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Indonesia

# Solidarity with striking Indonesian workers

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**If there was an easier way to struggle for their rights, the workers from the PT. Kanefusa Indonesia Federation of Indonesian Metal Workers Union (FSPMI) would probably have tried it.**

The workers have now been on strike for four months; have camped overnight for three days at the Department of Labour and Transmigration and its regional offices; waylaid Labour Minister Muhaimin Iskandar during a visit to a Toshiba company in Bekasi calling on him to make good his promise to protect workers' rights; waged an ongoing solidarity protest actions against the regional Industrial Relation Settlement office in West Java; and setup a camp in front of PT. Kanefusa Indonesia's factory.

PT. Kanefusa Indonesia, which is located in the East Jakarta Industrial Park (EJIP) in Bekasi and has approximately 500 workers, is Japanese owned and produces industrial machine knives and tools. The company's headquarters is in Japan and it has many branches in the region as well as in the United States and Indonesia (see <http://www.kanefusa.net/>). The company profile shows it to be a large company with considerable assets. But in the capitalist world, this often has nothing to do with workers' welfare.

The industrial dispute started early this year when workers asked senior company managers about the category and status of the company. Workers challenged the status of the company, which is registered with the Department of Industry and Trade as Sector 2. They demanded that the status be changed from a sector 2 category (which produces household tools and knives) to sector 1 (which produces industrial knives and tools), as this what the company actually produced from the start. If it succeeds their wages need to be increase RP. 30.000 (+/- 3 USD) from actual wage (around 115 USD/month).

The company refused the demand and insisted on sticking with the registered status, even though the Bekasi regional labour office later confirmed that the company should be categorised as sector 1, and admitted that inspections had been careless. It is very important for workers to win this case since the manipulation of status category influences wages, medical benefits and other normative rights (which have now been violated for years), not to mention it is a tax manipulation detrimental to the state. This kind of tactic is used by many big companies in Indonesia but existed laws cannot touch them.

This is the motivating factor, which after months of weary and deadlocked bipartite and tripartite negotiations (January to early June 2010), led the workers to going on strike on June 17. The company has accused the workers of conducting an illegal strike and some of the FSPMI leaders have been reported to the police. The company has also hired new contract workers and sacked 166 workers involved in the strike. These actions violate Article 143 of the Labor Law No 13/2003 strike actions, Article 144 because the company replaced workers that were on strike and Law Number 22/2000 on the right to strike. The ongoing intimidation and black propaganda against striking workers and their leaders is also a form of union busting since the company is promoting good relations with the leadership of another pro-management's union, the All Indonesian Workers Union (SPSI).

Two weeks ago 500 workers from FSPMI and the Metal Forefront "the forefront unit of FSPMI that usually does solidarity work" besieged the regional Industrial Relation Settlement office in Bandung, West Java, after the judge ruled that there was to be more mediation. It was really disappointing decision since mediations had repeatedly ended in deadlock. The court itself is also illegitimate because it did not provide the previous treatise as confirmed by the regional labor office.

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The decision however is not surprising, since most workers lose their cases in the industrial court, which why poor people end up in jail rather than the big bosses. No state institutions can be counted on to help after Labour and Transmigration Minister Iskandar became frightened and overreacted by asking police to dismissed the workers after they spent three nights at the Labour Department offices demanding his removal from the cabinet over his failure to fulfill his promise to workers and force the company to give them their rights.

The picket line remains in front of factory, although the company is still functioning using new contract workers together with the opportunist SPSI leadership. Although the striking workers have run out money, thanks to the solidarity and the spirit of struggle they continue to fight. The next tactics of struggle will be to further consolidate the factory blockade within the neighborhood industrial area, because a loss by the Kanefusa workers would be a bad precedent for other workers that are faced, or will be faced by similar cases. A political campaign is also being discussed to organise actions at Iskandar private residence and even President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's house. Workers also plan to sue the company for sector manipulation and tax evasion.

Meanwhile, in order to bolster the spirit of resistance, the FSPMI leadership along with around 70 FSPMI workers in Bekasi is participating in weekly political economy education classes organised independently by the radicalised workers of Garda Metal in Bekasi. FSPMI Bekasi has around 40,000 members and some 200,000 members across Indonesia. This type of education is a bridge to connect the economic struggle and political demands of workers and a means to understand why they have to conduct an all-out struggle under this pro-capitalist system and organize against the minority of capitalists that make the economic decisions in this country.

Please provide solidarity and support in the form of statements, solidarity actions (especially in Japan or any other countries where Kanefusa factories exist) and building political pressure, or just by sending solidarity greetings to the striking workers.

For additional information on the strike and ongoing political campaign, please contact:

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Your support and solidarity will help the FSPMI workers to continue, and win their struggle.