

have been used to justify revisiting the conflicts that resulted from economic crisis a decade ago in Southeast Asia.

*Murdoch University, Perth, Australia*

RICHARD ROBISON

**WORKERS AND INTELLECTUALS: NGOs, Trade Unions and the Indonesian Labour Movement. Southeast Asia Publications Series. By Michele Ford.** *Singapore: National University of Singapore; Honolulu: Univ of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 2009. x, 259 pp. US\$34.00, paper. ISBN 978-0-8248-3447-0.*

Indonesian trade unions and labour organizations were crucial to the liberation movement. They could be found on plantations, within transportation and in other sectors of the colonial economy. Workplace struggle and politics were often combined. This was inevitable given the decisiveness of state and politics in the primitive accumulation of capital. After independence the priorities of labour were subordinated to the broader aim of building a national economy. This fostered one of the largest peaceful popular movements in the Global South. Populist President Sukarno and the reformist Communist Party were in the forefront. But the movement did not stimulate economic growth. And it did not prevent the military and its business allies from capturing the benefits of the massive nationalizations of foreign companies. The leaders of the labour movement in particular were eliminated in 1965-1966. Class-oriented labour organizing was repressed and the few unions that remained were subordinated to authoritarian state-corporatism and developmentalism. But this was not the end of the story. Michele Ford has now written a book on the attempts by civil society activists to somehow substitute for the eliminated leaders in rebuilding the labour movement during the last decade of Suharto's reign and the first decade of liberal democratization. In summarizing her extensive and often pioneering research, the book represents a commendable effort to present crucial data and results to the interested practitioners and supporters who rarely have the time to navigate libraries, as well as to the students of labour problems in other contexts who need a qualified introduction to the Indonesian experience. Admittedly it took me quite some time to get through the text, but that was less because of its sometimes dense character than the fact that the analyses are useful and challenging for Indonesia scholars as well.

Ford focuses on the relations between NGO-based labour activists and workers over time. Two chapters introduce the institutional and conceptual history. This is followed by a number of empirically based chapters on important dimensions of labour organizing. The final chapters focus on the outcome. In the book Ford covers thus the complicated combination of industrial relations and the labour movement in informal sectors and

neighbourhoods. She commendably bridges several of the often separated schools of thought within labour studies. She often even manages to combine theoretical and comparative perspectives with extensive ethnographies. This is difficult but particularly important because much of the practice and actual strategies in the field tend to be inspired by and tactically adopted to theories and recommendations from scholars, supportive unionists and NGO activists, while at the same time being influenced by contextual opportunities, constraints and insights that are not put on record and are rarely well understood by analysts and sponsors.

In these contested fields, however, there are also challenges. Ford's historical and conceptual framework is not always powerful enough to help avoid overlap between the chapters, or to trace the processes in a clear-cut way and arrive at powerful conclusions. To my understanding this is mainly because the analysis of the relations between NGOs and workers is not inclusive enough to fully consider how it has been affected by the transition from the authoritarian state-corporatist labour regime under Suharto to the more liberal-oriented regime thereafter. The analysis of the struggle against the statist order focuses on the major strategies that guided the NGO and worker activists: a Leninist-cum-South Korean, a liberal-plural and a Kautskyan social democratic model. But none of these counter-strategies really considers the extent to which the leaders of labour and related social movements must rely on favourable contacts, lobbying, etc., or can operate through different channels for collective-interest-based representation in wage negotiations, company management public governance as well as in agreements on welfare-based growth. Comparative studies indicate that such channels—or the Leninist as well as liberal lack of them—are crucial not just for the policy outcomes but also for collective labour organizing, politics, alliances and electoral advances. But as Ford subordinates the conceptual tools to the views of the Indonesian activists who rarely considered these linkages and dynamics, she is not able to also analyze the problems and options by drawing on and comparing with theories about such transformative dynamics as are historically seen in Scandinavia and more recently in South Africa and Brazil. As a consequence we continue to live with similar perspectives of the Indonesian dilemmas as those which may have constrained the NGO and labour activists themselves. But again, nobody that I am aware of has provided more detailed information and told the story better than Ford.

*University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway*

OLLE TÖRNQUIST