions on the relevance of a "nation" ceased. The absence of a national perspective weakened the internationalism of mass organizations. However, Dr. Lane added that what happened in one part of the country impacted the whole Indonesian economy.

Old Debates from the 1920s

The topics in the lecture reminded Dr. Lane of a debate between the prime anticolonial leader, Sukarno, and the more conservative Mohammad Hatta. In terms of political organization, Indonesia is still in the Hatta period. However, the nature of the working masses, *serabotan* or messy, makes the Hatta perspective a dead-end. Therefore, the effervescence of the so-called "unfinished ferment" of nation-formation surfaces in Sukarno's adage: "*Banyak bicara, dan banyak bekerja*," or "Speak a lot, and also work a lot."

The Parallel Origins of an Emerging New Direction for the National Revolution

According to Dr. Lane, Hatta argued that nation-creation necessitated projects, activities, and benefits. Sukarno concurred that that these are the important requirements of organizing a union. However, in the case of society in the Dutch East Indies, the millions of people were unlikely to be organized. As such, the only way to advocate for anticolonialism was to emphasize their right to speak. Dr. Lane believed it is happening at present: left-wing groups, nongovernment organizations (NGOs), and civil society groups conduct activities to resolve problems, without discussing polemics or propaganda. He also argued that activists try to strengthen the dissemination of ideas through different media, such as newspapers, podcasts, radio programs, and television channels. He said that publishers across Indonesia are producing more radical books. They are published alongside progressive newspapers that are already in circulation. "All is connected to the struggle for a future of deep social transformation," Dr. Lane said. He concluded that he expects to see the next few years as a period of expansion of ideas, which can supplement the limited level of organizing in Indonesia.

Introduction of Reactor

■ **Angeli Lacson**
Senior Editorial Associate
UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies

Dr. Joel Rocamora earned his PhD in Politics at Cornell University. Under [the mentorship] of Benedict Anderson, he wrote a dissertation on the Partai Nasional Indonesia, for which he did extensive fieldwork in Indonesia and learned the Bahasa language. The dissertation was published in 1975, [titled] *Nationalism in Search of Ideology: The Indonesian Nationalist Party 1946–1965*. He joined the faculty of the UP Asian Center as its Indonesian specialist, until he was forced into exile during the Marcos regime. He conducted international solidarity work in the United States and the Netherlands during the martial law years. Upon returning to the Philippines in 1992, he became the Executive Director of the Institute for Popular Democracy.

From 2009 to 2016, he was a cabinet member of President Benigno Aquino III, serving as the Secretary and Lead Convenor of the National Anti-Poverty Commission. He was awarded the 1995 Philippine Book Award for *Breaking Through: The Struggle within the Communist Party of the Philippines*, published by Anvil Publishing in 1994. Dr. Rocamora's latest work, *Impossible is Not So Easy: A Life in Politics*, was published by the Ateneo de Manila University Press in 2020. The book is a selection of his political writings on working for difficult political causes. A reviewer noted that the book raised important questions such as "Can a reformist be considered a leftist or a revolutionary?" and "Can good people thrive in bad governance?" He is a native of the island province of Siquijor, of which he is unabashedly proud, notwithstanding or perhaps because of its scary reputation as a haven of *aswangs*, witchcraft, folklore, or mythical beings emerging from giant *balete* trees.

Reaction

■ **Dr. Joel Rocamora**
Former Executive Director
Institute for Popular Democracy

Dr. Rocamora began his reaction by saying that his last visit to Indonesia took place twenty years ago. This despite writing a book about the country and

specializing in Indonesian studies. He mentioned that he was struck by how Dr. Lane focused on discussing the nation as if the nation were an actor. He said that many politicians talk as though they act in the name of the nation. Meanwhile, the most progressive Indonesians, the members of the PKI, and the left wing of the Indonesian Nationalist Party (*Partai Nasional Indonesia*, or PNI), believed that they were acting based on their class.

■ Dr. Joel Rocamora shared his thoughts and reaction coming from decade's of engaging and research on the Philippines and Indonesian nationalist and socialist movements. Photo credit: Program on Alternative Development

Dr. Rocamora shared parts of his book, which he hoped could contribute to the discussion. According to him, the history of the Nationalist Party of Indonesia is a history of struggle between the left and the right. The bureaucracy represented the right—the ones who worked or spoke as if they were acting for the nation. Interestingly, he mentioned that the university student organization of the party, *Gerakan Mahasiswa Nasional Indonesia* (Indonesian National Student Movement), was left-wing. Dr. Rocamora said it raised the question of "why?" because these students were mostly petty-bourgeois.

He suggested that it may be useful to return to Suharto and the rise of the nationalist movement. At Bandung University (*Institut Teknologi Bandung*), where

students came from different parts of Indonesia, the only language in which they could speak to each other was Dutch. The other language was Malay—the language of the free, connecting different parts of Indonesia. He argued that the choice of Malay as the basis of the national language was a brilliant move because it not only unified a large segment of Indonesian society but also excluded the Javanese language. Otherwise, Java as an area would have dominated the rest of the country.

According to Dr. Rocamora, the labor and the peasant movement was the anchor of the left wing of the PNI. He added that they had become the dominant part of the leadership until before 1965. In 1964, the right returned to power, so the PNI became conservative. In the last chapter of his book Breaking Through, Dr. Rocamora tried to define what "the other side"[8] was. Thirty years since he wrote it, there is still no clear definition of the term. He said that some may question why the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), a proletarian party, did not make socialism its goal. He speculated it may be because the proletarian party was led by the petty-bourgeois who were "proletarianized." "I think the issue of class, nation, and ideology, has been enriched by Max's discussion of the role of the nation in Indonesian history," Dr. Rocamora remarked.

Lecturer's Response to Reaction

Dr. Lane:

In response to Dr. Rocamora's reaction, Dr. Lane clarified that before 1965, the elites who belonged to the right wing spoke in the interest of the nation. Meanwhile, the left wing spoke in the interest of their class. He emphasized two points. First, from 1950 onwards, and regardless of their ideological backgrounds—socialism, communism, Islamism, or social democracy—Indonesians strived for a common goal: gaining independence and consequently progress. At the time, even the left wing thrived in the newly independent Indonesian nation. Second, the fact that the world is made up of nations has always been relevant, and even more relevant today.

8 "The other side" refers to those who left the CPP as a result of the Reaffirm-Reject debate of the 1990s and the ultimately unsuccessful effort to form another Marxist Leninist party. It borrows from the song of The Doors, "Break on through to the other side," according to Dr. Rocamora.

Dr. Lane said that one challenge the Indonesian nation grapples with is the intervention of and pressures from imperialist countries. Standing up to these imperialist countries requires a strong nation or community. Since imperialist intervention and economic encirclement led to the suffering of the masses, strengthening the nation will benefit the working and peasant classes.

Dr. Lane believed a part of the process that happened after 1965 was a "counterrevolution" against the nation. The elite who won after the civil war in 1965 surrendered their economic and cultural interests. For half a century, children had not been introduced to their own history. This is much worse than in the Philippines, where high school students still read literature. Indonesia was left with an antinational elite that weakened the capacity of the people to be able to stand up for themselves.

Dr. Lane asked whether progressive movements in the Philippines identify with those of other countries in the Global South. He argued that the Indonesian Left does not; their lack of understanding and consciousness of living in a nation hinders them from identifying with other countries. It is in the interest of the subjugated, not of the elite, to have a strong community. Dr. Lane asserted that the task of completing nation-creation is the responsibility of the exploited class.

Open Forum[9]

■ Dr. Eduardo C. Tadem

Convenor
Program on Alternative Development, UP CIDS

On the question of whether the Philippines identifies with social movements in the Global South, I would say yes, especially among Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). It's not only Walden Bello, just because he organized a forum focused on the Global South. Among CSOs, there is a wide network that is not only regional or within Southeast Asia, but also global. I won't go into details about various

9 This section represents a near-verbatim account of the discussion. Brackets and minor edits were done for clarity and readability.

issues—women's issues, climate, debt, human rights, worker's rights, among others—but the Philippines identifies with the rest of the Global South.

There's one thing about Indonesia that really bothers me. I've also done work in Indonesia. My master's thesis was on rural development in Indonesia, which I compared to that of the Philippines. But two questions regarding Indonesia intrigue me. In the 1960s, the PKI, the *Partai Komunis Indonesia*, was the biggest communist party in the world outside the Soviet Bloc and China. They had three million members, and had an even bigger mass base among workers, students, and peasants. The peasantry was very militant and had been undertaking unilateral occupation of lands in order to implement laws on agrarian reform, which the government wasn't doing. Why did the PKI not have the political will to implement these laws and had to rely on the peasant mass base? This was well documented by the Australian academic, Rex Mortimer, in his books.

■ Dr. Eduardo Tadem engaged both speakers in an initial round of discussion. Photo credit: Program on Alternative Development.

Why is it that such a huge, seemingly powerful organization that also had links and alliance with Sukarno, the president of the republic, was so easily and quickly decimated? Why didn't they have the ability to fight back and resist an almost genocidal policy against them? PKI cadres, mass members, and even their

families were decimated during the massacre of 1965. In only one month, the whole movement disappeared. How was that possible? That's the first thing.

The second thing is, how is it that Sukarno, who was a virtual authoritarian, an all-powerful president, could have been so easily outmaneuvered and ousted by a general who wasn't even a top general in the Indonesian Army? He was the head of a special task force. So how could this have happened?

Dr. Lane:

I'll try to answer the second question first. I think in terms of Sukarno's position, I've always argued that he was not very powerful at all. He was a minority in his own government. He was extremely popular, but he had a weak command over the structures of the state. If you read the Communist Party newspapers from August to September 1965, you would see in the Chairman's articles that he was frustrated with Sukarno for not appointing any members of the Left to the cabinet. Survivors of the 1965 events would say that, had Sukarno appointed Communist Party members to the cabinet, there would have been a coup the next day. So, he had no actual leverage or control over the repressive instrument of the state—the Army or the police. He could influence ideological and public discourse because he was extremely popular, and he spoke on the radio. But he was not in a powerful position. So, it was not so difficult to understand how he was outmaneuvered.

There's another aspect to this. In the last few years, more evidence is coming out that there was an intricate intelligence maneuver behind what happened in September 1965.

Your first question is very good. I have some opinions on it, and an answer to that is really something that one searches for among the various analyses by those who survived. Even Pramoedya was unable to explain how that happened. You can't ask this question to the top leaders of the Communist Party because they were all killed. I articulated my opinion on this in my book, *Catastrophe in Indonesia*, published by Seagull Press in India and by the University of Chicago Press. The Communist Party accepted that from 1961 to 1963, there would be no elections. They initially protested when elections were postponed in 1959, but eventually, they became dependent on Sukarno. They campaigned for the establishment of an institution that could "retool" the state from above—a

revolutionary instrument which could enable the President to replace right-wing and conservative state officials with left-wing personnel.

There would be no electoral process, and insurrection was out of the question. They had no ammunition, whereas their enemy, the military, was completely armed. When Sukarno was decapitated, he was unable to defend himself. Because of the support and protection of the president, the PKI assumed that they were on the path to victory. That's one of the strange things; the Suharto regime propagandized that before 1965, the Communist Party was overthrown from power, which is not true. The Communist Party was not in power.

But people who lived in that period would say that the atmosphere felt as if the Communist Party were in power. I don't know if Joel has the same impression. I think it's something that the Indonesian Left needs to restudy. A deep analysis is needed to answer this question. The Party experienced a total defeat. It wasn't like in other countries where the Left reemerges after a period of repression and massacre. Twenty years after the fall of Suharto, the Indonesian Left still hasn't reemerged in a significant way, except with very new organizations unconnected with the past.

Dr. Rocamora:

Actually, I want to relate my response to your idea of the nation, because the "nation" was made up of certain elements. One term was *nasakom—nasionalisma, agama, komunisma*.[10] The reason why Sukarno fell so easily is [that] his hold [on] power was based on concept. Once the concept was destroyed by eliminating a crucial element, the communists, his role became untenable. I think the question of why the PKI fell so easily is also conceptual. They had not considered the possibility that the balance between Sukarno and the army, the communists, and the left groups would break. It would have been difficult for them to think of a different strategy; their centers of power—central Java, in north Sumatra, in Bali—were heavily populated and would not support armed struggle. They tried in east Java, but it was so limited that the movement was easily destroyed. They strategized a wrong concept.

10 Nasakom is an abbreviation that means "nationalism, religion, and communism."

Dr. Teresa Tadem:

I think a reason why the Left in the Philippines also grew under the Marcos dictatorship was that there was repression. But there was so much underdevelopment in the country. It was unlike Indonesia in the 1980s, which was a new Asian tiger together with Malaysia and Thailand. So, there was a higher level of development in those countries, while the Philippines was a basket case. I don't know to what extent that level of development impacted the Indonesian social movement. But I'm also curious; what was the impact of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, which they said was going to break Indonesia into several nations? Wasn't there an opportunity for social movements to build on that? Lastly, when Suharto fell, Indonesia embarked on decentralization, devolving power on the local level. I've read that this "decentralization" gave way to other religions and ethnic languages. I don't know how that affected social movements and the nation.

Dr. Lane:

Certainly, from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, the Indonesian government had a massive increase in oil revenue. But most of that money evaporated. There was no surge in industrialization or manufacturing even during the 1980s. But there is one very important but not well-studied consequence of this increased revenue during the Suharto administration. I think in parts of the Philippines, where you have rice agriculture, the Green Revolution required farmers to have different kinds of seeds, fertilizers, and insecticides. You had the so-called Green Revolution, which in many parts of the world led to the concentration of land ownership. Farmers went into debt, and the land ended up in the hands of the land-owning class and other capitalists.

What happened in Indonesia? It needs to be studied as a part of economic history. The sudden surge of wealth and revenue during the Suharto government enabled his administration to clear farmers' debts and to limit land concentration among elites. From 1970s to 1980s, rural discontent was dampened. Small businesses were also given cheap credit. During the 1920s especially in the urban areas, everything in Indonesia was small scale, in output, payments, everything; there was no capital accumulation. The surge in oil revenue allowed Suharto to buy social peace. In the late 1970s, 80 percent of the population was rural, unlike now, where it is 40 percent. Land concentration had not ended, but it had been

reduced. As a result, millions of rice farmers own their land, but they don't have enough to live on.

You have another looming danger in Indonesia. In ten to twenty years, there won't be any rice farmers. They're all 60 years old and above. You can't find young rice farmers. Who wants to farm a tiny crop of land if you can't make any money? They all go to the cities. In the late 1980s, a part of the administration's revenue was used to seize land from peasants and build a dam, a golf course, or others. That sparked the beginning of land conflicts and eventual radicalization, which developed into the anti-dictatorship movement in the 1990s. This radicalization shifted from rural areas to urban centers, populated by factory workers who were not organized in unions. The urban poor also consisted of the unemployed, semi-employed, informal proletariat, and semi-proletariat. They provided the mobilizing base for the student-led movement that took place until 1998. It is crucial to understand that there is still no real industrialization in Indonesia.

There are factories that assemble cars, motorbikes, and some other goods, but most of the manufacturing consists of fishing lines, plastic coat hangers, tins and bottles, and biscuits. They primarily produce goods in the marketplace for a very low value.

There are exceptions, you have an Indonesian workforce with 160 million workers, and probably five to ten million are in what you might call modern manufacturing, service, or construction sectors. The rest are *serabutan*, an Indonesian term which means you are working or looking for [odd jobs], but there is no stability. That's the majority.

Princess Nemenzo:

What was interesting to me was that the 1965 coup was really a counterrevolution, and that the PKI was not in power. This is contrary to the popular understanding that the communists were very popular. While the Sukarno administration did not appoint any Communist Party members to the cabinet, they allowed the Party to operate and mobilize. That gave the impression that they were a part of the government.

But I was also intrigued by what Angeli mentioned about the PKI not having an armed group. In the Philippines, the armed group seems to be part of the Left, serving as the integral unit of the Communist Party. This continued even

after the crushing of the politburo[11] of the old party here in the Philippines. My question is, was there never an armed group in the PKI? What happened during the Second World War with the invasion of Japan? Did the left-wing develop a guerilla movement against the Japanese that could turn into an insurgent group?

Dr. Lane:

In 1965, the Communist Party was expanding rapidly, even in Islamic areas. They also grew in a number of regions where the PKI had not initially been strong. Sukarno was buying time for two things: for the Party to get stronger, and for them to win over opponents, which was a dubious process. Different people have told me that the PKI had 30 percent of military officers secretly on their side. But this support remained a secret when the crisis came. The PKI wasn't able to rally the alleged 30 percent.

I think Sukarno was buying time; he hoped the Party would fuse with the left wing of the Nationalist Party. Then there would be a single progressive party, based on the mobilization of mass organizations. I think he had someone in mind to be the president after him, but that all came undone with what happened on 30 September 1965. Some people argue the chairman and members of the Communist Party were at fault. But more evidence is emerging that the attack may have been an intelligence operation carried out by people working for Suharto. But that's the problem. A midnight conspiracy is always going to be difficult to uncover; no one leaves documents around when you organize a secret operation.

I once had an argument with an exiled comrade from the Communist Party. I argued in an article for an Indonesian magazine that Sukarno drew a sharp line that divided the nation. He rang me up from overseas and said, "Max, you can't say that. Sukarno united the nation." I countered that even under the Dutch, Sukarno did not argue for the unity of the "nation;" he argued for the unity of the revolutionary forces struggling for independence. From the late 1950s to 1960s, there was *Nasakom*—nationalist, religious, and communist. But there was also *Nasakom palsu*, which literally means the false *Nasakoms*. These were the people who supported imperialism and undermined the nationalist movement.

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11 Politburo is an abbreviation of "political bureau." This is the main policymaking body in communist groups.

In his article, "Marxism, Islam, and Nationalism," Sukarno wrote that Marxists, Muslims, and Nationalists could work together. They had sufficient common bases. A Muslim should be able to work with a Marxist; there is "unearned interest" in Islam, which is similar to "surplus value" in Marxism. Nationalists should be able to work with a Muslim, because they draw from the progressive elements of both Islam and nationalism. This is why people say Sukarno was a unifier. But if you were a Marxist who disagreed with a Muslim or Nationalist, you were considered an enemy, and vice-versa.

Since the beginning of his rule, there had always been a dividing line. There were progressive revolutionaries. There were counterrevolutionaries. How could you say he was for unity? He banned the biggest Islamic Party. He banned the social-democratic Indonesian Socialist Party. There was a condition for the unity. During that period, it was unity against imperialism. That's interesting. Dutch colonialism in Asia was completely defeated. After Suharto took power, no Dutch traces were left. There were no remnants of Dutch businesses in Indonesia by the late 1950s. The Indonesian working class and trade unions overtook Dutch companies under the flag of nationalism. Expropriating the Dutch, who held much of the econonmy in their hands in the 1950s, was a very significant move. To nationalize those colonial businesses meant to nationalize 80 to 90 percent of the modern economic sector. The nationalization was initiated by the trade unions, and, in the end, the parliament had to agree. However, during martial law, the army seized control of those companies.

Angeli Lacson:

I also have a question, and it's related to what you said earlier about the national revolution being unfinished. I'm curious about what strategies social movements can use right now. I'm talking in the context, firstly, of the pandemic, which has really forced us to adjust to online media.

In the Philippines, we've seen over the past few years and elections how effectively corporations like Facebook and Cambridge Analytica have effectively weaponized social media, content creation, online news, and advertisement in ways that have twisted democracy and eradicated our sense of historical fact. From the 1990s to the early 2000s, digital democracy was not yet imagined. What do you think activists, social movements, and civil organizations can learn from Indonesian history and revolutions about how to mobilize and strategize in the digital space? Some people have argued that it's not as effective as on-the-ground

action. However, digital media has now been widely co-opted by corporate and elite forces. I'm curious about your thoughts.

Dr. Lane:

Since 1965, the television and other pre-digital media have all been owned by big capitalists. Social media is owned by international corporations, such as Facebook. Over the last eight or nine years, the government has been employing armies of buzzers that flood Twitter and TikTok with pro-government propaganda. Before the opposition joined the government, they did the same.

In Indonesia, and surely in the Philippines, I can't imagine why social media wouldn't be [relevant to social movements]. Every progressive group uses it as much as they can. If you look at the Facebook pages of key people on the Left, they have tens of thousands of followers. I myself have thirty thousand followers in Indonesia alone. Others have more than one account. Even people who are critical of social media use it a lot. WhatsApp now plays an interesting role among young people who are getting interested in social and political issues. They also discuss and popularize books, a practice empowered by social media.

In the end, it returns to the complicated and unavoidable question of growth of social movement organisations. The ruling class have huge resources; they can deploy five hundred buzzers. Although the small groups are now merging, and non-government organizations (NGOs) might have more resources, they still can't compete with that many buzzers. I think there is a capacity [to mobilize on social media], so that systematic domination by regime buzzers will be reduced. It just has not happened yet. A few thousand people will not be strong enough to counter the ruling class, who can spend money and employ more people to post propaganda. So, the Left and other progressive movements must use all available means to grow and widen activist support. This is a similar case to Australia; all progressive groups have Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram, among others. But unless they have ten thousand members, they can't spam one hundred messages a day, like what buzzers do for the ruling class.

Dr. Rocamora:

Both Duterte and Marcos won because of misinformation through social media. An employee of Cambridge Analytica said that. I'm not sure if it's Marcos or Duterte who contacted them. It's a serious problem because the technique is not

about stating "Marcos is great," or "there's a lot of money," and so on. For all groups, the technique is to divide the audience—the social media audience—and design messages specific to each of them. And of course, they have the means to do these things. I don't know what the response to this propaganda will be. I think Leni Robredo understands the problem, based on her speeches. But I don't think she's come up with a solution yet. I mean, we know that Marcos got 56 percent of the vote [in the 2022 elections]. It's impossible for Duterte at the end of his term to have a popularity rating close to 90 percent. But that is the single most important question for today.

Ananeza Aban:

I'm also interested [in] Indonesia, so my question is [about] the peasant movement. After Suharto's dictatorship, there were massive land occupation movements, especially in Java. I see discussions and readings on how big it was in West Java, probably in the whole island. So, I wonder how you see the contribution of the peasant movement in the contemporary setting. In what you call the continued social revolution in Indonesia, is there a national peasant movement? How do you define this national peasant movement in the context of Indonesian nation-building?

Dr. Lane:

There certainly have been cases of massive land occupations. In fact, these have taken different forms from decade to decade. In the 1970s, there were more spontaneous mass occupations; landless farmers traveled region to region, and they would sit there, wait for the sun to rise, raid the property, and then demand their share of the harvest from the land owners. Huge land occupations also happened in the 1980s. The most infamous land occupations happened in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, when hundreds to thousands of farmers would seize lands from which they were displaced. One of these was in West Java, where farmers occupied lands that were turned into golf courses.

You get incidents like these in different parts of the country. But they never generate or accumulate any momentum, even when a group links up with another. There is no evidence of any momentum outside a particular region. This lack of force may be because of the following reasons: there are campaigns against the occupation and other agrarian cases; the farmers have become

inactive because they [gained] their desired improvements; or the campaign resources are depleted, and then farmers are demoralized and stop.

There were attempts to form national peasant groups; there have been several of them since 1998. But none have developed yet. I think it's also the same case for groups that deal with other traditional land issues. There is a national organization, but their campaigns are unable to expand their ideology beyond their sector or region. Urban factory workers have greater scope for national organization. They get union federations or confederations, with branches in twenty to thirty cities and can carry out coordinated action, except when their leaders stop them. However, in the farming and peasant sector, it's very difficult to accumulate momentum.

Over the last twenty years, I've had discussions with groups involved in land and agrarian cases. They have been doing the same kind of organizing but in different locations. Younger people are also mobilizing, but it doesn't go anywhere politically. There is great idealism involved in working in solidarity with farmers, but this idealism has not developed yet beyond local unions.

Without nationalizing these initiatives, they will remain in this [underdeveloped] level. The most difficult to resolve are issues on rice farming, the aging population, and low profit from rice. I think the only solution is a very radical one: to nationalize all rice lands and train new farmers. I don't know if this is similar to the Philippines, but another issue that the Indonesian agrarian sector faces is [solidifying their forces]. Issues differ from one island, province, or district to another, which makes it hard to gain momentum for the movement. Farmers represent 40 percent of the population; they produce everything that everybody eats. They're obviously a crucial component to any kind of national movement that might emerge.

[Question from the audience]:

I was hoping to hear more about contestations on these three matters: class, nation, and the social revolution in Indonesia. I think you've already covered *Nasakom*, but what exactly happened? How did the Suharto regime reshape the thinking on those three matters? My other question is, which "vanguard" were you referring to, which you argued had been weak from 1991 to 1998? What is the status of that vanguard now?

Dr. Lane:

The vanguard I was referring to was the group that emerged as the People's Democratic Party.[12] It launched formally as an organization in 1994, but had also manifested itself in sectoral organizations as early as 1991. These organizations consisted of workers, students, and farmers. From 1993 to 1997, the PRD played a central role in popularizing strategies, demands, and slogans. These campaigns were punctuated by [substantial] mobilizations. Workers in Central Java, West Java, and Surabaya were involved initially in peasant mobilizations, but they eventually shifted to workers and the urban poor. They spearheaded the campaign for the huge rallies in Jakarta and Surabaya in May 1997.

Other groups also participated, but mobilizations were spearheaded by the People's Democratic Party. Fourteen PRD members were detained in 1996, and then put on trial. Another fourteen, including the poet, Wiji Thukul, disappeared and assumed to be murdered from 1997 to 1998. To this day, the mothers of the disappeared, who were mostly PRD members, hold vigils every Thursday outside the presidential palace. They demand information about what happened to their sons. They are the "vanguard" I was referring to.

Since then, their [efforts] became more focused on ousting the dictator. This goal had been consolidated from 1996 to 1998. When the dictatorship fell, there was also a fragmentation within the PRD. Some people allied with the Right. Others joined the NGOs, while a few of them entered the academe. If you go to any of the active militant trade unions, you will find that some of their leaders were initially in the PRD. So their members went in different directions. The socialist group can still be found at the center of leadership in smaller organizations.

The Suharto regime did its best to suppress any discussion of these issues. These conversations had to emerge gradually over a thirty-year period, accelerating in the 1980s when political prisoners were released. They discussed the history of the Indonesian class struggle with young people. In the 1990s, the PRD also had a very conscious policy not only of recruiting students, but also of organizing workers and peasants, who were seen as the key class forces for revolutionary change.

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12 In Indonesian, *Partai Rakyat Demokratik* (PRD).

As I mentioned, the PRD shifted their focus from enacting social revolution to ousting Suharto. Since the regime suppressed progressive discussions, they mostly happened underground or in the margins. However, in the last twenty years, books on these issues have been [cropping up] in Indonesia, including the works of Lenin, Stalin, Marx, Engels, Che Guevara, and Joma Sison.

Many [resources] are available now, from the academe and beyond. You can even buy books from the Internet, and they will be delivered to your house within a day or two. Socialist and liberal feminist books are also bestsellers, according to independent publishers.

But it will be a couple of years before we see the outcome of this growing interest in such ideas. Obviously, this fermentation is happening. But I don't know what exactly will come out of it. Something surely will. You can suppress an organized mass movement, but you can't stop the fermentation of ideas that are drawn from social, economic, and cultural changes.

Special Message

Dr. Francisco "Dodong" Nemenzo

Former President
University of the Philippines

Unlike Max and Joel, I do not claim to be an academic specialist on Indonesian studies, but I was in Indonesia at a crucial time, after the August Independence Day in 1965. I was there as the representative of the Philippine Communist Party, so I was able to meet key Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) leaders, and I met several Indonesian generals and admirals. They were so confident, and I had this strong impression that they were going to stage a military coup soon. They even asked me to stay longer in the national conference that was supposed to be the victory celebration. They were so confident because they thought that the military had an oversight. But actually, the military men they won over were generals who held official positions—they were no match ~~to~~ for Suharto.

Although Suharto was not a high-ranking leader at that time, he was the commander of the Sulawesi Brigade, a combat-effective unit. The PKI swayed generals who, it turned out, did not have a command of the troops. They were

no match ~~to~~ for Suharto because he was the leader of the elite corps that was fighting in West Papua; he had a recent combat experience. They were armed. They were brought to Jakarta for the Independence Day celebration.

In the military, it's not important who the majority or the minority are. The important thing is the combat-effective branch of the military. I think that was the mistake of the Indonesian communist leaders. I had a strong impression that they were going to start [the coup] very soon. But they were beaten by the combat-effective brigade of Suharto, who was at that time only a colonel. Most of the troops were not led by generals. Sometimes, the general is merely the symbol, but combative-effective units were led by colonels in Egypt.

When they seized power, everybody thought that General Abdul Haris Nasution was the top general in command. But it was General Suharto, who was in control of the Strategic Army Command. It was not a question of "Who are the majority among the generals?" It's a question of "Who led the combat-effective groups?"

I suspect that is what happened. The PKI members were so confident, but they did not have the combative units. They were no match for Suharto who commanded the elite corps of the Indonesian Army.

Closing Remarks

■ Ananeza "Angging" Aban

Senior Research Analyst
UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies

To all who are present today and who are a part of organizing this event,[13] we really thank you for being here. This is the second day of the lecture. There's still another one tomorrow.[14]

13 This is an English translation of the original words of the speaker: Sa lahat ng mga kasama dito at saka sa mga naging bahagi ng pag-organize.

14 This is an English translation of the original words of the speaker: Meron pa búkas.

Let me read a few concluding words. There are many takeaways in our discussion today, especially from Max Lane, and from Joel Rocamora, our reactor. But what seems to stand out is the continuous process of the creation of a nation, or the process of coming into being of Indonesia. As the book says, it is "an unfinished ferment." What is relevant in the building of a social revolution in Indonesia may also be relevant in the Philippines. Dr. Max Lane, I hope your insights inspire us to forward the struggle against tyranny, authoritarianism, and neoliberalism, in the face of the return of the Marcoses in Malacañang, together with other political elites.

Thank you, Max. Salamat,[15] terima kasih,[16] for your tireless and long-standing solidarity work not just in Indonesia, but also in the Philippines, which started even during the Martial Law years. We know that this is a commitment for life and for the future. Thank you also for introducing us and the world to the outstanding literary works of Pramoedya Ananta Toer or Pram, especially his very inspiring and moving novels, *The Buru Quartet*. As you described in your recent book, *Indonesia Out of Exile*, the four books are a massive explosion of light in the midst of such darkness. I loved that.

On behalf of the Program on Alternative Development of the University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS), we are forever grateful for your return to Manila, and for your insightful contributions to the making of a social revolution, whether in the Philippines, in Indonesia, or in greater Southeast Asia.

I also would like to thank the UP Office of International Linkages and our co-organizers of this lecture series: the Center for Labor and Grassroots Initiatives of the School of Labor and Industrial Relations or UP SOLAIR, and the Departamento ng Filipino at Panitikan ng Pilipinas of the College of Arts and Letters.

Finally, thank you to everyone here in the venue, in the CIDS [office], and also in the Zoom room, for attending the second day of the UP World Experts Lecture Series. We hope to see you in tomorrow's lecture.

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15 This is a Filipino term which means "thank you."

16 This is an Indonesian term which mean "thank you."

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Day Three

The Indonesian Labor Movement

Class, Nation, and the Forgetting of Development

Saturday, 11 March 2023
1:00 P.M.– 4:00 P.M.
Mini Hall, School of Labor and Industrial Relations New Building

Opening Remarks

- **Dr. Fidel R. Nemenzo**
  Eleventh Chancellor
  University of the Philippines Diliman

Dr. Fidel Nemenzo emphasized the importance of the World Experts Lecture Series (WELS) as a key program in the university's internationalization efforts. The series brings renowned academics and scholars to campus to discuss a range of issues. He then recalled the history of the WELS program more than twenty years before its formal establishment. He mentioned that the philosopher,

Richard Rorty was the first invited speaker. Dr. Maxwell Lane was the first visitor for WELS after the pandemic.

In his introduction of Dr. Lane, Dr. Nemenzo referred to him as an old friend whom he met way back in 1982 while visiting his parents in Australia. Prior to their meeting, Dr. Nemenzo already knew of Dr. Lane when a comrade friend introduced his translation of Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *This Earth of Mankind* to him. He recalled how exciting it was to get hold of books that were banned in other countries during the height of Martial Law, including Pramoedya's novel, whose stories he shared with fellow prisoners. Dr. Nemenzo also recalled getting to know Dr. Lane through meetings of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP). SWP planned solidarity activities against repression in the Pacific and Asia. It also supported the struggle in the Philippines against the dictatorship.

■ Photo caption: Prof. Fidel Nemenzo delivers his welcoming remarks reflecting on his decade long camaraderie with Dr. Max Lane. Photo credit: UP SOLAIR

Later on, Dr. Nemenzo highlighted how Filipino academics and activists alike can learn a lot from the history of the Indonesian social movement, as both countries have experienced long periods of colonial rule and anti-colonial resistance. Indonesia and the Philippines have also experienced dictatorships and processes

of democratization, and both countries continue to face challenges of poverty and inequality. Most importantly, like the Philippines, Indonesia also has struggling labor movements.

Dr. Nemenzo shared his insights into the labor situation in the Philippines in 2023:

> In the Philippines, we have drawn our attention to our labor situation against the backdrop of globalization, the increase [in] fragmentation of production across the country, and, of course, the new world change in environment. [. . .] Just this week, the jeepney strike organized by labor groups demanded a stop to the government's plan to modernize. We look forward to your sharing today on the Indonesian labor movement which is as complex, if not more complex, than our own history of social movements, labor unions, and working-class mobilizations.

Keynote Address

■ Angelo A. Jimenez

Twenty-second President of the University of the Philippines
Recorded Video

Good afternoon, everyone. I would like to express our warmest welcome and gratitude to Dr. Maxwell Lane for gracing us with his time, wisdom, and physical presence as a lecturer for today's World Experts Lecture Series. Dr. Lane's book and introduction to the politics of Indonesian unions, published by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in 2019, offers an informative and insightful overview of Indonesian labor, politics, and social movement, particularly [focusing on] union mobilization from 2012 to 2014.

I would also like to recognize the presence of Chancellor Fidel Nemenzo. To Dr. Melissa Serrano, congratulations on your appointment as the new Dean of the UP School of Labor and Industrial Relations.

We fondly welcome our faculty, students, and guests from other universities and colleges. Emerging, as we are, from the period of mostly virtual interactions imposed upon us by the COVID-19 pandemic, we are happy to afford you now

in-person learning and collaborative activities such as today's lecture on the Indonesian labor movement.

Indonesia, with a population of 270 million people, is the fourth-largest country globally and the largest in maritime Southeast Asia. Both the Philippines and Indonesia have experienced colonialism, although from different colonizers and in various forms. Both countries have been through periods of authoritarian rule and experienced people power movements that overthrew [dictators].

Though the experiences of these movements were very different, both the Philippines and Indonesia faced massive challenges of poverty and multifaceted underdevelopment because of the colonial legacy exacerbated by a period of authoritarian rule, which held back social and political progress. Both countries are [also] only minimally industrialized, if they can be said to be industrialized at all. The situation in both our countries has created a labor force and a working class that have not been able to play the political role that others have in more developed countries, including major roles in democratizing and evolving the welfare state in industrial countries.

Indeed, the different colors of Philippine labor unions and activism will do well to read Dr. Lane's book that I mentioned earlier to study the parallel experiences of our countries in terms of labor politics and progressive social movements. Given the circumstances of both our countries, what roles can there be for labor? Again, the answer to this question in the contemporary Indonesian context may be useful in reflecting on the same issues as they apply to the Philippines.

Today, through this lecture that the UP School of Labor and Industrial Relations and the UP System Office of International linkages have made possible, we have a wonderful opportunity to think about and address these relevant questions and policy problems.

We are delighted to see our faculty and students come together for this chance to co-mingle, collaborate, and be further inspired by new learnings and insights from a world-expert lecturer, Dr. Lane, whom we are fortunate to have with us here. We look forward to Dr. Lane's insights and expect a fruitful discussion with today's participants. *Mabuhay tayong lahat*! [Cheers to all of us!]

Introduction of the Speaker

Assistant Professor Benjamin Velasco

Director, SOLAIR Center for Labor and Grassroots Initiatives

Before introducing the speaker, Prof. Velasco gave a brief background of the WELS program and a context of the two previous lectures[1] held at the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies in the *Ang Bahay ng Alumni* Building. Prof. Velasco then introduced Dr. Maxwell Lane as a friend, an accomplished scholar, and an academic activist who writes about Indonesian politics and developments in extra-parliamentary political formations.

Lecture

Dr. Maxwell Lane

Visiting Senior Fellow
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore

Dr. Maxwell Lane began his lecture by asking, "In what ways organized labor can be an agent for change?" To answer the question, Dr. Lane discussed the history of Indonesian labor movements from the fall of former President Suharto in 1998 up to the present. The primary agency for national politics in Indonesia since 1998 has been electorally oriented political parties. During the immediate post-*Reformasi* period, the trend continued to be the multiplication of patronage-dominated parties, with a clear absence of any programmatic debate. As political agents for change, the electoral parties either stagnate or revert to promising one kind of return to the past or another. Before 1998, the agents of change were mostly formed by students and youth, unorganized labor, or urban poor who were dormant and underorganized.

1 See first two chapters of these proceedings.

The Significance of Labor Unions in the Fall of Suharto in 1998

For most of the period from 1965 to 1998, no unions existed at all. From the early 1970s to the fall of Suharto in 1998, the state only allowed one union to operate, making the experience of Indonesian laborers with unions very limited. This one state-controlled union was able to reach members in many enterprises. While unions were not big enough to become major vehicles for the 1997–98 protests, opposition unions had played an important role in preparing the ground. Social-democratic-minded technocrats advised President Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie to quickly sign several International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions that effectively ended direct state role in unions. It immediately had an effect of legalizing the possibility of workers establishing their own trade unions. Legislation then followed, and the formation of the trade union terrain we see today was set in motion.

Dr. Lane then highlighted some key points to remember about the period from 1965 to 1998 in understanding the situation today:

1. In top-down state-controlled unions, neither leadership nor structures had consolidated loyalty from members.

2. Incumbent leaderships and existing structures totally depended on state support for their positions.

3. Minimal union activity meant that memberships were inexperienced in union activism. However, some had become involved and were politicized in the anti-dictatorship movement, including strikes.

4. Only a small number of union organizers committed to organizing full-time. However, they officially rose to top leadership positions.

New Processes Set in Motion

Factory workers and others politicized by the 1996–98 atmosphere mobilized in large, militant actions involving several thousand workers in the new-generation *Aliansi Buruh Menggugat* (ABM, "Labor Alliance Accuses"). The momentum lasted

around three years until a new, less militant political atmosphere was established following the fall of President Abdurahman Wahid in 2001.

Dr. Lane noted that two major processes were then set in motion. The first involved the operation of the state-supported union, *Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia* (SPSI, "All Indonesian Workers' Unions"). The second involved the formation of grassroots unions.

The end of state intervention in the union movement meant that incumbent leaderships became susceptible to challenges, initially from long-term lower-level union organizers, as well as figures with external backing. Most of them were key leaders in the anti-dictatorship movement in 1998.

Factors Affecting Fragmentation and Regrouping

There are tens of thousands of enterprise unions, scores of federations, and even a large number of confederations throughout Indonesia. Labor law encourages the formation of unions. These laws facilitated new initiatives at the factory and workplace levels. Thousands of new unions are registered at the workplace level. Old-hand organizers established some of those unions while new organizers formed others.

Once the Asian financial crisis' immediate effects settled, factory and commercial expansion began in Indonesia, providing the basis for new unions with a stronger bargaining positiong. Processes began to become clear by 2005 and accelerated around 2008–2009. This means that the current unions in Indonesia are still very new. with enormous potential for fluidity and volatility. Thus, they are still susceptible to fragmentation and regrouping.

Key Union Groupings

Dr. Lane classified the most politically-influential unions in Indonesia at the moment into two major streams, and presented some examples:

1. The stream originating from the old *Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia* (SPSI, "All Indonesian Workers' Unions")

a. *Konfederasi Serikat Perkeja Indonesia* (KPSI, "Confederation of Indonesian Trade Unions")

The driving force of this confederation is the *Federasi Serikat Perkeja Metal Indonesia* (FSPMI, "Federation of Indonesian Metal Workers Unions"), headed by the former *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (Prosperous Justice Party) electoral candidate, Said Iqbal.

b. *Konfederasi Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia* (KSPSI, "Confederation of Trade Unions of All Indonesia")

There is no particular union driving this organization, but it is headed by Andi Gani Nena Wea, the son of a former *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan* (Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle) Minister in Megawati Sukarnoputri's government.

2. The stream originating from the pre-1998 anti-dictatorship movement:

a. *Konfederasi Alliansi Serikat Buruh Indonesia* (KASBI, "Indonesian Trade Union Alliance Congress")

b. *Konfederasi Persatuan Buruh Indonesia* (KPBI, "Confederation of Indonesian Labor Associations")

c. Several other smaller confederations and federations, including the *Federasi Serikat Demokratik Kerakyatan* (F-SEDAR, "Federation of Popular Democratic Unions")

Dr. Lane mentioned that *Konfederasi Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia* (KSBSI, "Confederation of Indonesian Prosperous Trade Unions") and several other smaller unions are positioned between these two streams.

Competition Between Unions

Dr. Lane noted the interesting aspect of competition between unions. Since unions are not funded by the government anymore, they have to recruit members. If they are big enough, they can get funding from international nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and, more significantly, the international trade union federations. Because Indonesian labor law allows workers to freely choose their unions, one workplace can have half of its workers belonging to one

union and then the other half to another. Thus, this new dynamic in unions is a competition for members.

In order to gain members, unions must make improvements at work; otherwise, workers might join other unions. According to Dr. Lane, this scenario could possibly happen more in Indonesia than in the Philippines because the union movement is relatively new in the former and lacks a long-embedded tradition. In Indonesia, workers will not be necessarily reluctant to switch unions because both the union themselves and their membership are relatively new, and loyalties are not necessarily deep. This dynamic exists both between the streams and among individual union federations and enterprise unions.

The Politics of Labor Confidence

The process of labor confidence began in 2010 when all unions from both streams collaborated on a campaign to get the social security and health insurance bills passed. Mass protests were the main method for lobbying the court. It succeeded and boosted the morale of all unions and NGOs involved. It then led to a period of escalating labor protests.

From 2012 to 2013, workers in certain areas began to see wage increases ranging from 40 percent to even 100 percent. As their confidence rose, so did the radicalization of consciousness. The protests were posted on social media, workers were on strike, and riots erupted. Tens of thousands of workers were coming out of the factories bearing militant consciousness.

In 2013, this confidence further developed. Leadership in the middle level of the unions were able to convince workers to go on strike and stop production. In the second half of 2013, there was a phenomenon known as *mogok*: workers came out of their factory on the day of the strike, shouted, and encouraged other workers to join. Because this action worked, more factories and production were stopped. However, backlash from employers happened. The mogok then disappeared. The police started to harass people, but it was a period of confidence and militancy, which caused enormous chaos.

In November 2012, key unions held a public meeting. Attendees include employer organizations, the Indonesian Ministry of Labour/ Ministry of Manpower, the

police, and the local military. Together, they signed a declaration of harmony, promising to stop all militant industrial campaigns.

Go Politik!: Via Mainstream Parties or Labor Parties?

Dr. Lane narrated how the leaders of big union confederations later declared industrial harmony to stop militant mobilizations. However, the competition among unions in recruiting members remained. After the success of 2012, there was an increase in open discussion about the need for unions to "go politik!" This meant getting involved in electoral politics through existing parties. Unions sent candidates to every party, but this effort essentially failed.

There was no discussion within the unions and mainstream media regarding the possibility of establishing a labor party. There had already been experimentation in local elections in the City of Batam, as well as an effective public mobilization campaign to push social insurance legislation through Parliament. Frustration over the ineffective implementation of industrial wins (e.g. wage increases) seemed to be driving the discussion among leaders, as well as at the factory level.

Go Politik! Turns into the Opposite of Itself

The counterpressure from employers after October 2012 seems to have turned the dynamic of the *go politik!* movement. From the idea of labor having its own physical representation, union leaderships practically aligned with incumbent parties and figures. The first sign of this change was the abandonment of the idea of union candidates in the 2014 elections, where the union leadership chose both the candidates and the parties they would try to represent. However, these candidates in the factory-belt electorates did poorly; none qualified for a seat in their own right.

In late 2013 and into 2014, Said Iqbal, president of KPSI and FSMPI, openly declared support for Prabowo Subianto in the May 2014 presidential elections. Meanwhile the KSPSI and KSBSI supported Joko Widodo. Dr. Lane posited that *go politik!* turned into a tactic to compensate for retreating from militant industrial campaigns.

Setting the Scene for New Political Agency

Big unions backed the formation and successful registration to participate in the elections of a workers' party. By January 2016, despite the *go politik!* campaign and

the formal unity of the unions through the *Gerakan Buruh Indonesia* ("Indonesian Labor Movement") coalition (as broadcast), the unions had suffered a major defeat: the change from annual to five-yearly reviews of the minimum wage. Moreover, no progress had been made on the other major demand: the enforcement of laws that forbid contractual day labor except in narrowly restricted areas.

As a result, it is possible to see the earliest signs of discontent with the incumbent leadership manifesting itself in various ways. These are caucuses of dissident factory branches, strikes unblessed by leaderships, as well as new broader alliances of unions and other groups.

Unions have started to collaborate with each other, working towards new cooperation between confederations such as KASBI, KPBI, F-SEDAR, GSBN, and KSN. There are indications of a desire to test ongoing collaboration and expand networks beyond unions.

■ Dr. Max Lane passionately delivering his presentation on the Indonesian labor movements. Photo credit: UP SOLAIR

The Partai Buruh ("Labor Party")

As early as 2010 to 2011, there were talks of a labor party, supported by the KPSI. Several meetings were held. Even after the 2014 elections, the KPSI, with other unions from the pre-1998 dissidents, announced a pre-party formation, the *Rumah Rakyat* ("People's Housing Program"). Between 2014 and 2020, there have been no signs of significant activity by the Rumah Rakyat (which one, Rumah or Ruman).

In 2022, the *Partai Buruh* (PB, "Labor Party") successfully registered as a political party and will participate in the 2024 elections. This news quite surprised Dr. Lane because, to qualify as a political party, it has to prove that it has executive committees up to the district level. Additionally, three-fourths to two-thirds of its members must be active.

Dr. Lane gave his two cents on the trajectory of the PB leadership. First, the PB's top leadership traces its origins back to the breakup of the New Order yellow unions that occurred within five years after the fall of Suharto in 1998. Moreover, PB President Said Iqbal campaigned for former Suharto-era general Prabowo, and is on record as saying that human rights are of little interest to workers.

At some point, PB encouraged some people to leave their unions and join them but the latter denied. During recent protests for workers' rights, there were no placards from PB and only general calls of "Protest Indonesia 2024." Additionally, there might also be splits within PB.

During the last few years prior to the formation of PB, the Indonesian parliament unanimously passed without amendments anti-worker laws that had been proposed by President Widodo. This happened despite the big demonstrations led by students. The only exception was the law against violence against women, which failed. Some of these laws include the law to weaken the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Job Creation Law, and the new Criminal Code.

The Case of F-SEDAR in Indonesia

Dr. Lane pointed out how Indonesian unions focus on character-building by giving F-SEDAR as an example. F-SEDAR conducts classes on political economy, explaining how capital works, the legal process regarding existing worker rights, and how the law can be further changed for workers. If 75 percent of the union's members do not attend, the class is cancelled. Since most factory workers

are only senior-high-school graduates and unable to get office jobs, unions encourage members to continue their studies at universities. F-SEDAR already has two or more qualified lawyers.

Under the hiring policies of most Indonesian factories, workers are employed on a short-term basis. Whenever their contracts end, workers usually approach unions to ask for help in getting their compensation. Unions deny them help unless they are willing to join and struggle for the union and their own rights.

Introduction of the Reactor

■ Assistant Professor Benjamin Velasco

Director, SOLAIR Center for Labor and Grassroots Initiatives

Dr. Verna Viajar is a scholar-activist and Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung in Berlin, Germany. She has worked with Asian and Philippine trade unions and NGOs as a consultant in the last two decades. She was also a lecturer at UP SOLAIR during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her knowledge on comparative industrial relations and her involvement in the Filipino and Asian labor movements have shaped her research, as well as her educational interest in labor and migration studies.

Reaction

■ Dr. Verna Viajar

Postdoctoral Research Fellow
Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung–Germany

Dr. Verna Viajar began her remarks by commenting on the depth of Dr. Lane's discussion. She found the topic interesting because she had not been updated on it. Dr. Viajar then shared her experience and encounter with Dita Sari, a labor lawyer and a prominent personality during the movement against Suharto. "The ebbs and flows of history make me understand the present, and somehow I get a glimpse of a possible future," said Dr. Viajar as she pointed out that her research on the Indonesian labor movement primarily focuses on its history. To supplement Dr. Lane's extensive lecture, she shared her own comparative study of Philippine and Indonesian labor control regimes.

Dr. Viajar highlighted the similarities between Indonesia and the Philippines in how they both experienced authoritarian leaderships and are controlled by capitalist relations. Labor relations—workers at the very least—have to be repressed as part of a development strategy aimed to integrate the country into neoliberal capitalism. In a 2021 book published by Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, *If Not Us, Who? Workers Worldwide Against Authoritarianism Fascism and Dictatorship*, she was asked to contribute a short chapter focusing on Indonesian workers' resistance against Suharto's authoritarian regime. In the book, she characterizes the Indonesian labor movement as one forged from the anti-colonial movement against Dutch colonialism.

In the book, Dr. Viajar also mentions that Suharto's power of labor control is anchored on two dimensions: the Pancasila framework on industrial relations and the security approach to industrial peace. Based on the Pancasila framework, class conflict is a foreign notion because it opposes their culture of harmony. The repression of Indonesian trade unions under Suharto was enforced through a securitized approach to industrial peace. The military and the police intervened in labor disputes by breaking up strikes and arresting trade unionists. She then compared this approach to what is currently happening in the Philippines.

Additionally, Dr.Viajar pointed out that the Indonesian labor movement existed before Suharto. However, since it was forged and influenced by the anti-colonial movement, it leaned towards the left, who fought for independence rather than workplace issues. Moreover, she shed light to the "disappearance of the labor movement," which was mentioned by Dr. Lane. When Suharto came to power, the leftists were decimated as a result of a bloody coup. She described the resurgence of the labor movement after Suharto's regime as "a democratization process."

Dr. Viajar also emphasized some events in the history of the Indonesian labor movements, as discussed by Dr. Lane. In the 1980s, labor unrest on dismal economic and work conditions fueled the emergence of independent trade unions alongside state-sanctioned labor organizations. The workers outside the official trade union movement fought for democratic change, freedom to organize, and better working conditions. The emergence of new capitalist relations under Suharto created a new urban industrial working class, which gave rise to various forms of labor unrest in the early 1990s. As the 1990s proceeded, and the unrest continued, independent organizing protest actions of workers

in their workplaces contributed to the anti-authoritarian and democratization movements. These protests broadened opposition to Suharto's rule.

Moreover, Dr. Viajar elaborated on some points made by Dr. Lane by comparing them to the Philippine context. The ratification of the ILO Convention Number 87 (Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize) in Indonesia became one of the factors that changed labor relations there. This resulted in the growth of labor unions in Indonesia. As few as ten members can create a union, and two unions can coexist in a workplace. However, the portion of Indonesia's organized workforce (12 percent or 2.5 million) is just a drop in the ocean. Since no institutions were built after the authoritarian regime of Suharto, unions relied on the power of social mobilization. Nevertheless, unions still had structural bargaining power that could paralyze companies or productions.

Union formation in the Philippines, on the other hand, takes a lot of time since it requires 20 percent of the debatable "bargaining unit." Unions in the Philippines also do not have much structural power that can stop the production process. However, the Philippine labor movement is strong in terms of institutional power, which includes laws that govern labor relations that can be used by trade unions. Considering this, they are able to influence policy decisions even though structural bargaining power is difficult for them at the market level.

Dr. Viajar also elaborated on the political and economic approach to labor regimes. The change in production relations in Indonesia and across the world allowed the emergence of different types of workers, such as service, domestic, and migrant working classes.

Ending her reaction, Dr. Viajar posed some questions on the topic:

- "If you look at Indonesia and the Philippines, [which] have been integrated in the global neoliberal capitalist relations and, at the national level, have an elite democracy or patronage politics, how do these dimensions shape the labor regimes of these countries?"
- "Have the dynamics with traditional or oligarchic political structures in Indonesia and the Philippines also affected and shaped the labor movement? Will Dr. Lane agree?"

"Maybe, it's better to have a competing labor movement rather than a homogenous and noncompetitive movement," said Dr. Viajar as a point of debate for her last remarks. In the Philippines, the trade union movement, like in Indonesia, is also quite fragmented. The struggle towards democratization continues, accompanied with a lot of killings. Workers' rights and struggles are inherently similar to broader democratization struggles because the fight for justice and democracy mirrors the struggle for equality in society.

Lecturer's Response to Reaction

As a response to Dr. Viajar remarks, Dr. Lane affirmed how trade unions had already existed before the colonial era and is part of a general campaign against colonialism. Here are some additional context and details on the history of trade unions:

- In the 1950s, trade unions were anti-colonial as they occupied Dutch-controlled businesses and forced the parliament to nationalize them.
- In the 1960s, trade unions grew rapidly. However, since they were still heavily consideried as anti-colonialism machineries, advocating for better wages and working conditions was not given much importance.
- In the 1990s, two unions were formed: the *Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia* (SBSI, Indonesian Workers Welfare Association) and the *Partai Rakyat Demokratik* (People's Democratic Party, PRD). They struggled for better wages and working conditions. In particular, PRD organized the largest strikes and had the biggest impact. It also contributed to the campaign of ousting Suharto.
- After Suharto's reign, thousands of new enterprise unions and federations started to deal with better wages and working conditions as their main agenda.

Dr. Lane gave F-SEDAR as an example of a trade union that made efforts beyond being just a union in a society dominated by "big money" at the national level

and by "middle money" at the provincial level.[2] F-SEDAR held regular meetings with their members, where they read works like Pramoedya's *This Earth of Mankind* to help them connect to their culture, and took up courses on political economy and law. Finally, Dr. Lane ended his discussion with these words:

> The assumption is to not think that workers are only interested in wages and conditions. They are more than just cogs in the factory and are able to think about bigger issues. Everyone must always be given the chance to test out what they are interested in.

■ Dr. Max Lane with Dr. Verna Viajar on the third part of the WELS on the Indonesian labor movement hosted by UP SOLAIR. Photo credit: UP SOLAIR

2 Based on Dr. Lane's explanation, "Big money" refers to the richest Indonesians (oligarchs and billionaires), while "small money" refers to politically influencial capitalists at the provincial level.

Open Forum

Michael Manalo (MA Political Science Student, UP Diliman):

We see this as a recurring pillar of Indonesian politics that scholars [have] talked about: the polarization of Indonesia into authoritarian and nationalist Islamic blocs. Given that prominent trade unionists have aligned themselves with the major parties, where does the Indonesian labor movement stand between those two poles? Are they also divided along those two poles? Is there a faction on the Indonesian left attempting to move Indonesian politics beyond those two poles?

Dr. Lane:

The polarization you described, and that some other academic observers have also noted, doesn't exist—it's nonsense. There is no such polarization. In the 2014 and 2019 elections, many commentators, not only academics in some universities but also in Indonesia, continued to talk about the authoritarianism on one side and Prabowo on the other. It was always nonsense. The polarization that you saw on social media, in newspapers, and televisions was purely rhetorical.

To prove this, within six months after the 2019 elections, Prabowo, who was seen as the leader of one pole had an audience with Jokowi. Prabowo had to join the cabinet and has been there for a good number of years. He abandoned all of the right-wing Islamic groups that he used to be associated because it was purely tactical. His flirtation with right-wing Islamic groups was lost during the elections. In every area that was not strongly Islamic, he only got 10 percent because his flirtation with the Islamic fundamentalists alienated everyone who was not pro-fundamentalist. Since then, he left his erstwhile Islamic allies and has been an epic part of President Widodo's government all this time. But we will see between now and the elections next year, amongst all these elite political parties: who will decide to play what game, what rhetoric to use. They have a problem—how do we make ourselves different from the others? Because if you look at the parliamentary record for two terms, every one of the nine parties in parliament [has] voted unanimously the same way on every single legislation. There is polarization in Indonesia, but it is not reflected in the rhetorical contestation between the parties. The polarization is between the big-money conglomerates [at] the national level and the little-money *kabupaten* (regency)

capitalists. [At] the local level, all of the nine parties in parliament [are] in one pole. The other pole is politically represented by social activism, which is the activist wing of what is called civil society in Indonesia. This includes some union-oriented party groupings. A coalition of the activist wing of civil society and these political groups sometimes [runs] campaigns.

Audience 2 (Master of Industrial Relations Student):

With regards to the educational programs in unions, who were the people who created these programs and benefits for the workers? I just want to clarify if they got external support. Also, what was the employers' idea about this? Were they supportive as well, or [did] the unions meet secretly for this?

Dr. Lane:

These [referring to the photos of union activity in his presentation] were Facebook posts, so union activity is not underground or secret. The employers also were hostile and didn't want to face a well-organized union. [In terms of] finance, there is no outside funding, which is their principle. In fact, I should have discussed this in my talk. They only have the union/federation dues as source of funding. They have policies like transparent discussion on the use of dues, application for funding, and a cultural approach, such as taking responsibility [for] the use of the funds. Some workers have become lawyers and take on commercial clients as a source of funding. Their belief is that workers should depend on workers. They are also not dependent on NGOs. [It is an] issue of dependence. Small workers do not depend on external funding as a principle and strategy. Nevertheless, they are aware that they cannot stay small.

Dr. Emily Cabegin (SOLAIR Faculty):

Workers should fight for their right to secure permanent employment because only regular employees benefit from the full protection of labor laws. Being a nonregular employee (such as contractual, job order, or agency-hired) is insufficient. Unfortunately, the prevalence of permissible labor outsourcing exacerbates this issue. Employers exploits contractualization to the fullest extent. For instance, at the University of the philippines, utility workers were once considered as regular employees of the university until their labor was subcontracted through agencies;

thus, they are assigned to different employers. The question is "how do these forms of labor relations make union work irrelevant?"

Secondly, because the contract covers the principal and the agency, the latter must bid the lowest to secure the contract. These contracts are often short-term. Consequently, employees become regular employees of the agency, but their agency signs short-term contracts with institutions, uncertain whether services will be renewed. The agency strives to keep labor costs low to increase the chances of contract renewal.

Additionally, our labor law has limitations. We currently have sole exclusive bargaining agents (SEBAs) representing unions composed of regular employees within a firm. Unfortunately, industry-level or multiemployer bargaining is not allowed by our labor law. My question is, could it be in the right direction for us to call for an amendment [to] our labor law so that it will comply with the legal framework—the multiemployer or industry-level bargaining?

Dr. Lane:

Regarding the first question, it is exactly the same as the case of Indonesia. The situation mirrors that of other countries facing agency labor hire and outsourcing issues. The rallying cry of Indonesian labor protests is often 'Stop outsourcing.' While some activities (such as catering and security) are legally allowed to be outsourced, many core productive functions are still outsourced despite being technically illegal. Employers often flout these regulations.

In Indonesia, labor law doesn't explicitly recognize a sole exclusive bargaining agent (SEBA), but unions adapt by strategically organizing strikes within factories. They identify critical operational points and disrupt production, forcing employers to engage with them. Legal discussions revolve around workers' and unions' rights, as well as potential changes through union coverage.

Unions recognize the disadvantage of fragmentation and seek broader outreach. However, there's a cultural clash with student activism, which tends to have a more bohemian organizational structure. Unions primarily consist of senior and unskilled workers, limiting their educational capacities.

Notably, Indonesia lacks multiemployer bargaining due to the nature of its industrialization—diverse products and fragmented industry segments. Additionally, Indonesia's position in the global supply chain involves low-level manufacturing processes (such as fishing rods, baskets, and basic food processing), which hinders genuine industrial unionization. Instead, there's partial industrial-level bargaining and an ad hoc process of forming confederations.

Dr. Melisa Serrano (Dean of UP SOLAIR, UP Diliman):

About the prospects of the Partai Buruh: the context is that the social protection campaign in Indonesia was successful thanks to the labor movement, particularly a coalition. This was a display of societal power since different movements also joined the campaign. At that period, the labor movement was mulling to form a political party—a labor party.

The analysis is that the FSPMI played a critical role in that particular coalition. They used their leverage. Very evidently, the success was because of the coalition, which is an expression of societal power. Thus, many other groups [and] social movements participated in that campaign. And then of course, you mentioned earlier that around that period, the labor movement, particularly the FSPMI and KPSI, was already mulling on establishing a labor party. Now, can you say that there is a link between these two because of workers' confidence? The confidence was there; they were planning to establish a labor party for the 2014 elections. Nonetheless, the 2014 election was a disaster, as discussed earlier, for the labor movement. It fragmented and polarized the labor movement.

Additionally, you have the FSPMI even supporting Prabowo, right? And of course, there are many issues of internal democracy [and] intimidation of members of FSPMI, just to vote for Prabowo. Now, you have the next elections coming. Do you think there are lessons now for the FSPMI [and] for the Partai Buruh, from these two critical moments in the labor movement in Indonesia? Would they again have the same attitude in terms of coalition of power or the societal power or the discursive power? What would they bring differently to the public, for example?

Dr. Lane:

Looking back at the history of the labor movement from 2010 up to today, the biggest lesson from the successful campaigns in social security was that the streets was key. However, [from] 2013 onwards, the decision not to go in that direction was clear. Secondly, some people active in organizing and leading the FSPMI in 2012 and 2013, were keen on a party. However, the key people who were active in 2013 and 2014 were all expelled from the union. After that, thinking about Partai Buruh was now on a different framework: electoralist campaigning instead of mass campaigning and militant industrial campaigning.

Another example of a union is KPBI, which is connected to the Partai Buruh. The same context applies. I don't know it really well because the propaganda from that union is [in] a different style [from] the other elements of the Partai Buruh. It is more oppositional and has a more demonstrative campaigning—a different strategy for the socialist left groups—while the leadership of the PB is primarily using it [militant propaganda] as a bargaining chip [for] the other parties. At this early stage, there is no evidence yet, and it is hard to predict future scenarios in the campaign or election: what's in the union's heads? But it will unfold in the next twelve months. Meanwhile, the unions' activity in the anti-dictatorship struggle did not support the PB. Some NGOs did so, but union organizing is different from NGO work. There are efforts to sustain long-term organizing, with the connection to the labor parties as a source of power. Grassroots unions want the union in a party, but they prefer the long-term organizing commitment [at] the grassroots level. Maybe in 2024, if I come back, it [will be] easier to answer the question. I am skeptical, but we need to understand the dynamics [of] how it unfolds.

Dr. Maragtas S. V. Amante (SOLAIR Faculty):

My question is rather general, on labor of course. Considering the incredible explosion of new technology, particularly involving robotics and Artifical Intelligence (A.I.), how will this endanger the working jobs and working people? The popular philosopher, Harari, forecasted that it will lead to a useless class, more than an exploited class.

Dr. Lane:

[There is] no sign in Indonesia [of such a risk] since technology in manufacturing, at the moment, is low. Since Indonesia reflects a global division of labor,

(countries in the Global South get the simplest factories to run [on] very low technology), maybe in ten to twenty years, it will change. But advances in technology, [such as] the use of applications like Grab and GoJek in the platform economy, have led to demonstrations and protests due to exploitation. A general strike will directly hit the economy, similar [to] the *welgang bayan* (literally, "people's strike") experience in the Philippines. There is a need to go beyond just being a union in a social, political, and economic context.

Audience 5:

In the business process outsourcing industry, I have never heard [of] workers [being] encouraged to join unions. My question is, is there a particular industry in Indonesia that is being restricted [from] joining unions?

Dr. Lane:

Ever since the ILO convention was ratified and the legislation was passed, everybody has been free to organize a union. The obstacle comes from the refusal of particular businesses to have unions. There [are] no legal ways for companies to just say "no, no unions here." You might get into conflict.

Audience 6:

Other than wages and conditions, are there other matters considered in collective bargaining in Indonesia?

Dr. Lane:

On wages, there is a government-regulated formula that allows for automated wage increases each year. It's much less than what the unions asked for and much less than the workers need in terms of issues of welfare. Sometime, it is the reluctance of the employers to have collective bargaining negotiations taking place. So, there are collective bargaining agreements that are signed like that, but [they are] usually based on the framework of basic minimum wages.

The bigger wages usually happen in a pharmaceutical company, an airline, or a state-owned company where there is much more formality and less use of outsourcing in the employment process.

In the unions that had collective bargaining during the Suharto era, such as in the cargo section of Japan Airlines during the 1980s and 1990s, they organized bargaining negotiations with companies like Japan Airlines. They aimed to get the guaranteed minimum increase for the year, and sign an agreement. That was the process. Now, there's a bigger sector. There's a much more brutal scenario in terms of what companies are paying workers [and] what companies are willing to pay properly.

Audience 7:

What are your observations about the government's response to all these union activities, especially [since] you mentioned some active unions [prioritize] the education of union members, conduct paralegal trainings, and launch mass protests? In the Philippines, while the unions are very active, the government [and] the employers are also very active in using violence against trade unionists. Recently, there have been many extrajudicial killings of trade unionists in [the] Philippines. What are your observations in the case of Indonesia? Is this happening as well right now? What forms of government retaliation or employer retaliation have been seen in Indonesia?

Dr. Lane:

Typical violence against trade unionists started to escalate in 2012 and 2013—a time when bigger unions signed the harmony agreement. I think you can clearly say that the primary strategy of the government and establishment is to draw in, [that is] embrace these big unions, through the Parti Buruh. You can see this scenario in some of their actions, which include some top union leaders having a photo opportunity with the president [and] praising him. Drawing in the big unions with the Indonesian establishment isolates the small ones so that they cannot group together.

The second one, although it is not the main [form] yet, [involves] arresting trade unionists. There are examples in the Indonesian case of small unions in Jakarta and East Java. It is something that could escalate. It is something not done by the government but [by] the companies pushing the police to arrest. I don't think it's

an instruction from the president, minister, or police headquarters, but rather the companies. However, it sets a precedent. If smaller unions are starting feel threatened, the physical violence seen in 2012 might start again.

[At] the national level, the small unions and militant trade unions are not yet perceived as a threat. It has been a threat to the authorities before, in a longer tradition of militancy and repression.

That's one of the weird things [in] Indonesia. In some ways between 1970 and 1998, repression in Indonesia was haphazard rather than deep. Why? Because the repression in 1965 and 1966 [killed] a million people. When Marcos [Sr.] came to power, he did not kill a million people. He sustained the violence for a long time. [On the one hand,] Suharto just did that in one go and terrorized the people, and [there is] ongoing violence. But after Suharto, 20 years have passed, things are still new. However, as it [repression of unions] grows [escalates], [the] militant section of the movement will face more challenges.

Online Audience:

Can you speak more about what "forgetting of development" as a consequence of the thirty-two years of the Suharto dictatorship?[3] Is nationalism a locus aspiration for Indonesian people?

Dr. Lane:

This was touched upon in the talk yesterday. The thirty-two year period of the New Order was a period of globalization and opening up to foreign investors. The suppression of national history has resulted in a scenario where the immediate natural tendency of anyone struggling or complaining is going local or sectoral. Thus, you do get unions, but they're all mostly local and not national. With the exception of a few, there is no strong tendency to go national. As a consequence of that, the discussion, "What is development? How can a country develop?" has really vanished from all left-wing and civil society discourse

3 This is in reference to the formal title of Max Lane' lecture: Class, Nation, and the Forgetting of Development.

in general. People with a social justice orientation [are] saying, "We want to concentrate on marginalized groups." But the reality is [that] the group that is most marginalized of all is simply the vast majority (the 1 percent versus the 99 percent or even the 10 percent vs the 90 percent). It is the 90 percent that is "marginalized." So, [how could] the 90 percent be located on the margins? Social justice aims to advance marginalized groups but, this language tends to obscure the fact that the "marginalized" are [actually the] exploited and suppressed groups. It's actually the vast majority of people. It is connected to the question of development because people who want to increase their income and improve their conditions will never achieve their goals unless the problem of national development, [or in this case] underdevelopment, is solved. Even in advanced industrial countries like Australia, it is the same. Wage increases, and welfare policies—the employees say, "Let's take them back." No improvements are permanent. You have to solve this underlying problem as well. That is what is lagging now. Nevertheless, activists are aware that this should be addressed.

Closing Remarks

■ Dr. Melisa Serrano

Dean
School of Labor and Industrial Relations

We thank Dr. Max Lane for a very vibrant and engaging discussion about the Indonesian labor movement. Of course, there are some pessimistic discussions, but I think he ended it with some optimism in the case of F-SEDAR, [which] is an embryonic organization that I believe is class-based. We also thank Benjie Velasco for initiating and inviting Dr. Max Lane [to] the WELS. We'd be able to see you again, Dr. Max Lane, next year to continue our discussion about the Partai Buruh. We thank also former UP President Nemenzo, who is here, and the faculty of SOLAIR. Hi, Ma'am Princess Nemenzo. Yes, so, we will again have this World Experts Lecture Series perhaps sometime in May or June. We will again invite some professors from Pennsylvania State University. We'll try to take you here for another expert lecture series. M*araming salamat po at magandang hapon po sa ating lahat* (Thank you very much, and good afternoon to everyone). I would like to give you our journal, the *Philippine Journal of Labor and Industrial Relations*, as our token of appreciation. *Maraming salamat po.*

■ Dean Melisa Serrano of the UP School of Labor and Industrial Relations summing up the discussion and expressing gratitude to the organizers and participants for this day's lecture. Photo credit: UP SOLAIR

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