



HOME
NEWS

Indonesia
Index

Introduction

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Indonesia 1965

The Second Greatest Crime of the Century

By Deirdre Griswold

- [Introduction](#)
- (Chapter 1)
[The Bloodbath](#)
- (Chapter 2)
[1958: The First CIA Attempt](#)
- (Chapter 3)
[350 Years of Colonialism](#)
- (Chapter 4)
[U.S. Corporations Arrive for the Feast](#)
- (Chapter 5)
[The "Left" Critics after the Fact](#)
- (Chapter 6)
[The Question of State Power](#)

CHAPTERS [Index](#) [Intro](#) [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [Search](#)

[HOME PAGE](#) | [FREE TRIAL](#) | [JOIN WWP](#)

Your feedback is welcome
webweaver@workers.org

Copyright © 1998 workers.org



HOME
NEWS

Indonesia

Index

Introduction

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Introduction

Before October 1965, Indonesia had the largest left movement outside the socialist countries, while the government of President Sukarno pursued a militantly anti-imperialist foreign policy.

This book tells of the massacres following the October 1, 1965, military takeover that decimated the Indonesian left. It focuses on the role of Washington in providing essential clandestine support for the right-wing generals in that bloodbath.

This book was first published in 1970. It is being reprinted in 1998 as a new generation has emerged in Indonesia. This new generation has no illusions about the generals and the state they represent. Nor can it be seduced by the kind of "development" promised under the "New Order" which is now in crisis. There are many, many murders and shattered lives to avenge. And it is young -- and with youth comes new hope.

CHAPTERS [Index](#) [Intro](#) [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [Search](#)

[HOME PAGE](#) | [FREE TRIAL](#) | [JOIN WWP](#)

Your feedback is welcome
webweaver@workers.org

Copyright © 1998 workers.org

The Bloodbath

Between October 1, 1965, and April or May of the following year, the right-wing military regime of Generals Nasution and Suharto seized power and consolidated its strength in Indonesia. In that scant seven months as many as a million people were slaughtered. The rising toll of victims appeared occasionally in the press here, recorded with little more passion than a sports score.

Some accounts of the appalling massacres did in time find their way into the papers of London and New York. Their tone was fatalistic, implying that the unbelievable carnage described was the product of a bloodlust and disregard for human life inconceivable to "civilized" Westerners. There was no sense of urgency about these reports, as though nothing could be done to stem the gory tide.

No member of Parliament or Congress rose to condemn the butchery. No relief or rescue agencies attempted to intervene on behalf of the political prisoners. Only a few isolated voices in the West tried to raise an outcry in the face of such awful silence.

Over four years later [in 1970], several hundred thousand political prisoners still rot in jail. There have been repeated purges of the armed forces and the civil service. The fascist military regime is debating whether or not to carry out mass executions, claiming it no longer can afford to feed the mass of prisoners.

American capital is moving into Indonesia once again to explore offshore areas for oil, reactivate existing wells, and mine copper in West Irian. Properties nationalized under President Sukarno have been returned to their U.S. and European former owners.

Indonesia seems to be right back where it was before World War II, before the rising nationalist movement swept out the Dutch and the 3,000 separate islands of the Netherlands East Indies united in the new and militant Republic of Indonesia. How did it happen? And what really happened?

There is a standard phrase that appears in all the Western news accounts. It is "the attempted Communist coup." The massacre of hundreds of thousands of civilians was justified, so this official account goes, as a reaction to an attempted coup by the Communists on September 30, when six right-wing army generals were killed.

THE STRANGE "ATTEMPTED COMMUNIST COUP"

The dictionary defines the words "coup d'etat" as the sudden, forceful overthrow of the government; literally it means a blow against the state. Since the events of September-October 1965, every person who was a member of the Cabinet on the night of September 30 has been accused of participating in the coup; three were sentenced to death and all arrested. Foreign Minister Subandrio is probably dead. Former President Sukarno himself has been placed under house arrest for interrogation about his part in the alleged coup attempt.

These facts in and of themselves invalidate the "Communist coup" story, since a government can hardly be accused of plotting its own overthrow.

To this it must be added that Indonesia had the largest

Communist party outside of the socialist countries. Its membership was over three million, and there were estimated to be between 15 and 20 million active supporters. Yet there was no call to action, no strikes or massive popular demonstrations at the time of the coup, or even in the bloody months of massacre that followed. Only a person most gullible and ignorant of Indonesian politics could be made to believe that this mass party was preparing to seize power without using its popular resources.

No one denies the fact that individual members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) did participate in the September 30th Movement, which was not a coup attempt but an effort to block the right-wing generals. However, the party itself seems if anything to have been unprepared for the task of taking state power, and had a history of leaning on President Sukarno in its bouts with the reactionaries.

The story of a Communist coup has persisted in the Western press up to the present time only because there is so much ignorance about Asia in general and because anti-Communism is used to justify and minimize mass murder.

However, it is not ignorance on the part of the mass media that dictates their handling of the events of October 1965. It can only be a deliberate policy to bury the truth. There was a coup d'etat that took place. It was organized and carried out by a clique of right-wing generals with the closest collaboration of high U.S. officials. And the American press had all this information readily available to it but did not choose to let the American people know what was taking place.

SEPTEMBER 30TH MOVEMENT VS. THE COUNCIL OF GENERALS

The September 30th Movement, which did indeed assassinate six right-wing generals before it was quickly crushed on the morning of October 1, 1965, was headed by Lieutenant Colonel Untung, a trusted member of Sukarno's palace guard. He had the support of Air Marshal Omar Dhani, Commandant of the Indonesian Air Force. But the Movement was not an attempt to overthrow the government, all of whose members were later accused of being part of the "attempted coup." It was an attempt to save that government.

The Indonesian military ever since independence has been composed of contradictory elements. Untung, Dhani and others like them were strongly nationalist and anti-imperialist. But there were many other officers who owed their existence to a feudal origin and collaboration with the foreign exploiters. General Haris Nasution, one of the Army chiefs who helped crush the September 30th Movement and is today a member of Indonesia's ruling triumvirate, has a long history of open treason against the Republic. In 1952, he attempted a coup d'etat but failed. This did not prevent him from becoming Army Chief of Staff in the years that followed and by the late 1950s he had created his own political party.

Nasution, Suharto and other officers, many of whom had been trained in the U.S., formed a secret "Council of Generals." On September 21, 1965, they met in Djakarta with the entire armed forces chiefs of staff. At this secret meeting, which was tape-recorded by agents of Foreign Minister Subandrio, a plan was drawn up to overthrow the

government on October 5, Armed Forces Day, when all the crack regiments under their command would be assembled in the capital.

When Sukarno learned of this plot, he called in Untung. The September 30th Movement was hastily formed to preempt the move by the Council of Generals. It was hoped that by destroying the leaders of the Council, the coup would be thwarted.

The right-wing generals had intended to justify their takeover with Sukarno's "ill health," the pretext being that should anything happen to the President, the country would fall into the hands of the Communists. However, their intended move could only have had the sympathy of a small minority of the population, and they were no doubt anxious about what the response of the millions of progressive Indonesians would be.

The failure of Untung's movement gave the generals an excuse to openly begin a massive hunt of left-wingers, and they found the people and their organizations confused and unsure about what was happening.

Having crushed the September 30th Movement, the Council of Generals went on to implement their coup plan, setting up a new government controlled by the military and physically wiping out the opposition.

The Western press dwelt mournfully on the death of the six generals, but it was many months before the extent of the slaughter that followed was reported anywhere. It was even longer before the story of what happened on September 30 finally made it into the New York Times, even if only by the back door.

THE TESTIMONY OF GENERAL SUPARDJO

On March 1, 1967, the Times reported on the trial of Brigadier General Supardjo, an officer charged with being in on the "coup attempt" of September 30. In his testimony, Supardjo denied that he had participated in the Movement, remarking wryly that it was poorly organized. However, he made it clear that he was not playing along with his captors.

According to the defendant's (former Army Brigadier General Supardjo) testimony, Indonesian political history since September 30, 1965, has been completely distorted. The attempted coup that night, he said, was not a Communist plot and it certainly was not aimed at ousting the legal government. Instead, he has repeatedly told his five uniformed judges that the "September 30th Movement" came into being to forestall a coup by the "Council of Generals".... Mr. Supardjo noted with irony that in the aftermath of the coup the "Council of Generals got what it aimed for." After all, he added, "the ministers of the legal government are now in jail" -- three of them, including former Foreign Minister Subandrio, have already been sentenced to death -- and, he said, only Mr. Sukarno is left. (New York Times, March 1, 1967]

General Supardjo could have had no selfish motive for this testimony. Indeed, it brought him a death sentence.

While the Council of Generals has not been mentioned elsewhere in the Establishment press other than in these direct quotes from General Supardjo's testimony, its existence was widely recognized. On July 4, 1966, the Indonesian Ambassador to Cuba, Mr. A.M. Hanafi, announced his resignation. In a statement explaining why he was leaving the post, he talked of the right-wing military group that had taken over in his country:

Since the outbreak of this 30th of September Movement affair, the development of events has brought to light the existence of a "Council of Generals," a gang of the most reactionary high-ranking Army officers, whose ringleader is Gen. A. H. Nasution. Everything that is happening in Indonesia now was carefully plotted by this Council, working hand in glove with the CIA, and was what Col. Untung and the other patriotic officers tried to avert with their 30th of September Movement. Opposition to this Council has now become the order of the day for every Indonesian patriot.

THE SILENT SLAUGHTER

October, November, and half of December passed before any story of the mass slaughter taking place in Indonesia broke in the American press. That was in *Time* magazine. It was another month before the New York Times reported it.

Was this because the U.S. press didn't have the story earlier? That is inconceivable. An event of earth-shaking importance had taken place with the right-wing coup. Even a cub reporter would understand how significant such a political turn was for the fortunes of the U.S. in Asia. The Viet Nam War was going on just across the South China Sea. Hundreds of reporters were stationed there from every major news agency.

Did the new regime exclude foreign reporters? If so, there was never a word about it printed in any newspaper. It can only be assumed that the U.S. press, as well as Washington, were intimately aware of the reign of terror, but were keeping mum.

When, after three months, the awful toll was finally brought out, it was with an air of a fait accompli. Hundreds of thousands had already been killed. It was too late to stop it.

Time magazine, which usually judges the virtue of governments by the number of communist scalps dangling from their belts, nevertheless objectively reported on December 17, 1965, that:

Communists, red sympathizers and their families are being massacred by the thousands. Backlands army units are reported to have executed thousands of Communists after interrogation in remote jails. Armed with wide-bladed knives called "parangs," Moslem bands crept at night into the homes of Communists, killing entire families and burying the bodies in shallow graves. The murder campaign became so brazen in parts of rural East Java, that Moslem bands placed the heads of victims on poles and paraded them through villages. The killings have been

on such a scale that the disposal of the corpses has created a serious sanitation problem in East Java and Northern Sumatra where the humid air bears the reek of decaying flesh. Travelers from these areas tell of small rivers and streams that have been literally clogged with bodies. River transportation has at places been seriously impeded.

Spotty accounts appeared now and again in the months that followed. Again, their tone was fatalistic. There was no indignation or sense of urgency. Instead, the mounting dead were portrayed almost as victims of destiny, the doomed figures of a Greek tragedy.

The Guardian of Britain on April 7, 1966, carried this account from Djakarta by Nicholas Turner:

Estimates of the total number of Indonesians killed in political massacres after the attempted coup of September 30 are being revised as fuller information comes in from outer regions. One Western ambassador considers 300,000 to be a conservative estimate, and other compilations run far higher.

A traveller who knows the island of Bali well, and speaks the language . . . describes mass executions and the annihilation of village after village in some areas. A consular official in Surabaya accepts a figure of 200,000 for Bali, which has a population of two million.

Estimates of the dead in Sumatra also range around 200,000, and a similar figure for Java is generally regarded as on the low side. When the death tolls for other islands such as Borneo and Sulawesi are added, the total may well be upwards of 600,000. Just how many of these are Communists is another question.

It appears certain that the great majority of the dead were innocent victims of political hysteria....

In some areas, Communist suspects were shot or poisoned, but usually the Moslem youth beheaded its victims with the parang. . . . The heads were often impaled on fences and gateposts

Rivers in many parts of the country were clogged with corpses for weeks. A European resident of Surabaya describes finding bodies washed up by the river on to his back garden.

Carnage on such a scale can scarcely be imagined, and the first effect after reading of such events is to feel stunned, incapable of comprehension. But after the first shock wears off and the awful truth sinks in, it is necessary to ask some questions. How was it possible? More people died in these few months than in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. By the end of 1965, more Indonesians had been killed than the number of Vietnamese fallen after 15 years of war.

Were these merely the victims of some local vengeance,

as the papers tried to imply? James Reston of the Times found it significant in one of his columns that the term "run amok" is of Malay origin. How convenient for Mr. Reston are the anti-Asian prejudices and chauvinism of Western society! How easy it is for the newspapers to explain away a million deaths in Indonesia, where, as every good American schoolchild knows, "life is cheap."

All the lies that allowed the comfortable Christians of Holland and England to believe they were morally right in robbing Indonesia for three centuries are now invoked by Mr. Reston and the editors of other great American newspapers to explain away the massacres.

Mr. Reston's "insights" into the Indonesian character notwithstanding, the real explanation of the massacres lies not in bloodlust or hysteria, or in people wildly "running amok." As in all cases of genocide throughout the world, there was organization, planning, efficiency and an **armed force** responsible for the executions.

ARMY CARRIES OUT A "SPONTANEOUS" MASSACRE

In one of the few isolated instances of press coverage given the slaughter in Indonesia, the New York Times May 8, 1966, Sunday Magazine ran an article by Seth S. King, its Southeast Asia correspondent. King quotes a schoolteacher in a village near Jogjakarta:

My students went right out with the army.
They pointed out P.K.I. members. The army
shot them on the spot along with their whole
family: women, children. It was horrible....

Indonesia is made up of 3,000 separate islands, strung out for 3,000 miles along the equator. Yet the massacres were coordinated, and as the earlier quote from the Manchester Guardian showed, almost evenly spread across all the greater islands of the archipelago.

No mass hysteria could leap hundreds of miles, across the intervening seas, to strike on island after island. Only a strong central power could have directed the executions.

It was Nasution and Suharto's army that systematically went from village to village, rooted out the peasant leaders, the communists and nationalists, the workers who had led seizures of Dutch and American property or feudal plantations. They hauled before the firing squad thousands of teachers, infected with ideas of "liberation." They didn't bother with trials, lawyers or laws themselves. It was the ultimate pacification program that U.S. experts in Viet Nam had dreamed of and this time it worked.

How was it that a reactionary group of generals dared to embark on such a grisly course, one that could only earn them the undying hatred of millions? These corrupt military men, powerful as they may have been, based their internal support on a thin crust of Indonesian society composed of feudal reactionaries, merchants tied to Western commerce and a portion of the civil servants. But the great mass of the people were their enemies, struggling to end once and for all the landed aristocracy and to break the bonds to the West that had exploited them for over three hundred years

How then could the Council of Generals have expected to win against such a large and organized adversary? What gave them the courage to put aside their own personal

deals and manipulations in order to launch a full-scale political offensive against the Sukarno government and the Indonesian people?

"WASHINGTON CAREFUL NOT TO CLAIM CREDIT FOR IT"

We could easily venture a guess, but it is not necessary. The answer has already been given, and by no less an authority than the New York Times.

In a more scientific frame of mind than was evident in his previously quoted remarks, James Reston spoke quite candidly about the coup and the massacres on June 19, 1966:

One of the most persistent complaints among officials in Washington is that our political troubles in Vietnam are not balanced adequately by reports in the press of the more hopeful political developments elsewhere in Asia.

The savage transformation of Indonesia from a pro-Chinese policy under Sukarno to a defiantly anti-Communist policy under General Suharto is, of course, the most important of these developments. Washington is careful not to claim any credit for this change in the sixth most populous and one of the richest nations in the world, but this does not mean that Washington had nothing to do with it.

There was a great deal more contact between the anti-communist forces in that country and at least one very high official in Washington before and during the Indonesian massacre than is generally realized. General Suharto's forces, at times severely short of food and munitions, have been getting aid from here through various third countries, and it is doubtful if the coup would ever have been attempted without the American show of strength in Vietnam or been sustained without the clandestine aid it has received indirectly from here.

This column of Reston's was entitled "A Gleam of Light in Asia." In the low-key tone that has characterized similar admissions about the U.S. role in Indonesia's brutal return to a semi-colonial status, the massacres are brushed aside as a deplorable but necessary means to obtaining Washington's end.

The air of glee about the right-wing victory is even less restrained in other reports. Max Frankel, long an observer of the Washington scene, captured the mood of exhilaration in the nation's capital in a Times article on March 12, 1966, entitled "Elated U.S. Officials Looking to New Aid to Jakarta's Economy."

The Johnson Administration found it difficult today to hide its delight with the news from Indonesia, pointing to the political demise of President Sukarno and the Communists. After a long period of patient diplomacy, designed to help the army triumph over the Communists, officials were elated to find their expectations being realized.

Both Reston and Frankel are very cautious when it comes to spelling out the details of how the U.S. helped put Nasution and Suharto in power. Overthrowing governments is not anything that can be openly bragged of, especially when the result is a genocidal bloodbath of the opposition. Yet there should be enough in these reporters' remarks alone to bring the U.S. government up on charges before any reputable world body. (However, instead of launching an investigation of the coup and genocide carried out in Indonesia, the United Nations under U.S. pressure readmitted Indonesia to membership without debate.)

One of the methods which the U.S. used to ensure the success of the coup was reported by Bertrand Russell in his introduction to *The Silent Slaughter*.

During October 1965 two representatives of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, close associates of mine, were in Djakarta on my behalf attending a conference. In Djakarta few had any doubt about what was taking place around them. The United States Seventh Fleet was in Javanese waters. The largest base in the area, feverishly constructed by the United States but a few months earlier on the southernmost point of the southernmost island of the Philippines, was ordered "on alert." General Nasution had a mission in Washington. The United States was directly involved in the day to day events.

It is doubtful whether the full story of the CIA involvement in Indonesia will ever be told in even one-quarter the detail leaked about U.S.-backed coup d'etats in other countries. The crime was so horrible that even the half-hearted supporters of imperialism would be turned away if they knew the truth about U.S. complicity. William Worthy, one of the speakers at the Public Inquest on Indonesia, told how Sukarno himself indicted the CIA a few months before the bloody coup.

One of the several, and I emphasize several, Achilles' heels of the CIA is its assumption that everyone, everywhere, especially if not Anglo-Saxon, is for sale. As Eric Norden told you, the United States in 1963 tried to bribe the Sukarno government with a huge offer of American economic aid if only he would abandon his policy of confrontation with Malaysia. In other words, the taxpayers of the United States were to pay out of their hides in order to save this obviously contrived new nation of Malaysia, which the Times of London itself admitted was first formulated in the British Colonial Office. Sukarno also told his people last spring that a direct offer to bribe him personally had been made by American agents.

But the CIA did not stop at merely trying to bribe Sukarno, the President of the Indonesian Republic. They also approached the right-wing generals (where they had not already **created** them with U.S. training and support) and worked out their takeover plot with them.

According to Suara Pemuda Indonesia, in an early 1966 article, this had been going on for several years and was far advanced by 1965:

The U.S. imperialists highly appreciate the right-wing military figure of Nasution and call him the "strongest" and a "courageous figure." To strengthen the position of the right-wing military clique, the U.S. imperialists had given "aid" which up to 1963 amounted to 60.9 million U.S. dollars. Before the end of 1960, the United States had equipped 43 battalions of the army. Every year the United States trained officers of the right-wing military clique. Between 1956 and 1959 more than 200 high-ranking officers were trained in the United States, while low-ranking officers are trained by the hundreds every year. Once the head of the Agency for International Development in America said that U.S. aid, of course, was not intended to support Sukarno and that the U.S. had trained a great number of officers and ordinary people who would form a unit to make Indonesia a free country. By a free country, he meant a country like Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand and other American satellites.

The cooperation as well as the aid of the United States have greatly strengthened the position of the right-wing military clique in Indonesia. Finally in the middle of last year the U.S. imperialists suggested that the right-wing military clique take over state power. For this purpose the U.S. imperialists provided many facilities, among others a fund of 225 billion Indonesian rupiahs. Cooperation between the imperialists and the Council of Generals is channeled through the CIA....

The Council of Generals is an organization of the right-wing military clique within the Indonesian Army, which was founded to seize power from the hands of the legal Indonesian government. The founding of this Council of Generals was directly supported and planned together with the U.S. intelligence service, the CIA. Its members consist of 40 right-wing generals, among whom the important figures are General Nasution, General A. Sukendro, General Suharto and the right-wing generals who were killed on October 1 last year. They were: General A. Yani, General Suparman, General M.T. Harjono, General Suprpto, General Sutojo and General Pandjaitan.

Although the Council of Generals has just been founded, the right-wing military clique within the army has existed for a long time. The founding of the Council of Generals was merely an inauguration of the power of the right-wing clique within the Army.

This was hardly a mere piece of speculation on the part of Suara Pemuda. It was common knowledge in political circles in Indonesia as well, of course, as in the very highest circles in the United States. Max Frankel of the New York Times wrote on March 13, 1966, that "The United States continued to retain excellent contacts with the top military leaders, even after Mr. Sukarno had

renounced American aid (in December 1964] and had begun to move against American information libraries, the Peace Corps, and news correspondents."

And on February 12, 1965, eight months before the counter-revolution began, the New York Times put its editorial finger on what it considered the turning point in U.S. determination to overthrow Sukarno. It said at that time:

When President Sukarno threatened the Federation of Malaysia, he placed himself firmly in the path of U.S. and British efforts to contain Communist China. Washington has left active defense of Malaysia to the British Commonwealth nations and seeks to retain some influence in Indonesia primarily in the hope of some day helping her army against the expected Communist bid for power.

The plan could hardly have been spelled out more clearly, although of course the news of it was played down and other newspapers in the United States didn't make even back-page stories of this sensational item. The story not only revealed the plan for "helping her army" but coolly revealed that the U.S. used Britain as a mere pawn for its campaign to "contain Communist China"!

The importance of Malaysia should be kept in mind, too, when reading in later parts of this pamphlet how intensely both nationalists and Communists felt about defeating the puppet state of Malaysia, which was the **external** threat to the independence of Indonesia, just as the right-wing generals were the **internal** threat.

Finally, with reference to the CIA, it should be even more clearly understood now than in 1965-66 just how universal its activities are and how axiomatic it must have been for it to concern itself so deeply with Indonesia. The revelations a year and a half ago about the CIA's penetration into the U.S. student movement, about whole "foundations" being conduits for CIA money and whole book publishing companies being started by the agency should have convinced any skeptic that the well-based charges against the CIA in the case of Indonesia were absolutely true and that the U.S. did not merely "aid" the fascist generals, but used them to reintroduce U.S. big business and U.S. imperialism, generally, into Indonesia.

CHAPTERS [Index](#) [Intro](#) [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [Search](#)

[HOME PAGE](#) | [FREE TRIAL](#) | [JOIN WWP](#)

Your feedback is welcome
webweaver@workers.org

Copyright © 1998 workers.org

1958: The First CIA Attempt

In spite of occasional flashes of truth in the press, the real U.S. involvement in the 1965 coup is one of the best-kept secrets in Washington. Official statements on the coup and its aftermath are practically nonexistent. Somewhat more is known of the 1958 attempt to overthrow the Sukarno government in which the CIA was involved.

In their authoritative book about the CIA entitled *The Invisible Government*, Washington correspondents Thomas Ross and David Wise related how the U.S. supplied a right-wing rebel force in Indonesia with arms and a small air force of B-26 bombers in an attempt to overthrow Sukarno. The attempt failed, but not before one of the American pilots, Allen Lawrence Pope, was captured by loyalist forces.

Ross and Wise explain:

Three weeks before Pope was shot down, Dwight D. Eisenhower had emphatically denied charges that the United States was supporting the rebellion against President Sukarno.

"Our policy," he said at a press conference on April 30, "is one of careful neutrality and proper deportment all the way through so as not to be taking sides where it is none of our business.

"Now on the other hand, every rebellion that I have ever heard of has its soldiers of fortune...." But Pope was no freebooting soldier of fortune. He was flying for the CIA, which was secretly supporting the rebels who were trying to overthrow Sukarno. [p. 137]

This cool revelation was never contradicted by Eisenhower or anyone else. All the authors omitted to mention was the all too obvious fact that the CIA is the arm of the United States government itself.

After the Administration changed hands and President Kennedy had arranged for Pope's exchange and invited Sukarno to Washington, the new President was somewhat more candid than the old on the subject of the U.S. try at counter-revolution in 1958.

During the visit Kennedy commented to one of his aides: "No wonder Sukarno doesn't like us very much. He has to sit down with the people who tried to overthrow him." [p. 145]

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in his authoritative biography of President Kennedy matter-of-factly confirms this story in a chapter analyzing Sukarno:

His deep mistrust of the white West was understandably compounded in the case of the United States by his knowledge that in 1958 the CIA had participated in an effort to overthrow him. [*A Thousand Days*, p. 532]

Wise and Ross also pointed out some of Washington's reasons for being favorable to the right-wing generals:

And many in the CIA and the State Department saw merit in supporting these dissident elements. Even if Sukarno were not overthrown, they argued, it might be possible for Sumatra, Indonesia's big oil producer, to secede, thereby protecting private American and Dutch holdings. At the very least, the pressures of rebellion might loosen Sukarno's ties with the Communists and force him to move to the Right. At best, the Army, headed by General Abdul Haris Nasution, an anti-Communist, might come over to the rebels and force wholesale changes to the liking of the United States. [*The Invisible Government*, p. 139]

That attempted coup failed. But seven years and nearly a million lives later these "changes" were effected.

A series of articles written by a Times team of journalists researching the activities of the CIA has confirmed the Wise-Ross story of the 1958 CIA intervention into Indonesia's internal affairs.

In Indonesia in the same year [1958], against the advice of American diplomats, the CIA was authorized to fly supplies from Taiwan and the Philippines to aid army officers rebelling against President Sukarno in Sumatra and Java. An American pilot was shot down on a bombing mission and was released only at the insistent urging of the Kennedy Administration in 1962. Mr. Sukarno, naturally enough, drew the obvious conclusions.... [New York Times, April 25, 1966]

CIA "PRINCIPAL ARM OF U.S. POLICY"

There has been no slacking off of CIA activity in Indonesia since 1958. On the contrary, there is every indication that the influence of this agency deepened in right-wing circles as the position of the Indonesian government moved to the left. In the same articles which the Times researchers so carefully prepared, the following remarkable statement appears:

In Southeast Asia over the last decade, the CIA has been so active that the agency in some countries has been the principal arm of American policy. It is said, for instance, to have been so successful at infiltrating the top of the Indonesian government and army that the United States was reluctant to disrupt CIA covering operations by withdrawing aid and information programs in 1964 and 1965. [New York Times, April 27, 1966]

If the intelligence agency of another country had infiltrated the U.S. government and armed forces to their highest level, and if such infiltration were followed by a coup favorable to that foreign power and consolidated by a bloodbath of monumental proportions, there should be little doubt in people's minds about what had happened.

The thread of continued U.S. infiltration, subversion and economic sabotage in Indonesia after the 1958 attempted coup can be picked up only in small pieces. But enough has been made public to get the drift of what Washington

was attempting to do. Control over the army was the key factor in undermining the Sukarno regime, and every effort was bent in this direction.

Senator Eugene J. McCarthy in the July 9, 1966, issue of *Saturday Review* discussed the effects that the U.S. "military assistance" program has on foreign policy. He wrote:

Supplying arms opens the way to influence on the military and also on the political policies of the recipient countries. Experience has demonstrated that when an arms deal is concluded, the military hardware is only the first step. Almost invariably, a training mission is needed and the recipient country becomes dependent on the supplier for spare parts and other ordnance.

. . . Indonesia, where military elements appear to have taken de facto control of the government in the wake of recent turmoil, received, in addition to Soviet military assistance, nearly \$64,000,000 in military-grant aid from the United States between 1959 and 1965.

When Sukarno told the U.S. "To hell with your aid!" it was an attempt to break loose from this armored stranglehold.

Even with the information revealed by Ross and Wise, however, the general public hasn't the least idea how deeply the U.S. was involved in the 1958 attempt to overthrow the Sukarno government. But in the case of the **successful** coup of 1965, not even the gossips of Washington knew what really happened. So much was at stake for U.S. big business and for the world politics of U.S. imperialism that few indeed were the slips of "security" on the Indonesian question.

McNAMARA THOUGHT IT PAID DIVIDENDS

Probably no one knows better than former Secretary of Defense McNamara what importance Indonesia has in Washington's Asian strategy. While he is known to have a thousand answers ready and a volume of statistics at hand on other vital subjects, he was suspiciously tight-lipped on this. In the 1967 Fulbright Committee hearings on the U.S. Foreign Assistance Program, McNamara testified at length on the results of U.S. military aid programs in many countries throughout the world. Yet he was strangely uninformative on the results of such "assistance" to Indonesia, despite the unofficial leaks from "informed sources" greeting the military coup with glee. But McNamara was too modest to take credit for it.

Not as discreet was Senator Sparkman of Alabama, who perhaps needed assurance that all this aid was worth it. In banker's language he questioned Secretary McNamara:

SEN. SPARKMAN. I want to go back to . . . our continuing military aid to Indonesia. At a time when Indonesia was kicking up pretty badly -- when we were getting a lot of criticism for continuing military aid -- at that time we could not say what that military aid was for. Is it secret any more?

SECY. McNAMARA. I think in retrospect,

that the aid was well-justified. SEN.
SPARKMAN. You think it paid dividends?

SECY. McNAMARA. I do sir.

[Foreign Assistance Hearings,
p. 693]

BUNDY HAD HOPES

In the prolonged period between the abortive coup attempt of 1958 when the CIA pilot was shot down and the successful military takeover in 1965, even top-ranking members of Congress were kept in the dark about the progress of U.S. subversion and infiltration.

One such Congressman was Clement Zablocki, Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on the Far East. The extent of the secrecy shrouding relations between the U.S. and key persons in the Indonesian military and government can be judged by the fact that Zablocki, a Congressional "watchdog" over the U.S. interests in Asia, did not know in the summer of 1965, a few short months before the coup, why the Administration wanted to increase military aid to Indonesia.

Rep. Zablocki's committee was worried that increased military aid to Indonesia, which was being urged by the State Department after Johnson sent Ellsworth Bunker on a special mission to Djakarta in March, would be used to implement President Sukarno's outspokenly anti-imperialist policies. Called to testify before the committee in closed-door hearings was Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, William Bundy. What's the purpose of this aid, the committee wanted to know. Won't it be used in the campaign against Malaysia? "I want to point out," replied Bundy carefully, "that this equipment is being sold to the Indonesian army and not the Indonesian government." "What's the difference?" demanded Rep. William Broomfield. "It will be used against Malaysia." "We hope not," said Bundy. "When Sukarno leaves the scene, the military will probably take over. We want to keep the door open."

Broomfield continued to press the point, asking what "proof" the State Department had that the army leaders would be friendly to the United States. "We have hopes," was Bundy's reply. (Allen-Scott report -- Hall Syndicate, July 15, 1965]

Bundy's reticence to allay the fears of his less-informed colleagues seems to be the policy of top-level Administration personnel when questioned about Indonesia. As James Reston pointed out "Washington is being careful not to claim any credit" for the coup "but this does not mean that Washington had nothing to do with it." [New York Times, June 19, 1966] And former Secretary of Defense McNamara, who could have adopted an I-told-you-so attitude when reminded in the spring of 1966 by Senator Sparkman of earlier criticism of the military aid program, modestly limited his comment to "I think, in retrospect that the aid was well-justified."

By now, Zablocki must surely be convinced that it wasn't out of some idealistic urge or altruism that Washington tightened its connections with the Indonesian military. Since the takeover led by Generals Nasution and Suharto, Indonesia has moved into the American orbit. Final proof of this was the visit of the new Indonesian Foreign Minister, Adam Malik, to then President Johnson in

September of 1966. And on that trip, Malik also dropped in on Zablocki and personally reassured him that the new government was "friendly" to the United States.

HUMPHREY HAD AN OLD AND DEAR FRIEND

Malik's visit to the U.S. in September 1966 was the first by an Indonesian official of the "New Order." Columnist Marianne Means of the World Journal Tribune, after an exclusive interview with Malik wrote of his "friendship" with Hubert Humphrey. [WJT, Sept. 28, 1966]

Minneapolis -- A private plane carrying Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam Malik and three aides glided unobtrusively into Wold-Chamberlain airport here at 10 a.m. last Sunday on a mission of international significance.

Malik, the top civilian in the government of Gen. Suharto, which seized power last October from pro-Communist President Sukarno, was hurrying to a private rendezvous with Vice President Humphrey in his elegant Sheraton-Ritz suite.

Protocol was ignored, for Malik had a very special motive for the conference and the Vice President was forced to wedge the meeting into a crammed campaign schedule.

Malik, who is visiting this country to arrange Indonesia's reentry into the United Nations, later indicated in a private interview the reason for the journey -- the Vice President had played a heretofore secret, but important, role in encouraging the democratic forces in Indonesia.

Humphrey, then Senate Whip and a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, met Malik in 1963 at the ceremonial signing of the limited test ban treaty in Moscow. The men began to exchange messages, directly and through emissaries.

Humphrey conferred with President Kennedy, who authorized him to continue his unofficial personal contacts with the Indonesians and to urge them not to lose faith....

Thus the stage was set for their first face-to-face meeting in three years. During their talk, Malik assured the Vice President that Indonesia will use its efforts, slowly at first but inevitably, toward reducing Communist Chinese influence in Southeast Asia. Malik said one of the first steps envisioned is the development of a regional alliance with other non-Communist nations, such as Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia. Malik also stressed to the Vice President that U.S. resistance to Communist aggression in South Vietnam had given heart to the leaders of the Indonesia revolt.

As he left the suite, Malik paused on the doorsill: "Goodbye, my old and dear friend," he said softly.

This remarkable article tells us a good deal. First, that a high-ranking member of the U.S. government engaged for two years in subversion against the Republic of Indonesia, encouraging members of the military who were opposed to their country's policies. That when these elements finally seized power, with the "encouragement" of the mightiest nation on earth, and massacred up to a million people, the "friendship" between these two great "democrats" ripened. And that part of the payoff for the deal was a reversal of Indonesia's foreign policy to one of support for U.S. aggression in Southeast Asia.

Humphrey had an opportunity to pay Malik, and the ruling generals, a return visit in November of 1967. Whatever promises and mutual congratulations were made in his private talks with Malik and General Suharto remain in the "confidential" category. One can only guess. But Humphrey's concern lest people get "the wrong idea" about what happened in Indonesia did make it into the press. [New York Times. Nov. 5, 1967]

Vice President Humphrey opened his visit to Indonesia today by publicly denying reports that have aroused anti-American feeling among Jakarta's leaders. It is not true, he said, that the United States action in Vietnam touched off the overthrow of Indonesia's leftist ruler, President Sukarno.

Speaking to about 200 Americans at the United States Embassy, Mr. Humphrey urged them to consider the effects of their words and actions. He said, "We do not want it to appear that what happened here was because we made it happen. That is not true." Some Indonesians are reported to have taken umbrage over talk, apparently originating in government sources in Washington, that the United States had a great deal to do with the overthrow of President Sukarno because of its Vietnam action.

Mr. Humphrey took a cue from Marshall Green, the United States Ambassador here, who has been quietly fighting that opinion.

Mr. Green portrays the United States presence in Southeast Asia not as having directly set off the Sukarno overthrow, but rather as having provided a shield behind which anti-Communist forces here and elsewhere might effectively operate.

Various Communist and left-wing spokesmen here attributed the Sukarno overthrow to the Central Intelligence Agency. Last November, President Sukarno, still clinging to a morsel of power, made a speech in which he referred to Ambassador Green 26 times as an agent of the CIA. ...

Humphrey may consider the effects of **his** words and actions more carefully than his employees. But he still can't hide what everyone in Indonesia seems to know: that the U.S. government had a big hand in creating the present regime.

CHAPTERS [Index](#) [Intro](#) [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [Search](#)



[HOME PAGE](#) | [FREE TRIAL](#) | [JOIN WWP](#)

Your feedback is welcome
webweaver@workers.org

Copyright © 1998 workers.org

HOME
NEWSIndonesia
Index

Introduction

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

350 Years of Colonialism

Until the 1965 coup, Indonesia was one of the most dynamic leftward-moving countries in the non-socialist world. The Sukarno government took a number of bold steps in foreign policy that shocked the Western capitals and threatened to be infectious. Indonesia withdrew from both the UN and the Olympic games, declaring them to be dominated by imperialism, and started to set up rival international bodies. At the very moment that the right-wing coup was taking place, a conference against foreign military bases, which of course was aimed first and foremost at the U.S. with its 3,000 installations overseas, was in session in Djakarta.

These moves came at the urging and insistence of the masses, who were organized and highly class conscious. The PKI had three million members, and mass organizations that were influenced by the Communists encompassed some 20 million persons. Again and again, in bold militant street actions, the people demonstrated their opposition to imperialism in front of the U.S. mission in Djakarta and other large cities. From the beginning of 1965, workers in the oil and rubber properties owned by U.S. corporations began expropriating these holdings and putting them under workers' control.

The Indonesian people had every reason to fear foreign domination. Like the Vietnamese, they saw in recent years that the freedom they thought they had won from European colonialism was eroding away as U.S. businesses tightened their control on the economy and the American military presence became more obvious.

The idea of enduring another siege of economic oppression was unbearable to them. For of all the countries, outside of Africa, that had suffered from colonialism, Indonesia was without a doubt plundered the most ferociously. When the Indonesian masses finally were able to declare their political independence, the rich archipelago was one of the most impoverished areas on earth.

ONE DOCTOR FOR EVERY 60,000 PEOPLE

Reba Lewis, author of *Indonesia: Troubled Paradise*, tells how when she and her husband, a doctor with the World Health Organization, decided to move to Indonesia in 1957 from his post in India, there was only one doctor for every 60,000 people. In India, which was itself a land full of beggars, struggling to emerge from the yoke of colonialism, there was at this time one doctor for every 6,000 people.

In *Western Enterprise in Indonesia and Malaya*, a British economic history by no means sympathetic to the Indonesian revolution or its national aspirations, authors G.C. Allan and Audrey Donnithorne remark, "In 1940 only 240 Indonesian students graduated from the high schools and only 37 from the colleges. In that year out of over 3,000 higher civil servants there were only 221 Indonesians, and even in the middle ranks a larger number of posts were held by Europeans and Eurasians, who counted as Dutch."

By 1945, Mrs. Lewis tells us, 93 per cent of the people were still illiterate. After 350 years of colonial domination, there were only a hundred Indonesian

physicians; less than a hundred Indonesian engineers; and in a nation dependent upon the efficiency of its land productivity, only ten Indonesian agricultural experts.

We have been told ad nauseam by the bourgeois press that Indonesia's economy, crippled by inflation and barely able to keep pace with the population growth, got that way because of Sukarno's extravagance in building sports palaces, mass auditoriums, and playing host to various congresses of Afro-Asian peoples. But the figures just quoted on the heritage of colonialism, and the following information, tell a different story.

DUTCH DEVELOPED VAST ESTATES

During the long period of colonial rule, the Indonesian economy fell more completely under the control of the -- the Dutch, and for a brief period the British -- than almost any other territory. Unlike China and Japan, where the European powers imposed their will mainly through commerce, the Indonesian economy was taken over and completely reorganized.

Vast estates were established by the Dutch East India Company, later to be held under the direct control of the Dutch crown. What had begun as the spice trade under early Portuguese merchants soon became a diversified system of agriculture. Many new crops in demand on the world market were introduced into Indonesia. Coffee, tea, sugar, indigo and spices became major exports, but instead of being produced by individual small farmers, they were cultivated on huge estates, mainly on Java.

Changing conditions in Europe deeply affected Indonesia's development; indeed, the destiny of the Indonesian people was completely in the hands of the men making decisions in the European capitals. In periods of crisis in Europe, the tempo of production in Indonesia declined sharply. Even in those days, when months of long sea voyages separated areas on opposite sides of the earth, the thin line of Dutch and British trading vessels plowing the waters between kept a stranglehold on Indonesian life.

When Britain occupied the Dutch settlements on Indonesia in 1811, and held them for five years under the governorship of Stamford Raffles, it was because Holland had moved into the French orbit during the Napoleonic Wars.

In this brief period of British control, the Dutch crown's monopoly over exploitation of Indonesia, which had already suffered a mortal blow with the demise of the Dutch East India Company in 1800, was brought to a decisive end. Raffles, who in effect introduced an "Open Door" policy in Indonesia, made certain reforms under the name of "economic liberalism" which, in his own words, were a prescription "by the establishment of a free and unrestricted commercial intercourse to draw forth their resources while we improve our own."

The Treaty of London, concluded between Britain and Holland in 1824, gave the former the Malayan Peninsula and assured the continuation of Dutch rule over Indonesia. But the British lion already had his paw well into the opened door, and both powers from then on intensified their exploitation of the Indonesian people and land.

U.S. ENTRY BEGAN WITH STANDARD OIL

Perhaps this is the place to pause for a minute and take a look at America's historical interest in Indonesia.

The U.S. became involved in Indonesia, which was then the Netherlands East Indies, both economically and strategically in the early 1900s. At the turn of the century, the Standard Oil Company tried to penetrate the monopoly on Indonesian oil held by Royal Dutch. Royal Dutch's Indonesian wells had enabled it to cut into some of Standard's Asian markets. In return, the U.S. giant started a price war against Royal Dutch that nearly put the company out of business.

The merger of Royal Dutch with Shell in 1907 saved these Dutch and British concerns from going under financially, but they could not keep Standard out of Indonesia much longer, and in 1912 Rockefeller was permitted to form an Indonesian subsidiary, which began mining oil in Central Java in 1914. It was to the great advantage of the powerful U.S. corporation that both Britain and Holland were preoccupied in the war raging across the European continent at the time, and could no longer afford to fight the incursions of their main rival.

World War I also provided the opportunity for the U.S. to move into rubber production in Indonesia. Like oil, rubber had been exclusively produced by Dutch and British concerns, which had alternated as colonial powers in this part of the world for some three hundred years. But the decline of European capital, that became so dramatically apparent with the outbreak of the war, and the colossal rise of the new young industrial giant across the Atlantic, meant an end to their imperial monopolies once and for all.

By 1914, Goodyear Tire and Rubber had already opened estates in Sumatra, and the U.S. Rubber Company, through its subsidiary the Holland-Amerika Plantege Mij., had acquired 80,000 acres of land suitable for rubber production. This move brought the largest rubber estates in the world under a single ownership.

During the postwar period and then the Depression, the holdings of U.S. companies in Indonesia were expanded and consolidated.

By the 1930s U.S. imperialism had already developed a global appetite, and the coming bloody clash with Japan for hegemony in the Pacific was in the making. The Second World War was to mark the end of the centuries-old European colonial regimes, especially in the Far East, but both Japan and the U.S. looked on a war in Asia as the opportunity for opening up new empires.

A KEY PRIZE IN WORLD WAR II

Indonesia, with a population at the time of around 80 million and natural resources ranked fifth in the world, was no small prize in the struggle. While both Japan and the U.S. had their sights fixed primarily on China, the memorable battles fought in the South Pacific that proved so costly in American and Japanese lives show the great strategic and economic importance attached to this area even then.

Shortly after the war it became clear that the Chinese Revolution had irreversibly removed that Asian giant from the capitalist market. The U.S., no doubt feeling its defeat of Japan somewhat a Pyrrhic victory when the major prize remained unattainable, was forced to shift its

attention elsewhere.

Southeast Asia, both as the gateway to the Indian Ocean and as an area rich in valuable materials, emerged as a primary target in Washington's global strategy. U.S. support for the French counter-revolutionary war in Indochina began pouring in, until by the time of the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, American dollars and supplies were paying for 80 per cent of the war.

To students of the Viet Nam War, much of this is now well known. But what has been largely neglected is the role that Indonesia's riches played in shaping the Eisenhower Administration's thinking in this crucial period.

It may be remembered that in his oft-quoted remarks to the Governors' Conference in 1953, when Eisenhower was explaining to these business-minded politicians why it was to the advantage of the U.S. to pay for the French war, it was the "rich empire of Indonesia" that lay at the crux of the matter.

Now let us assume that we lose Indochina. If Indochina goes, several things happen right away. The Malay peninsula, the last little bit of land hanging on down there, would be scarcely defensible. The tin and tungsten we so greatly value from that area would cease coming, but all India would be outflanked.

Burma would be in no position for defense.... All of that position around there is very ominous to the United States, because finally if we lost all that, how would the free world hold the rich empire of Indonesia?

So you see, somewhere along the line, this must be blocked and it must be blocked now, and that is what we are trying to do.

So when the U.S. votes \$400 million to help that war [in Indochina], we are not voting a giveaway program. We are voting for the cheapest way that we can prevent the occurrence of something that would be of a most terrible significance in the United States of America, our security, our power and ability to get certain things we need from the riches of the Indonesian territory and from Southeast Asia.

AFTER THE WAR: U.S. DOMINANT IN ASIA

In the period before World War II, the major obstacle to further expansion of U.S. economic interests in Indonesia was the tight control of the Dutch overlords. American corporations fought Dutch groups in international price wars, etc. and most often the superior industrial and marketing capability of firms like Standard Oil gave the U.S. the upper hand. But Wall Street was held back in any efforts to make a massive push into Asia at that time by the fact that the area as a whole was still held tightly by the European colonial powers -- although in growing competition with Japan.

After the war, the situation was entirely different. The once proud empires of Europe were licking their wounds, entirely dependent upon handouts from the U.S., which had emerged from the war unscathed. Revolutionary

resistance movements that had taken up arms against the Axis powers threatened the European "democracies," both in the colonies and at home -- the ruling classes had everything they could do to prevent their own overthrow. It was no time to raise and equip an expeditionary force.

This is not to say that, even then, they didn't try. The French sent troops to Indochina, the Dutch tried to force the Indonesian people to submit once again, and British soldiers went into Malaya to crush the people's movement. But in every case, these imperialist powers were only shadows of their former selves, dependent for their stability at home on the Marshall Plan, and relying on the U.S. to foot a growing amount of the military bill for these foreign adventures.

Was Washington altruistically helping its allies regain their former possessions, or did it have something else in mind?

The course of the 20-year Viet Nam War should clear up all doubts on this score. As Eisenhower so candidly admitted, the U.S. took over a larger and larger share of the expenses of these counter-revolutionary wars because its own interests were at stake. It hoped to see Britain, France and Holland take on the brunt of smashing the national liberation movements. Then, when both sides were exhausted, the U.S. would move in and finish the job -- administering over the withdrawal of the expeditionary troops, as in Viet Nam, while laying the basis for its own accession to the position of foreign overlord.

THE INDONESIAN STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

That Washington underestimated the strength of the Vietnamese popular forces is now well known. But what happened in Indonesia in this postwar period?

With the defeat of the Japanese, power in Indonesia was in the hands of the nationalist forces. On August 17, 1945, Sukarno proclaimed the Republic of Indonesia, claiming at last the independence that the people had fought so long for. From a revolutionary point of view, the Dutch had never had any right to rule the people of Indonesia. But now, even from a legal point of view, the Dutch, by surrendering to the Japanese in 1942, had in effect forfeited any claim to Indonesia. Great bitterness existed among the Indonesians, who felt that the Dutch had allowed the Japanese imperialists to take over without a fight rather than arm the Indonesian people.

But the Dutch in 1945 were not so willing to give back Indonesia to its own people as they had been to make a deal with Japan. For four years, intermittent warfare was waged as the Dutch made a last effort to reconquer their former colony.

When the Japanese surrendered, the Dutch had no troops in Southeast Asia. They frantically ordered that Indonesia be kept under Japanese command until the British could get there. On the arrival of Lord Mountbatten, he also instructed the Japanese not to hand over any administrative functions to the newly proclaimed Republic, and soon the British were using Japanese troops in combat against the Indonesian patriots.

This situation provoked widespread protest throughout Asia, and even in Australia the dock workers refused to load any munitions that might be used against the

Indonesians.

In November 1946, the Dutch signed the Lenggadjati Agreement, recognizing the de facto authority of the Republic over Java, Madura and Sumatra and agreeing that Dutch and Allied troops should gradually be evacuated. It also stipulated that by January 1, 1949, a United States of Indonesia encompassing all the islands of the archipelago was to come into existence.

However, from the moment of signing this agreement, the Dutch worked feverishly to destroy the Republic. They started to set up puppet states under various feudal lords, at first on the outer islands but eventually in the territory they had supposedly recognized as free. They also continued a blockade of Java, and most important, began to build up, rather than phase out, their troop strength.

By May 1947, there were 110,000 Dutch soldiers stationed within the Republic. At midnight on May 27th, they struck against the Indonesian armed forces. While they used bombers, cannons and tanks against the ill-armed Indonesian troops, they called the defensive measures of these people fighting for independence "atrocities."

The Indonesians had expected an American occupation when the war was over, and believed so firmly in the U.S. as a "liberator" that they patterned their first statement of freedom after the U.S. Declaration of Independence. To welcome the U.S. troops that never arrived, they hung out posters containing quotations from the Declaration of Independence and Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Even after they saw that they would have to fight the combined forces of the Dutch and British, who were using Japanese troops, they still believed that U.S. intervention would help them gain their freedom. Sukarno made a radio appeal to the U.S. to be an arbiter in the fall of 1945, but there was no answer from Washington.

Still hoping for help, a group of Indonesian women even set out for the United States to appeal to the Daughters of the American Revolution, thinking these ladies would understand their revolution! But disillusionment was not long in coming.

The U.S. strategy was to avoid a definite victory on either side, hoping to draw out the struggle until both Holland and the Republican forces were worn out. When the Dutch first moved to destroy the Republic and build back their own strength in Indonesia, the U.S. turned its back to any appeals for help from Sukarno. But later, as the Dutch military position improved and it seemed that they had a chance of reinstating colonial rule, the U.S. moved to work out a compromise. In January 1948, a new agreement between the Netherlands and the Republic was signed on board the U.S.S. Renville. The Renville Agreement legitimized the recent conquests of the Dutch, who by now controlled half the sugar mills in Java, 75 per cent of its rubber, 65 per cent of its coffee, 90 per cent of the tea and the rich oil fields of Sumatra.

This temporizing agreement, presided over by the U.S., lasted less than a year. In the meantime, the Dutch strove feverishly to set up more puppet states and continued their military build-up. But the movement for independence was also growing, and by the end of the year the Dutch felt compelled to make a do-or-die move.

In a lightning attack on December 19, Dutch paratroops

seized the Republican capital at Jogjakarta, capturing Sukarno and other government leaders. It appeared the Republic was doomed.

However, the real strength of the independence movement lay not in Jogjakarta but in the countless hamlets and towns throughout the archipelago where armed guerrillas had been organized. The attack had completely exposed the Dutch intention to restore their colonial stranglehold. Their puppet states lost any control over the masses, and the net effect of the blitzkrieg was to weaken the overall Dutch position even more. Within six months, the Dutch were forced to restore the Republican government and enter into a series of negotiations which culminated in final independence.

U.S. SUBVERSION BEGINS

The Dutch formally relinquished their colonial status at the Round Table Conference at The Hague in 1949. They did not do so, however, without exacting some very serious concessions from the Indonesian government, whose Prime Minister at the time was the reactionary Mohammed Hatta -- later to become an outright enemy of Sukarno and leader of the CIA-backed secessionist movement in 1958.

Hatta agreed to the restoration of "broad avenues of [Dutch] economic power over Indonesia, such as rights, concessions and licenses for the operation of existing and new enterprises and estates. Furthermore, the Indonesian Government was forced to take over the debts of the Netherlands East Indies Government, which amounted to more than a billion dollars, and which, in effect, meant that the Indonesians were paying for the Dutch military attack which had been launched against them."

[*Indonesia: Troubled Paradise*, p. 95] In 1950, Indonesia finally abrogated this deal and tried to make further steps toward real sovereignty, although these outrageous concessions to the Dutch had already helped to further weaken its terribly crippled economy.

It was at the Round Table Conference in 1949 that the first inkling could be seen of the role that the U.S. would later play in Indonesia's politics. At the urging of the U.S. representative, Indonesia reluctantly agreed that the status of Irian Barat, the huge western portion of the island of New Guinea, would be held in abeyance for the time being, to be settled by negotiations within a couple of years.

Irian Barat, or West Irian, was one of the territories held by the Dutch for hundreds of years as part of the Netherlands East Indies. Although sparsely populated, its spectacular scenery and huge area (largely unexplored even to the present day) is suspected to contain vast resources of mineral wealth. The tremendous chain known as the Owen Stanley Mountains, containing peaks of over 15,000 feet rising within sight of the sea, is a geological formation that has already attracted the attention of prospectors for several U.S. mining concerns, while other U.S. firms are drilling for offshore oil.

The Dutch continued to maintain control over this part of Indonesia until 1962, when Irian Barat was taken over by a United Nations administration. The U.S., first at The Hague in 1949 and again in the early sixties, "mediated" the dispute in a way calculated to weaken the Indonesian government.

Theodore Sorensen, in his book, *Kennedy*, touches briefly but revealingly on the U.S. role as mediator in this conflict:

. . . A temporary success of sorts was registered in 1962 in the territory of West New Guinea, the subject of a bitter dispute between the Netherlands and Indonesia. To avoid a war which the Dutch had no desire to fight and which the Indonesians had every intention of winning with massive Soviet backing -- and to strengthen the position of the Indonesian moderates, the only hope against an ultimate Communist takeover in that country -- Kennedy made available the brilliant diplomatic services of Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker as a UN mediator. [p. 580]

The word "moderates" can be changed to read "fascist butchers," since the forces the U.S. hoped to bolster have now revealed their true character. And the "brilliant" Ellsworth Bunker is now known to the world as the man who presided over the U.S. occupation of the Dominican Republic and, as Ambassador to South Viet Nam, is presently making a last-ditch effort to prevent the Vietnamese liberation forces from finally wresting their country out of the hands of foreign imperialists.

More light on the U.S. "mediation" of this question is shed in Arthur Schlesinger's biography of Kennedy, *A Thousand Days*.

. . . The President regarded Indonesia, this country of a hundred million people, so rich in oil, tin and rubber, as one of the potentially significant nations of Asia. He was anxious to slow up its drift toward the communist bloc; he knew that Sukarno was already turning to Moscow to get the military equipment necessary for invasion. And he was also anxious to strengthen the anti-communist forces, especially in the army.... He was therefore immediately responsive when Robert Komer proposed that the United States take the initiative in trying to settle the West New Guinea argument before it blew up into a crisis. [p. 533]

CIA PRESIDED OVER WEST IRIAN TALKS

And who is Robert Komer? Just a leading CIA agent, who ran the notorious pacification program in Viet Nam. His recent appointment to be Ambassador to Turkey touched off riotous demonstrations there, while the Turkish press dubbed him "Robert the Butcher."

Schlesinger also, in agreement with Sorensen, explains that Washington's motive for intervening was because they felt the Dutch could not win a war over West Irian. "The only alternative to [settlement] was war, and the President was sure that the Dutch, having declined to fight over Java and Sumatra, would hardly go to war over this last barren fragment of their Pacific empire."

In the spring of 1962, negotiations began in Middleburg, Virginia, between the Indonesians and the Dutch with Ellsworth Bunker "sitting in." After five months of talks, an agreement was reached in which the UN would be an interim administrator while sovereignty passed over (theoretically) from the Dutch to the Indonesians. Then

the question would finally be settled in a referendum to be held in 1969 (20 years after The Hague Conference!).

But in 1969 the U.S. was no longer worried about Irian Barat becoming part of Indonesia, since the Djakarta puppets had made its rich mineral deposits and strategic potential completely open for exploitation by Wall Street and the Pentagon.

The U.S. part in the negotiations over New Guinea had another function in addition to preventing a possible line-up in which the U.S. would be forced to militarily intervene on the side of the Dutch.

It also opened doors for other contacts with the Indonesian government, doors that had been closed since 1958. As Schlesinger put it, "Kennedy now moved to take advantage of the improved atmosphere.... When private American oil contracts were up for renegotiation and Sukarno threatened restrictive measures, Kennedy sent out Wilson Wyatt . . . to conduct negotiations for new contracts, a mission which Wyatt discharged with notable dispatch and success." [p. 535]

The amazing thing about this success for U.S. imperialist diplomacy is that it occurred only a few years after this same country -- the U.S. -- had been caught red-handed in an attempt to overthrow the Indonesian government. And yet Washington managed to become a key figure in negotiations that presumably had nothing to do with the U.S.! But this triumph of imperialist maneuvering and trickery had much less to do with the "brilliance" of Ellsworth Bunker and others than it did with the hard facts of life in Indonesia. Raped by the Dutch for 350 years and then saddled with a robbers' "peace" by The Hague agreements, Indonesia needed foreign exchange so desperately that its nationalist government, no matter how much it hated the imperialists, was still granting them economic concessions in 1962 and later.

CHAPTERS [Index](#) [Intro](#) [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [Search](#)

[HOME PAGE](#) | [FREE TRIAL](#) | [JOIN WWP](#)

Your feedback is welcome
webweaver@workers.org

Copyright © 1998 workers.org

WW

HOME
NEWS

Indonesia
Index

Introduction

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

U.S. Corporations Arrive for the Feast

After twenty-five years of fighting the Japanese, the Dutch and the U.S. colonialists, and after having begun a program of virtual expropriation of some of the foreign holdings of Indonesia's natural wealth, the country was again opened to outright colonial exploitation.

The 1965 coup and the subsequent slaughter of the anti-colonialists smoothed the way for many U.S. companies to come back during 1966. But it was not until January 1967 after the generals' clique was firmly consolidated, that the "foreign investments law" was passed. This law opened the door legally, as well as politically and militarily, to the foreign plunderers. It specifically guaranteed all U.S. investors against losses due to "war, revolution or insurrection."

This, of course, was what the coup was really all about. Stories about "natives running amok" and "religious Javanese" being "shocked by Communist atheism" were planted in the cynical U.S. and world imperialist press to cover up what was simply a drive by the U.S. master-butchers to get their plantations, oil wells, banks and mines back -- with interest.

The coup did give them the bonus of political control over a tremendous section of the South Pacific and another wedge into Southeast Asia, and this was fundamental for the long-range interest of U.S. imperialism as a whole. But U.S. big business, which so directly influences Washington, is also noted for its pragmatism -- for keeping its eye on the ball of immediate profit. And there was plenty of profit to be made in Indonesia, once the Sukarno government, the Communists and the revolutionary nationalists were defeated.

The familiar old robbers are now back at the feast. Unilever, the U.S. and British makers of Palmolive and Lux, have two soap and edible fat plants in the islands and drain off most of the palm oil to fatten their own profits. Uniroyal, another U.S. international giant (formerly United States Rubber), has a 54,000-acre rubber plantation and a latex plant in Java. Union Carbide, Singer Sewing Machine and National Cash Register have gotten their properties back.

But the U.S. penetration has redoubled since the coup and shows signs of being stepped up far higher in the light of the open door it has achieved by the coup. Now Eastern Airlines has got in to share the profits with Garuda (Indonesian) Airlines; Mobil Oil has secured oil exploration rights for 450,000 acres on Sumatra as well as purchase of the already existing Asamera Oil Company. Freeport Sulphur recently got a \$75 million contract for exploiting West Irian copper. It paid a sum equal to about 70 cents for each Indonesian for the privilege.

Freeport explored West Irian for copper in 1968 and from its ore samples concluded there was about 4 per cent copper in the ore. This is almost 20 times as rich as ores now found in Arizona and Utah, where the copper companies have been making profits for years. The copper deposits in the West Irian area alone are estimated at over 33 million tons. At 20 cents a pound (refined copper has been selling from 50 to 70 cents a pound wholesale this year), the total value of this find would be equal to about

\$1,000 for every man, woman and child in Indonesia.
(The Indonesian per capita income is \$82 a year.)

But copper is only a small part of the tremendous natural wealth of the country. Indonesia is considered to be the fifth richest country in the world in natural resources. U.S. Steel expects to get 20,000 tons of nickel a year from West Irian and Wago Island, plus an unstated amount of valuable cobalt as a "by-product." International Nickel hopes to get an equal amount, and a Japanese company now expects to find 50 million tons of the stuff. (Japanese imperialism, which killed so many U.S. -- and Japanese -- youths in 1941-45 shares the feast with U.S. imperialism which has practically invited its former enemy to the table in order to keep it from challenging other U.S. interests.)

How do the Indonesian masses receive these companies when they enter or reenter the islands? Do the people welcome them as benevolent "developers" of their land?

Not exactly.

Twenty years ago, the infamous Alfred Krupp, the most powerful financial backer of the Hitler regime, was convicted and condemned at Nuremberg for one of the most hated of all the crimes perpetrated by the Nazis -- the use of concentration camp prisoners as slave laborers in the plants and mines belonging to the corporate backers of German fascism.

That was in 1947.

On February 19, 1967, at 6:30 p.m. an ominous replica of the grim World War II newsreels flashed briefly across the television screen during a nationwide broadcast by the National Broadcasting Company.

The narrator of the NBC Sunday documentary, referring to the picture on the screen, described a group of workers bent over in a field under the watchful eyes of armed soldiers. The time was just previous to the broadcast. The place was Indonesia. The workers were prisoners of the U.S.-backed Indonesian Army and the rubber plantation on which they were working was recently returned to the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company.

The narrator explained the scene:

Bad as things are in Indonesia, one positive fact is known. Indonesia has a fabulous potential wealth in natural resources and the New Order [the fascist regime headed by pro-U.S. General Suharto] wants it exploited. So they are returning the private properties expropriated by Sukarno's regime. Goodyear's Sumatran rubber empire is an example. It was seized [by the rubber workers] in retaliation for U.S. aggression in Vietnam in 1965. The rubber workers union was Communist-run, so after the coup many of them were killed or imprisoned. Some of the survivors, you see them here, still work the rubber -- but this time as prisoners, and at gunpoint.

As the commentator described the crime depicted on the screen, the tone of condemnation associated with Nuremberg was entirely missing. In its place was a definite sense of grim triumph! The narration continued:

The New Order wants Goodyear back. They,

like dozens of other foreign capitalists, are anxious to return because the wealth is there - not just rubber, but oil, tin, lumber, spices, almost everything.

The scene, as brief as it was ghastly, was sandwiched into a vicious, hour-long anti-Communist propaganda film worthy of Goebbels. NBC designed the film as an introduction for the U.S. population to the "New Order" in Indonesia -- the CIA-inspired military usurpers who have ruled the country by terror since the coup of October 1, 1965.

Although the film completely covered up the role of the U.S. in the Indonesian massacre of a million people, nevertheless the quick shot of slaves working on the Goodyear plantation at gunpoint was highly significant. At one and the same time, it revealed the thoroughly fascist character of the pro-U.S. regime in Djakarta, clearly implicated the prime mover behind the counter-revolution (the U.S. monopolies), and dramatized the fundamental objective of Washington's long standing policy in Indonesia (and all Asia) -- the enslavement of the oppressed for the benefit of U.S. big business.

In keeping with the general line of U.S. propaganda on Indonesian events, NBC tried to depict the bloody victory of the reactionary officer corps as an unlooked-for gift which dropped unexpectedly into the lap of Washington.

The narrator deliberately omitted the fact that the soldiers holding the guns on the Goodyear plantation slaves were under orders from All-Sumatran Defense Commander Lieutenant-General Achmad Junus Mokoginta who was graduated from the United States Army Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

Nor was it mentioned that Mokoginta is under the discipline of the Indonesian High Command in Djakarta, which the U.S. spent \$53 million to "train" from 1952 to 1965. (The \$53 million is a public figure. CIA disbursements are classified.)

When it was baldly stated by U.S. news managers that the "New Order wants Goodyear back," this was very true. But what was concealed, for fear of uncovering Washington's primary role in the massacre of a million people, is that the Suharto regime is a hired creation of the U.S. government and "wants" only what it is paid to want.

POLITICAL PRISONERS "DYING LIKE FLIES"

Alex Campbell, managing editor of the *New Republic*, got a glimpse of the New Order when he visited Indonesia in the spring of 1969. Conditions hadn't changed much since the NBC documentary.

The government plans to send some 60,000 (political prisoners) to forced labor on rubber plantations in Borneo. Perhaps 10,000 have already gone there. They are said to be dying like flies. Meanwhile those still in the camps may be slowly dying of starvation....

Many of those plantations are property of the U.S. Rubber Company and Goodyear.

All Indonesians have to carry identification cards that contain information about race, religion and occupation. The cards of the

relatives of political detainees bear in addition a warning that they are suspected of having Communist sympathies. This usually means that they are refused jobs, or that they soon lose the jobs they have.... The punishment of the children is to be refused admission to schools.... Meanwhile, new suspects continue to be arrested and put in prison or otherwise disposed of....

The authorities recently pounced on a poverty-stricken area in central Java, encircled it with troops and then carted off some hundreds or perhaps thousands of persons who were charged with planning another armed uprising....

Campbell also described the life style of one of the generals who became the head of Pertamina, the state oil and mining monopoly, after the coup.

The critics of General Sutowo say that a good deal of the oil money is already finding its way into his own treasury. His daughter's costly wedding was the talk of Djakarta in March. It continued for days, there were thousands of guests, and the general had closed-circuit television installed into his huge home, as the only way by which he could watch the entire proceedings. The father of the groom artlessly exclaimed, "I did not realize my son was marrying a princess!"

General Sutowo is living the life of a racketeer who has the "protection" of even more powerful bandits -- the U.S. Seventh Fleet. He earned his payoff by opening Indonesia up to U.S. oil companies. But his fabulous extravagance -- by Indonesian standards -- is peanuts compared with the fortunes being amassed by American oil speculators.

The Suharto regime has thrown open thousands of square miles of offshore oil fields to foreign exploitation. Atlantic Richfield, Phillips, Mobil Oil, Union Carbide, Tenneco and a Japanese and an Italian company all came in to work this bonanza.

A share of the Natomas Company, a U.S. company mining Indonesian oil, was listed on the New York Stock Exchange for \$16 in 1968. By the summer of 1969, when stock prices generally were slumping to new lows, Natomas had soared to \$114.

Alcoa, the great U.S. aluminum monopoly (Aluminum Corporation of America), the preserve of the fabulously wealthy Mellons of Pittsburgh, is ransacking the whole Indonesian archipelago for bauxite (aluminum ore) and intends to dig mines and build refineries as it has done in Africa, Australia and America. So lush are the prospects for this lushest of companies that it expects to spend no less than \$100 million in exploration and initial installations of equipment. And the resulting "investment" will be simply the means for transferring Indonesia's aluminum wealth into the coffers of Pittsburgh and Wall Street banks. "The agreement (between Alcoa and the puppet generals) provides for one of the biggest single investments in Indonesia outside of long term oil operations," said the Associated Press in March, 1969.

With Chase Manhattan being the generals' "friend" in Djakarta and with Holiday Inns taking over Sukarno's

presidential palace, it is hardly surprising that imperialism's most suave and presently successful salesman, Richard M. Nixon himself, sat down to dinner with his butcher-assistant General Suharto in July of 1969 and applauded him amid the cheers and approval of the U.S. press.

"Indonesia is the great prize of American diplomacy in Asia," wrote New York Times reporter Max Frankel from Djakarta right after the Nixon-Suharto dinner. And he added that during the bash, Nixon was "cheerfully rattling off statistics of Indonesia's economic potential, soaking up the cheers of the crowd and offering tributes to independence and democracy."

While no Times man could possibly have written these words without smiling to himself or drowning his cynicism in liquor, he did nevertheless let slip one piece of real information when he used the word "prize" in relation to the 110 million-strong country. Since when is a "prize" -- a piece of booty -- independent? By his choice of words, the Times man betrayed his utter contempt for Nixon's puppet allies.

Yes. Indonesia is today a "democracy" where hundreds of thousands of political prisoners face slow death, where power was seized by a handful of corrupt military men who wiped out the mass organizations, executed or jailed every member of Sukarno's cabinet, discarded the constitution and keep the President under house arrest; it is an "independent" regime that is auctioning off its people and natural resources to the lords of international finance.

Nixon considers Indonesia a model country now, and points to its violent anti-communist turn as a redeeming effect of the U.S. war against Viet Nam. He is trying to console the banks and corporations that have "lost" Viet Nam with the prospect of Indonesia's untold wealth and 110 million people who will work for starvation wages.

Nixon talked about Indonesia's "strategic geographical significance and enormous if unrealized economic potential." At one point he turned to General Suharto, who usurped the Presidency, and said, "The people of the United States wish to share with you in this adventure in progress."

Actually, the Yankees have already begun arriving in Djakarta to nail down their "share" of the "prize." These just plain folks are the representatives of Sinclair Oil, Freeport Sulphur, U.S. Rubber, Eastern Airlines, Chase Manhattan Bank and scores of other U.S. corporations that thrive on the "independence and democracy" spawned by fascist butchery.

U.S. "aid" had of course been scaled down considerably during Sukarno's shift toward complete nationalization of U.S. companies. And as we pointed out, Washington restricted itself mostly to aiding the generals and the extreme right wing so as to get back into the country with its previous money-making machinery for Wall Street.

It can be said categorically that all U.S. aid to any country whatsoever is given with the aim of getting profits for U.S. big business in one way or another. Sometimes, it is more sophisticated and indirect, as in the case of Yugoslavia and Rumania, where the benefits to U.S. capital are more diffused, less defined and not of **an immediate** monetary character. Marshall Plan aid was

of a dual character, that is, it helped keep Europe from communism by keeping it on a kind of dole, and it also gave enormous orders to U.S. industry to send goods to Europe.

By and large the "aid" is directly connected with the process of funneling back the wealth of the "aided" country to the treasuries of the United States capitalists. Thus a U.S.-built railroad to the middle of Africa becomes an instrument to bring the products of the interior to the seashore. And a modern U.S.-built mechanized dock at the shore becomes the means of transferring those products to the holds of U.S. ships.

Railroads and docks are not in and of themselves a bad thing. In fact they are essential to modern living. They make human labor far more productive. And every underdeveloped country wants to have its share of them and a lot of other machinery, too. But when some other country owns the plantations which send their goods to the docks on the railroads, when that same foreign country owns the mines which load their precious metals on the railroads, and the factories which pile their commodities on the railroads, then the whole population of the host country is only robbed that much more systematically and efficiently by the country which "aided" the colony with modern machinery.

When Sukarno said to the U.S. Ambassador sometime in 1965 -- before the coup -- "To hell with your aid!" he really meant: "To hell with your attempts to make us your colony!" The U.S. reactionaries who are always preaching against sending "aid" to foreign countries, at the time revealed the demagogic, lying character of their position when they failed to make very much noise about Sukarno's defiance or compliment him for being independent and self-reliant!

HOW U.S. "AID" WORKED

The former Ambassador of Indonesia to Cuba, A.M. Hanafi, wrote in a Letter to the American People, sent in care of YAWF and published in the Partisan, Vol. 3, No. 2, a short explanation of how this "aid" from imperialism worked in the case of Indonesia:

Some time ago, as a member of the International Monetary Fund, Indonesia was offered credit under the Marshall Plan. With that credit we had to buy, directly or indirectly, a lot of American products.

This in itself was no great cause for regret, but what happened after we got those millions of dollars credit? There was a steady and ever-increasing inflation which, cyclically, caused an even greater need for more credit, and so on, until an extremely embarrassing situation was reached. The "textbook thinker" of the Indonesian Government agreed, following the advice of the administrators of the International Monetary Fund, to invite Hjalmar Schacht, one of Hitler's top economists, to advise us how to get out of our financial difficulties. This was done, over the protest of the mass organizations, and the black market for dollars soared to fantastic heights.

It was said that Government officials were

corrupt, but I think that Mr. Bill Palmer and certain officials of the U.S. Embassy in Djakarta knew far better even than President Sukarno who among the Indonesians were corruptible and who were not. And who, you may ask, is Mr. Bill Palmer? As the Chief of the American Moving Picture Association in Indonesia (AMPAI), he used his ostensible position as a distributor of movies being shown in theaters throughout the nation to control millions upon millions of rupiahs in daily circulation. After some time we smelled a rat and suspected that he was one of the CIA's agents in Indonesia.

As a result, in 1965 the revolutionary youth and the police raided his mountain home in Tjipajung, some 45 miles from Djakarta; they found CIA documents and other evidence that Palmer was the head of a network of counterrevolutionaries. The AMPAI was then taken over by the Government, the importation of movies from the United States was ordered stopped, and Bill Palmer was sent home. Adam Malik, then Minister of Trade, however, managed to continue to bring in American movies. It should be stated that our attempt to block these movies was not based on any anti-American feelings, but rather grew from our experience that everything that emanated from the United States was being used as a basis for subversive activity.

I have learned, too, from my own experience, exactly what U.S. credit means. I learned this while serving as Minister for People's Mobilization for Development, from 1957 to 1959. The United States offered us \$350 million in credit -- in installments, and with many strings attached, some explicit and others implicit. Among other things, the United States demanded that three Cabinet Ministers be replaced -- Minister of Information Sudibjo, Minister of Veterans' Affairs Chaerul Saleh, and I. President Sukarno asked me to resign "in the interests of the nation," and I told him yes, I would gladly be an ordinary citizen again if the credit of \$350 million were dependent on my exit from the Cabinet. I was willing to resign, I said, even without any political reasons, but it might be difficult to explain my resignation to the people, because everyone knew that the decisions I had made as Minister had benefitted the country.

But I had had enough, and I didn't want to be involved in any more political compromises. (As an aside, it may interest you to know that when President Sukarno formed his new Cabinet it was even more opposed to U.S. intervention than the old one had been, and included two top Communist leaders, Aidit and Njoto.) But why did the United States give such importance to our resignations? We three were strongly opposed to a new law on mining investments which was detrimental to Indonesia's best interests but favored those of

the United States.

So I think, dear friends, it is very understandable that, after we had uncovered many instances of U.S. subversive activities in Indonesia in the economic and political spheres, President Sukarno took a firm stand and told the United States where it could go with its aid. Unfortunately, Sukarno has had to pay for his courage, and with the counter-revolutionary coup d'etat that was effected by Nasution and Suharto and their fascists the idea of military junta which was first envisioned by the counter-revolutionary traitors of PRRI/PERMESTA was realized.

CHAPTERS [Index](#) [Intro](#) [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [Search](#)

[HOME PAGE](#) | [FREE TRIAL](#) | [JOIN WWP](#)

Your feedback is welcome
webweaver@workers.org

Copyright © 1998 workers.org

HOME
NEWSIndonesia
Index

Introduction

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

The "Left" Critics after the Fact

While the slaughter of Communists, nationalists and progressives of all sorts has been going on in Indonesia, what has been the reaction of the anti-imperialist forces in the rest of the world? Has the response of fraternal parties and movements been by any standards commensurate with the enormity of the crime committed against the Indonesian people?

In the United States, where all the major tendencies in the international working class movement are represented, the only demonstrations and rallies organized to protest the massacres have been those carried out by Youth Against War & Fascism (YAWF). Our organization demonstrated at the Indonesian Consulate first to expose the mass killings and again to demand the release of the political prisoners. In both these acts of protest, the role of U.S. imperialism in the bloody affair was emphasized.

Again, YAWF was the only voice of protest -- if only from the visitors' gallery -- when Indonesia was readmitted to the United Nations without debate. What would have been a routine item on the agenda was turned into a moment of intense struggle as guards rushed to eject demonstrators with accusing banners: "U.S. Puppets Slaughter One Million Indonesians!" In all the Western countries where parties do exist reflecting the different tendencies in the communist movement, it has been impossible for this writer to learn of any similar actions taken in solidarity with the Indonesian Communists, who have now been under the gun for over four years.

There has however been some space devoted to the question of Indonesia in the journals of quite a few of the parties in question. The monthly *Political Affairs* which is sympathetic to the positions taken by the U.S. Communist Party ran a series of articles entitled "Lessons from the Setback in Indonesia" in March-April-May of 1968. The series is introduced as a document issued by a tendency calling itself "The Marxist-Leninist Group of the Indonesian Communist Party."

The theses of this document and quite clearly those of the editors of *Political Affairs* as well, are that the September 30th Movement was "of a purely adventuristic nature," that it "failed to secure active support by the Party and working people and, therefore, stood aloof from progressive revolutionary doctrines" and that "a certain Party ... was responsible for turning the Indonesian Revolution into a gaming table for its political gambles."

REVISIONISTS STILL TALK OF PEACEFUL ROAD FOR INDONESIA

While criticizing the PKI for being both adventuristic and conciliatory and asking "how it could have happened" that a small group of leaders "got themselves involved in the September 30th Movement" when the Party was not prepared for armed struggle, the document sums up the "path ahead" without calling for the introduction of armed struggle against the fascist regime. Rather, it identifies the "right path" as the program adopted by the Fifth Congress of the PKI, which as elaborated in another section of this same document predicted that "A people's democracy in Indonesia can be attained by peaceful means."

This point is hammered home throughout the document, and the question of the future political development of the PKI is tied to the "struggle for peace and peaceful coexistence." The authors foresee mobilizing "the broad popular masses to form a peaceful front against imperialism."

Given this general ideological outlook, it should not then be too puzzling to note that nowhere in this quite lengthy document is there mention of the role of U.S. imperialism in the massacres. In spite of the present state of terror and military dictatorship in Indonesia and the war being fought just across the South China Sea in Viet Nam, this tendency clings to a program of "peaceful coexistence" and finds more evidence of Chinese responsibility for the defeat than U.S.

Another article, with the same essential shortcomings, this one written by a Soviet theorist named V. Viktorov, appeared December 1968 in *International Affairs*, published in Moscow. Entitled "Indonesia's Hour of Trial," it contains many important facts and figures on Indonesia's political and economic transformation since the coup. While reviewing the return of Dutch , published in Moscow. Entitled "Indonesia's Hour of Trial," it contains many important facts and figures on Indonesia's political and economic transformation since the coup. While reviewing the return of Dutch corporations, Indonesia's reentry into the International Monetary Fund, and the rule of the "Tokyo Club" of creditors who rescheduled Indonesia's debts in return for more favorable investment conditions, the article only vaguely mentions other "imperialists" who have recaptured Indonesia's mineral resources. The U.S., the largest imperialist power to benefit economically from the coup, remains nameless.

PLP, CP IGNORE U.S. ROLE IN COUP

The quarterly *World Revolution*, which is published by the U.S. Progressive Labor Party, ran in its January-March 1969 issue two documents issued by the Central Committee of the PKI. Both expound a new program adopted late in 1967. They are a very definite departure from the program of the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Party Congresses, ratified in 1954 and then revised in 1959 and 1962. These two documents strongly criticize the earlier stands of the PKI and solidarize the new PKI Central Committee with the Chinese Communist Party and its international line.

An introduction to these two documents was prepared by the editors of *World Revolution*. Their round-up on how the fascists were able to seize power criticizes the Aidit leadership, just about all of whom are now dead, for following a "Moscow line," stating that although the PKI began opposing Soviet revisionism in 1962, it still maintained "a domestic revisionist program." In the opinion of PLP, it was the policy currently advocated by the "Moscow-liners ... that was responsible for the murder of over 500,000 Indonesian communists and radicals by the Suharto-Nasution fascists." Reliance upon Sukarno, a "nationalist image," and wavering on whether or not to support the September 30th Movement led to the decisive defeat for the party and the masses. But the Soviet Union, according to this position, must be considered largely accountable because "Before, during and after the mass slaughter of communists by Nasution-Suharto the Soviets were the main source of supply for the fascist army. The Soviets even today provide this army with all our

emphasis) its equipment and spare parts, ammunition, fuel and instructors and advisors although this army has no one to fight but communist revolutionaries."

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about this "round-up" of Indonesia's recent history is that it also nowhere mentions U.S. imperialism. In fact, in claiming that the Soviet Union completely sustains the fascist military machine, PL's analysis obliterates the role of U.S. military advisers, equipment and training in the coup itself -- something that even bourgeois sources acknowledge to have been the critical factor in the takeover.

The two Indonesian documents accompanying this introduction do not have the same failing. Rather, the new program of the PKI emphasizes many times the status of Indonesia today as a "new-type colony of U.S. imperialism." It traces the replacement of Dutch capital by U.S. firms and points out how Indonesia is strategically important to the U.S. for their general military objectives in Southeast Asia.

NEITHER HAS MOBILIZED PROTEST

In both the positions of PL and the revisionist CP described here, the overriding emphasis on the culpability of political opponents for the dreadful defeat of the Indonesian Communists, to the point of almost totally ignoring the role of the major imperialist power, does relieve the urgency to act in this country in protest against the murders. Whether or not this is the underlying cause, the fact is that the parties in the West that lay claim to the closest fraternal ties to the PKI have done nothing to raise a storm of protest and outrage at what has been one of the most monstrous crimes of modern times. Whatever blame the Indonesian masses may finally attach to the policies of their leaders, these Western critics of the PKI leadership, by not offering true international solidarity through struggle, have done nothing to deserve respect for their positions, be they right or wrong theoretically.

While not a major tendency in the world movement, the position of the Socialist Workers Party should perhaps be mentioned here. It too has published a critique of the PKI, purportedly written by a former member of the Indonesian party. However, this criticism is nowhere supplemented by any attempt to rouse support for the struggles of the Indonesian people against the fascist butchers, nor by a condemnation of their own ruling class which through the CIA and other agencies played the decisive role in the coup. The colossal and immensely tragic defeat for 100 million people struggling against imperialist domination becomes reduced in the pages of *The Militant* to a factional issue -- an opportunity to say "I told you so" to opponent political tendencies.

Could those who offered all this criticism of the course of the PKI without lifting a finger in the PKI's defense and without once even reproaching the CIA or trying to arouse the U.S. public against the massacre, really have done any better than the PKI? It is almost ludicrous even to ask the question.

A more pressing and apropos question is this: Can such parties, no matter how well they phrase their theoretical positions or how many members or subscriptions they have, succeed in the United States where the PKI failed in Indonesia? Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary practice. But without ordinary class struggle practice, much less revolutionary practice, the most

revolutionary theory is just a lot of words.

YAWF has not written any weighty critique of the Aidit leadership. We have organized demonstrations and rallies protesting the massacres and have published a number of documents and articles primarily focused, as is this pamphlet, on the U.S. role in these events. Does this mean we have no opinion on the policies followed by the PKI or on the position of Sukarno and other bourgeois nationalist leaders? Does it mean that we feel the Chinese and Soviet parties had no influence on the line of the Indonesian Communists?

No, this is not the case at all. Certainly, in a disaster the proportions of this one, only fatalists will ignore what role subjective factors played in the defeat. Imperialism is not all-powerful, as the heroic struggle of the Vietnamese is confirming each day, and if a strong and seemingly dynamic progressive movement can suddenly be almost wiped out, then the reasons for its weakness must be found.

CHAPTERS [Index](#) [Intro](#) [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [Search](#)

[HOME PAGE](#) | [FREE TRIAL](#) | [JOIN WWP](#)

Your feedback is welcome
webweaver@workers.org

Copyright © 1998 workers.org

The Question of State Power

Even those parties which are in favor of armed revolution and have repudiated the idea of peaceful conquest of power in their programs do not necessarily succeed in taking power, even under the best of circumstances.

The Communist Party of Germany was programmatically in favor of armed revolution in 1933 and it could muster nearly six million votes in the early part of that year. But it went down to defeat at the hands of the fascists in the same year, suffering physical extermination of tens of thousands of cadres. Outside of heroic but sporadic pockets of resistance, the German CP did not and could not (because of previous errors and a previously determined course) mount a general uprising to check or overthrow the fascists.

Under the much better circumstances of the revolutionary situation in Russia of 1917 and the paralysis of the Russian bourgeoisie, there was a crisis in the Central Committee of Lenin's own Bolshevik Party over the question of whether to launch the November 7 insurrection. Lenin's line only prevailed in the committee because of the **previous** training and preparation of the party, both in theoretical understanding and practical struggle. Even then, some of Lenin's closest collaborators opposed the "tactic" of insurrection.

The objective conditions in Indonesia resembled both the Russia of 1917 and the Germany of 1933 in some respects. And they were also different, because Indonesia is a colonial country where revolutionary nationalism against Dutch and U.S. imperialism has played a tremendous role in both the country's and the PKI's history.

The PKI was the biggest Communist Party in the world outside of the socialist countries -- just as the German CP was the biggest before Hitler's victory over it.

Unlike the case in either Germany or old Russia, the Indonesian Party had the ear of the head of state, and occupied key positions in the government apparatus. Furthermore, the head of state, although not a Communist, showed every sign of collaborating with the Communists to the end -- and in his fashion, apparently did so. He employed some opportunist slogans, but defied imperialism on some occasions even more than most leaders of the socialist world have done. He condemned and split from the imperialist-dominated UN; he called upon the masses to expropriate the holdings of imperialism in Indonesia; he was willing to go along with the PKI toward a more and more anti-imperialist Indonesia. The logic of his course suggested that he would have to adopt communism at some point whether he wanted to do so or not. The fascist generals must have believed this, too, since they made sure to take away all his power and only spared his life for fear of arousing the masses against themselves.

What went wrong? And why was this tremendously powerful movement composed of both the PKI and the left nationalists unable to prevent the terrible massacre of its forces and its friends?

The Indonesian Communists themselves, both inside and

outside the country, have been discussing practically nothing else but the question of the PKI's strategy and tactics -- unless it be the question (for those still inside the country) of how to physically escape the executioner, and even this question is often subordinated to the need of developing a better instrument of revolution.

THE EXTRAORDINARY TESTIMONY OF A DOOMED PKI LEADER

One of the grimmest and yet most poignant of the self-criticisms was made by Sudisman, one of the five top leaders of the PKI. He told his own hangman's court in 1967 (hoping his speech would be heard by his comrades -- as it finally was) that the PKI had made serious errors.

(Sudisman took over the top leadership personally after Aidit and Njoto were murdered, and he attempted to follow a more leftist course.)

Truly, the PKI is the product of its era, born with the era itself. The revival of the PKI will not depend on the five of us [i.e., himself, D.N. Aidit, M.H. Lukman, Njoto and Sakirman]; we have failed in our labors. In one form or another, still with many hardships, the PKI will find a way to come forth again, with even greater vigor than in our time.

And certainly, failure will act as our teacher. The laws of war have taught us that we must fight, fight, and fight again. And if we fail once, the struggle should be taken up again, until conclusive victory is won.

Victory will be to those who are not afraid to face difficulties and who have the courage to continue fighting. And, to obtain victory we must have the patience to wait a long time, a very long time.

The judge has spoken of the PKI as if it were an "invisible man," which I take to mean that the PKI is nowhere and at the same time, everywhere. And in reality, the Mahmillub in essence has re- cognized the fact that faith cannot be completely shackled.

And according to the law of the people, the people's faith will lead them to final victory. This confirms the popular refrain which says: the world keeps on spinning.

I am convinced that although the PKI is proscribed, history in the long run will free the PKI, and Marxism-Leninism will reign in the heart of every Communist. In his oral briefing, the judge called the PKI "poisonous." Yes, he was right. The PKI is poisonous when it comes to killing the bacteria of the bloodsuckers of the people, the oppressors and exploiters, but at the same time, it is also a powerful restorative, animating the people.

For me, everything has two or more sides. For example, the human body cannot grow without phosphorous. Phosphorous, after all is a poison that kills bacteria and promotes bone

growth. I understand that failure in battle is brought about by the errors one commits. The errors of the PKI, accumulated over a long period of time, were the reasons for the failure of the 30th of September Movement.

These errors included subjectivism in ideology -- that is, our considering a thing from only one point of view and not in its totality, so that reality was viewed not as a whole, but as something glimpsed in fragments.

As a result the PKI was unprepared when the Party became larger; it was careless of the danger of imperialism, which, together with the country's reactionary forces, was just waiting for the opportunity to attack.

In such a situation it was necessary to have a certain knowledge of Marxism-Leninism in order to calculate, concretely and scientifically, the correlation of forces and the relative strengths of the PKI and its enemies. Moreover, in order to organize a campaign, revolutionary skills are needed, plus courage to determine, a priori, the correct line to follow and the right moment for its adoption.

The 30th of September Movement did not fulfill these requirements, and thus brought about its own failure.

Moreover, the campaign was totally isolated from the masses, although, in keeping with the announcements of the Revolutionary Junta, the objectives of the 30th of September Movement were correct.

In addition to subjectivism in the leadership, the PKI was also infested with modern revisionism. This resulted in the adoption of a bourgeois attitude after positions in state organizations were obtained.

These weaknesses led to a compromise with the bourgeoisie in the theoretical field.

In organization, the PKI did not apply adequate methods for solving the contradictions within the Party through criticism and self-criticism. Without criticism and self-criticism we became tolerant and criticism from the bottom was not developed. These errors committed by the PKI in the fields of ideology, in politics and organization have been mentioned in the self-critical report of the Central Committee of the PKI, now in the hands of the military regime.

The failure of the 30th of September Movement has led the PKI to criticize its own errors, to make a self-criticism.

I am certain that sooner or later, the new generation of PKI members will learn the good lesson of self-criticism. This new generation will make the PKI a true Communist Party on Marxist-Leninist lines and will choose a correct and revolutionary

agrarian program, free from all types of economism and modern revisionism. Such a Party will be able to solve the basic problems of the Indonesian people....

If I die, it does not mean that the Indonesian Communist Party must also die. Far from it. Although the PKI has been dismembered and ripped to shreds, I am convinced that this is only temporary and that in the course of history, the PKI will return.

Quoted in Tri-Continental,
No. 7, 1968

Sudisman, facing a certain death sentence, showed by these admirable remarks (which were only a small part of his final speech to the court) that he was all too well aware that the PKI had erred. But he proudly refused to say that the September 30th Movement was itself in error. On the contrary, the error, he explained, was in its **failure**. He himself took full responsibility for it before his enemies as well as before his friends and the judgment of history.

SUDISMAN OPENED QUESTION OF A THOROUGH REVIEW OF TACTICS

But Sudisman does not give any specific recipe for taking power or any precise explanation of what the Party did wrong after September 30. He was speaking under the most difficult of circumstances, and it was not at all necessary for him to spell out his criticisms in detail in order to open the way for a thorough review of tactics by those who are serious about revolution. Furthermore, even if he were not speaking in the shadow of the hangman's noose, his comments as an Indonesian Communist leader have far more value for the Indonesian and world revolution than the theoretical lucubrations of many non-Indonesian radicals both revisionist and "revolutionary," whose real motive in criticism is purely factional and full of hatred.

In other parts of his speech Sudisman mentions that nearly all the members of the September 30th Movement were "individuals who happened to be members of the PKI," although he takes personal responsibility in the fascist court for the leadership of the event and challenges the court to punish him alone.

The importance of this almost quixotic gesture is that it does underline the fact that "all actions were executed by individuals who happened to be members of the PKI" -- something that was apparently common knowledge in Indonesia, or Sudisman would never have revealed it.

This fact must be kept firmly an mind throughout the following pages, because some of the documents can easily give the impression that Untung and the whole September 30th Movement were just militant nationalists and that the PKI completely ignored the fascist danger and repudiated the September 30th Movement in every way. Some of the documents of the PKI itself give the impression that the Party was completely blind to the danger of the fascist generals' coup.

This was not the case, really. But due to the whole policy of the PKI, including the period in which it worked closely with the Chinese CP leadership, it was unprepared to cope with the fascist coup. In this sense, it resembled

the CP of Germany at the time of Hitler's 1933 victory. There were many Communists like Sudisman, including many in the leadership, who were deeply revolutionary and deeply determined to fight for the Communist victory. But the point at which to fight and the methods of preparing the fight are not easy to arrive at, even for the most experienced and devoted leadership.

DID PKI FAIL TO RECOGNIZE THE DANGER OF THE RIGHT-WING?

The following account by Eric Norden gives one slant on this problem. Norden is a radical journalist who is very conversant with Indonesian affairs and believed that "Sukarno's course, in spite of his erratic personality, was essentially the best one for Indonesia." He gave the following blow-by-blow account of the events around September 30. He explained about the reactionary generals' meeting, which Sukarno and Subandrio secretly tape-recorded, and how the generals had planned at the meeting to overthrow Sukarno and replace him and then tell the masses that it was done on the grounds of Sukarno's ill health. Then Norden said (at the June 1966 public inquest):

Sukarno was deeply alarmed by the revelations in this tape recording, and he called in one of his most trusted aides, a man named Lt. Col. Untung. Untung was the commandant of the palace guard, whose duty it was to protect Sukarno. He was a non-political man, with no affiliations left or right, but intensely devoted to Sukarno, whom he viewed as the founder of the nation. Untung decided that action would have to be taken quickly, because the September 21st meeting of the reactionary generals revealed that the armed forces commanders intended to stage their coup d'etat against Sukarno on October 8, which was Armed Forces Day. At that time all the top military units would be in Djakarta for a massive military parade, and it was generally assumed that this would be their best time to move.

Untung went to a number of pro-Sukarno political leaders for aid, including Aidit [leader of] the Communist Party. Aidit flatly refused to believe him. He couldn't conceive of the generals taking such a risky ploy as an open move against Sukarno, and refused to give any assistance. However, one military man who was loyal to Sukarno was Air Marshal Omar Dhani, who was the Commandant of the Indonesian Air Force. Untung and Dhani together, using small contingents of hand-picked men they knew were loyal to Sukarno, staged a preventive coup against the generals the night of September 10, 1965. Units loyal to Untung and Dhani took over the radio station and several other strategic points in Djakarta.

It was announced over the radio that a new revolutionary council had been formed, including cabinet ministers such as Subandrio, the purpose of which was to defend the President against what they called "a council of generals formulated by the

CIA." It should be noted that the CIA's involvement with this Council of Generals was stressed repeatedly in the broadcast. Six of the top army generals involved in the conspiracy were murdered by units loyal to Dhani and Untung. However, one of the top generals, Abdul Haris Nasution, one of the leading movers in the anti-Sukarno movement, escaped with a flesh wound and managed to flee to the outskirts of Djakarta. There he was joined by General Suharto, one of his allies, who was in command of the crack Siliwangi Division. With this elite division in his hands, he was able to move into Djakarta. After a fierce fire fight, the pro-Sukarno troops were driven from the radio station and Suharto took over the city, reasserting effective control.

Sukarno, during all this, had gone to the Halim Air Force Base on the outside of the city to await word of the coup. When he found out that it had been a failure, he fled to the summer palace at Bogor.

Could it be true that the top leader of one of the world's biggest Communist parties was so naive as to disbelieve the possibility of a fascist coup by generals who were so well known to be "aided" by the United States and who fairly openly (in politically sophisticated circles) opposed Sukarno? Aidit couldn't have been suspicious of Untung to any great degree, although he may have feared a provocation. And recalling Sudisman's words, we must repeat that "individual members of the PKI" were the main participants in Untung's action. But according to Norden, Aidit "couldn't conceive of the generals taking such a risky ploy as an open move against Sukarno." Norden, of course, did not know what went on in Aidit's mind, but in one sense at least he might have been right in his estimate. That is, Aidit may have been lulled to overconfidence not because he failed to understand the intentions of the generals, but because he had far too much faith in his own previous policy.

OR DID IT RELY TOO HEAVILY ON SUKARNO?

In August 1917 in Russia, the extreme right-wing generals -- led by General Kornilov -- took the "risky ploy of an open move" against the still tremendously popular Kerensky. They were anxious to destroy the growing revolutionary movement and they were willing to destroy Kerensky to get to it. Kornilov led an armed counter-revolution. The Bolsheviks summoned the masses to "defend the revolution" against Kornilov. (And they overthrew Kerensky two months after they had "defended" him.)

Actually, it was a far less "risky ploy" for Suharto and the reactionary generals than Kornilov's move was. The Bolsheviks were, on the whole, armed. They had whole regiments which were openly Bolshevik, where the officers were paralyzed. The key workers on railroads and in telegraph stations, etc., were constantly alerted by the Bolsheviks against the reactionary generals. True, according to some authorities, the total membership of the Bolsheviks was only 40,000 in the month of July, just one month before Kornilov's attack (whereas the PKI had in the neighborhood of three million). But the Bolsheviks had made every possible use of the revolutionary situation

and paid constant attention to the problem of how they were going to be able to seize power.

Now Aidit was familiar with this history. Why didn't he see the imminent danger from the Indonesian generals' clique? Why was he so sure that the generals would not move? The more surely that Indonesia was moving in the Communist direction Aidit thought it was, the more surely the fascist generals would at some point move against the Communists. But Aidit was not prepared for the move. Much of Aidit's previous policy was based on utilizing Sukarno's tremendous popularity and helping to build up that popularity with both Communist and non-Communist masses. So much of his policy was based on the idea that Sukarno, although a left bourgeois nationalist, could move right on to communism leading the non-Communist masses with him.

While this concept is theoretically wrong, there is no eternal absolutely unbreakable law in social relations. And it did seem that Indonesian practice could make the theory wrong in this particular instance. Sukarno certainly showed many signs of wanting to do this and at the end never crossed over to the side of the fascist generals.

He might very well have played a valuable figurehead role for the Communist revolution in spite of and because of the fact that he had his origins in the bourgeois nationalist movement.

THE STATE WAS BOURGEOIS

But Aidit and the PKI forgot or neglected one tremendous factor -- the state itself.

Whatever Sukarno's role, the state was still bourgeois -- still a capitalist state. The "armed bodies of men," the essence of the state, were under pro-capitalist commanders. There were PKI members in the government apparatus. But there was no rival state power in the form of a congress of soviets, a workers' army, mass worker defense guards, etc., or anything to seriously rival the capitalist-controlled army and seriously oppose it in a showdown. The three million-member PKI could be immobilized if it depended upon purely parliamentary means when the generals resorted to open force.

Aidit couldn't believe the generals would dare to oppose Sukarno, because he was thinking of Sukarno's matchless oratory; he was thinking in purely propagandistic terms, in terms of popularity, winning votes and so on -- rather than in terms of force and ruthless showdown, as the generals were thinking.

It is true, of course, that such a show of force may come only once in a generation and all the rest of the time it seems to be a question of maneuver, publicity, persuasion and so on. But the truth is that revolutionary parties are trained to be ready for the supreme moment not only by learning about such moments in history books, but also by constantly engaging in open struggle on lower levels with the bosses, with the police, with the reactionary detachments of the army, etc. They must be educated in struggle and in the spirit of distrust and hatred for the bourgeoisie. When a party becomes as powerful as the PKI was, it must also understand that capitalism -- and **world** capitalism (in this case, the U.S.) -- is planning day and night to destroy it.

The fact that Aidit and most of the leadership seemed not

to understand this does not necessarily mean that they were secretly revisionists who were influenced by Moscow rather than Peking. To the contrary, they had been working with the Chinese CP for several years.

In the summer of 1965, it is true, Chou En-lai, while on a trip to Indonesia, publicly called for the arming of the masses. Both Aidit and Sukarno by that time seem to have been in favor of it too. But the idea came too late, as it did in the case of Mossadegh in Iran, Nkrumah in Ghana, and Arbenz in Guatemala. (There is evidence that it was proposed as early as January or February of 1965, but little was really done about it.) The idea came late, and even then, the conviction was not strong enough to urge the masses daily and hourly to get their own arms -- by disarming the police, recruiting bands of soldiers, getting arms from friendly soldiers who steal them from the army supply depots, etc. This can be done whenever the situation is anywhere near as revolutionary as it was in Indonesia. But of course it requires not just courage, resolution, etc., which the Indonesian leadership of course had, but a certain approach to the state, a strong and unshakable conviction that only the Communists can really solve the question of social justice and must lead the masses to smash the old state and create a new one.

Actually, both Aidit, the PKI leadership and the left wing of the Nationalist Party had been urging **Sukarno** to form a people's militia all during the spring of 1965. And on August 17 (Indonesia's Independence Day) Sukarno announced that a militia of several million was to be formed. He covered up -- and really softened -- its potentially revolutionary character by saying that it was to be used in the national fight against Malaysia. But the announcement must have alarmed the generals' clique, nevertheless. And coming as late as it did and promoted so awkwardly, it may have forced the generals to make their counter-revolution that much earlier. In defense of the PKI it should be added that Communists would certainly have been in the leadership of most of this militia if it ever had really gotten started. So they now assumed they were going to be in a position to protect their flanks -- **in case** the generals tried to move against them. Why should it occur to them to start training bands of 20 or 30 militia men when they would soon command millions? And besides they felt that the Army would side with them against the generals.

RANK AND FILE OF ARMY WAS PROGRESSIVE

The NLF armed themselves from 1960 to 1964 by first practicing with wooden sticks, attacking their enemies with their bare hands, often sacrificing five guerrillas to capture one gun in Viet Nam. Of course, the atmosphere in Indonesia was such that the army seemed to be a pro-revolutionary army, and the real polarization did not occur until after September 30, and by then the time was very, very short. This is only another way of saying that every country has its own peculiarities of development. But the PKI leadership took the view that the Indonesian peculiarities made a **fundamental** difference so far as the Communist strategy was concerned.

There was a strong tendency not to rock the boat, to continue on the previous course, which was to depend on Sukarno's ability to swing the whole army (with the help of the PKI of course) over to the defense of the new expropriations and the continued course to socialism. There was good ground for the PKI to have illusions on

this score, because the Party was well aware that the rank and file of the army was made up so largely of either Communists, Communist sympathizers or revolutionary nationalists who would be at least neutral to Communism -- if the Communists took a clear hold on the helm of the state, and especially if they did this in company with the ever-popular Sukarno, who did not represent the national bourgeoisie in the eyes of the masses, but the revolution against imperialism.

The PKI's illusions about the nature of the army are most clearly -- and tragically -- expressed in a statement made immediately **after** the September 30th Movement. In an editorial appearing in the Oct. 2, 1965, edition of *Harian Rakjat*, the national newspaper of the PKI, there appeared the following statement, most probably written on Oct. 1, when it still appeared that the September 30th Movement was successful, although it was known that the reactionary politician-general Nasution and the extremely powerful General Suharto were still alive and actively working against the PKI, moving their troops furiously to counter the actions of the September 30th Movement.

The *Harian Rakjat* editorial follows:

It has happened that on the 30th of September measures were taken to safeguard President Sukarno and the Republic of Indonesia from a coup by a so-called Council of Generals. According to what has been announced by the September 30th Movement, which is headed by Lt. Col. Untung of a Tjakrabirawa (palace guard) battalion, action taken to preserve President Sukarno and the Republic of Indonesia from the coup by the Council of Generals is patriotic and revolutionary.

Whatever the justification that may have been used by the Council of Generals in its attempt, the staging of a coup is a condemnable and counterrevolutionary act.

We the People fully comprehend what Lt. Col. Untung has asserted in carrying out his patriotic movement.

But however the case may be, *this is an internal Army affair*. On the other hand, we the People, who are conscious of the policy and duties of the revolution, are convinced of the correctness of the action taken by the September 30th Movement to preserve the revolution and the People.

The sympathy and support of the People is surely on the side of the September 30th Movement. We call on the People to intensify their vigilance and be prepared to confront all eventualities. [Our emphasis.]

From the last sentence it is clear that the Party leaders were very uneasy about the situation. Eric Norden may be quite correct in saying that Aidit couldn't believe that Suharto and the generals really intended to try a coup. By October 1, the PKI leadership seems convinced. But it is moving far too slowly.

The Party correctly identified itself with the September 30th Movement, but having done so, it was time to summon the masses to arms. But the Party's call was only

to "intensify their vigilance." At such a time, such a call might easily spread alarm or indecision rather than vigilance.

Even worse, by saying in the same statement in which it identified itself with the September 30th Movement, that the action was "an internal Army affair," the Party tended to half repudiate the action and close its eyes to the consequences.

But again, this mistake flowed from a previous false policy and a previous misunderstanding. The false policy was one of expecting Sukarno to be able to outweigh all the possible actions of the generals, and assuming that Sukarno himself would be loyal to his own program and be able to carry it out against the will of his generals. The misunderstanding was about the class character of the Indonesian state and the class character of the Army.

WHAT DETERMINES THE CLASS CHARACTER OF AN ARMY?

The class character of any army is determined in the long run by the class it serves, and in the short run by the class character of its high command and not at all by the class composition of its rank and file, which is always made up of the poor -- of workers, farmers, farm laborers, etc. And the generals of the Indonesian Army were for the most part reactionary servants of Indonesian and international (i.e., imperialist) capital. Untung, their main opponent within the Army, it must be noted, was only a lieutenant colonel, with direct command over less than a thousand men.

(In Untung's first statement to the country, announced over the national radio on the morning of October 1, is the following revolutionary statement: "The Army is not for generals, but it is the possession of all soldiers of the Army who are loyal to the ideals of the revolution of August, 1945." On the afternoon of the same day a decree was read which abolished the rank of general altogether.)

Many "left" critics have misused Mao's correct observation, claiming that the PKI did not understand that "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." It would be more correct to say the PKI did understand this, but failed to understand the class character of the guns they thought were theirs (in the national army).

Sukarno was the Supreme Commander of the Army and "Great Leader of the Revolution" -- in name, of course. But merely because the Supreme Commander, alone among top officers, moves left, the army does not become a revolutionary proletarian army.

If the almost invincible Napoleon were to have sold out to the feudal kings of Europe at the height of the victories of the French revolutionary army, he could not have thereby turned the army into an instrument of feudalism.

Or more to the point, if General Eisenhower had decided to become a Communist in Europe in 1945 (as Senator Joseph McCarthy implied he did) this would not have altered the class character of the U.S. Army or materially changed the history of the post-World War II years. Eisenhower would simply have been assassinated by his brother officers or removed by arrest and punished by legal means, depending upon how stable the situation in the rest of the army was.

Sukarno was removed under cover of protecting him. And

his influence was destroyed under cover of praising him. He did not even have the military clique ties to the army that a top general would have. He was far more isolated from the generals than a person like Eisenhower would have been in the example given.

PKI PERSISTED IN MISCALCULATING ARMY

The misunderstanding of the PKI about the nature of the Indonesian Army went so deep that the Second Deputy Chairman of the PKI was able to say, two months after the counter-revolution began, that it was a unique army and that no counter-force was really necessary against it.

During an interview with the Tokyo Evening News on December 2, 1965, Deputy Chairman Njoto made the following remarks:

Question: How can your party set up your own army? Lenin and Mao Tse-tung have maintained that the establishment of the army of the Communist Party is an indispensable condition of revolution.

Njoto: The PKI always regards the Indonesian Army as being not the same as armies in the imperialist countries or as in India now, seen both from the history of its formation as well as from the tasks of being against imperialism and feudalism, and also seen from the composition of its soldiers, who mostly come from the peasant and worker class. That there still exist in the national army anti-people elements is the same thing as in the republic as a whole....

Question: How about the relations between your own army and the present professional army?

Njoto: The PKI has never had its own army. This is why there is no connection in any way between this thing that never existed and the national army.

Actually there had been some success in creating the popular national militia during 1965 although it apparently did not get very far. Njoto repudiates the whole idea of a Communist-led militia. At best he is being elusive with a reporter at the wrong moment on the wrong question. At worst he is repudiating the whole idea of any armed opposition to the bourgeois-controlled army.

It is quite possible that Njoto was not wholly candid in the extremely difficult situation that had developed. Perhaps he felt he had to conceal whatever elements of armed opposition the PKI was able to summon up at the last minute. But his statements generally have the ring of conviction and fit in with the previous mistaken position of the PKI in this matter.

Tremendous events were now going on. Millions of people were listening in. They needed an immediate tactical program, no matter how euphemistically or carefully phrased it might be. They needed a clear explanation of who was friend and who was foe. Njoto was not obligated to give correct answers to the Japanese press. But he also failed to give them to the Indonesian masses. He himself was to pay with his own life for this failure.

SOME ELEMENTS OF PARTY WANTED TO FIGHT

In the middle of the crisis that began with September 30, there were more forthright elements than the top leadership in the PKI, elements who, although in theoretical agreement with Aidit and the Central Committee, felt in their bones that this was the time to fight and fight hard -- rather than merely be "vigilant" and relegate the whole struggle to "an internal matter of the Army."

This is indicated in the statement of the East Java Communist Youth Organization which was issued on October 1, 1965. It appears in Pemuda Rakjat, the youth organization's paper. The following is based on the Indonesian text given in Berita Yudha October 7, 1965 (the statement was also read on the local radio several times).

Statement supporting the "September 30th Movement"

-- No. 1 56/v/PBD/65

In connection with the occurrence of a September 30th Movement under the leadership of Lt. Col. Untung to safeguard the Indonesian Revolution and Bung Karno, and in relation to the revolutionary situation which has enraged the counterrevolutionaries into forming a so-called "Council of Generals" to carry out a coup d'etat (against) the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, in the name of the 750,000 members of the People's Youth for the whole of East Java, we declare our fullest support for, and stand behind the September 30th Movement in forming Indonesian Revolution Councils down to the regions.

We instruct all Organization Leadership Bodies as well as the entire membership of the East Java People's Youth to sharpen their vigilance, heighten their support for Youth Unity on the basis of the Nasakom axis and carry out the Five Charms of the Revolution, in order to continue to crush American imperialism. "Malaysia," village devils, city devils, modern revisionism and other internal counter-revolutionary elements.

Surabaya, October 1, 1965
Leadership of the Major Region
(East Java) People's Youth
(signed) Tjap S. Gijo

Regardless of its references to the nationalist, Sukarno-coined slogans, this was obviously an appeal to create soviets throughout the country. That is, it was an attempt to establish a "dual power" -- a rival political power to the government, which when armed, would be also a rival state. This was exactly what the situation called for and with a group of 750,000 (in East Java alone) calling for it, there is little doubt that it would be successful -- if the PKI leadership did not oppose it. (But they did!)

The PKI had three million members and influenced about 20 million more through trade unions, mass organizations, etc. This would correspond to 40 million in the United States (close to the highest vote ever received by a U.S. Presidential candidate). Had the PKI leadership fully

supported its own "individual PKI members" in the September 30th Movement and its East Java Youth Movement, it would have opened the road to victory instead of defeat. It would have set the masses on the road toward political power.

It would not have even been necessary to make an open break with Sukarno to do this, although Sukarno himself might have repudiated the councils that were "defending" him, especially if Suharto forced him at pain of his life to do so. But the PKI leadership turned once again to depending upon its alliance with Sukarno to magically overcome the fascist drive of the generals. It was the prisoner of its own previous political course in this.

"AN INTERNAL ARMY PROBLEM"

The Jogjakarta Regional Committee of the PKI was quoted in the Jogjakarta daily, Ariwarta Waspada, on October 5 as saying: "The September 30th, 1965 Affair is an internal Army problem, and therefore the Party has no part in it."

This was an outright repudiation of September 30th. It was a considerable step away from the position of October 1, and must have been taken because Suharto had now crushed the September 30th Movement in the army. (He had not yet moved against the PKI.) The statement could have been due to fear or panic, rather than policy. But it was a published statement, nevertheless, and had its inevitable effect on the masses.

On October 8 and 9 the statement of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the PKI (issued on October 5) was printed in the same paper, and it said:

The Indonesian Communist Party supports the Message of President Sukarno, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia, on settling the problem of the September 30th Movement. [Sukarno said in the Message that he had "reassumed" leadership of the state and of the Army and appointed Suharto as practical commander of the troops.]

Having carefully studied the Message of President Sukarno, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia and Great Leader of the Revolution, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Indonesian Communist Party states that it fully supports this Message, and calls on all Committees of the PKI, all members and sympathizers of the PKI and all revolutionary mass organizations led by the PKI cadres to help carry out the Message of President Sukarno, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia and Great Leader of the Revolution.

With regard to the September 30th Movement, the Central Committee of the PKI considers it to be an internal problem of the Army and the PKI does not involve itself in it.

With regard to the names of members of the PKI included in the list of the Indonesian

Revolution Council, it can be stated, as a consequence of questions put to the members concerned, that these members were neither informed beforehand nor asked for their permission.

The Central Committee of the PKI calls on the whole People to continue to heighten their vigilance, to continue to strengthen the National United Front, the Nasakom axis, and the Nasakom Spirit in putting into practice the Five Charms of the Revolution, in carrying out Djwikora to crush the joint British-U.S. Project "Malaysia," and to continue the anti-Nekolom struggle in general.

Djakarta, October 5, 1965
Political Bureau,
Central Committee of the PKI

This all too clear statement repudiated not only the September 30th armed actions, but also directed that the "revolutionary councils" (which were the beginnings of real soviets, political, if not military dual power, potential state power for the masses) be disbanded, by saying that no PKI member had "permission" to take part in them.

(General Suharto had by now gained full control of the Army.)

HOPED TO CAPTURE STATE PEACEFULLY THROUGH
MANEUVER

Now such a position, such a repudiation, might somehow be forced on a party in order to avoid an immediate repression. But the Indonesian Communist Party was still tremendously powerful. It was not a question of hiding itself. The Party had the very core of the masses behind it. The maneuver of going from semi-repudiation to full repudiation of the September 30th Movement, if a maneuver it was, could only have been designed to further the strategy of working with Sukarno to "capture" the state, so to speak, and shift it more or less peacefully onto the road of socialist construction.

It was the false premise of this strategy -- the premise that the state was "different" and the Indonesian Army "not the same" -- that played such a tragic role in the defeat of the PKI.

It was because of this false premise that the basic policy of the Indonesian Communist Party, when it should have been one of actively preparing revolution and insurrection, was one of delay, one of expecting the Army to be faithful to Sukarno and Sukarno to be faithful to the revolution -- and faithful in such a way that only a true communist possibly could be. In the actual event, the reactionary generals merely spoke in the name of Sukarno, ruled in the name of Sukarno and -- with a pistol at Sukarno's head -- took full power in the name of Sukarno. And then they murdered the revolution in their own name and brought their imperialist bosses back to exploit that part of the Indonesian people who remained alive.

Why was it possible for the reactionary pro-imperialists to use Sukarno's name as effectively as the Communists had done in a previous period and thus mollify the masses and confuse the Communists at the same time? It was not

because Sukarno had sold out -- although it is significant that he did not defy the reaction and insist on continuing the previous anti-imperialist course. It was because Sukarno had straddled between classes, between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. He had defied the imperialists, it is true. He had defied them so thoroughly that they decided to get rid of him. But he was originally based in a radical bourgeois movement and he never broke with the Indonesian bourgeoisie. The Indonesian bourgeoisie correctly felt it could still utilize Sukarno as a cover for its own comeback -- finally even against his own will -- as long as he did not really become a Communist.

"NASAKOM" COULDN'T WORK IN CONTEXT OF IMPERIALISM

This should have been made clear by one of Sukarno's own slogans, a slogan that the PKI supported wholeheartedly: Nasakom, which means "nationalism, religion and communism." This was an opportunistic combination of terms that was supposed to describe the character of the Indonesian state. The PKI thought it would work. And if no pro-imperialists were operating under the cover of the "nationalist" wing of the state, perhaps it could have worked. That is only another way of saying that if the capitalists would not fight to keep their privileges, there could really be a peaceful road to socialism. To get rid of those pro-imperialists who shouted for "Nasakom," an armed showdown would have been necessary.

After the event many of the PKI's international friends told them that they (the PKI) had been totally wrong to rely on Sukarno, who was a bourgeois leader, and that supporting Sukarno was the same as supporting the bourgeoisie. This ice-in-the-wintertime advice came rather late, as did the advice to take up arms against Suharto and Co.

But none of these critics seems to have made this point very strongly in **advance** of the event. The reason, of course, was that the prospects were so glittering and until the last moment the strategy seemed so workable and Sukarno so agreeable.

A strong comradely criticism from powerful friends along the above line before September 30 might well have prepared the leadership politically to brace itself and choose open revolutionary tactics immediately after September 30, when they still might well have succeeded.

But bad as the defeat was the revolution itself was not defeated. The struggle goes on, large forces have taken up arms. Guerrilla detachments fight in Java, Sumatra and West Kalimantan. No sooner is one force reported to be crushed, than another force springs up.

At the heart of all the lessons and all the tactics on both sides in the tremendous conflict of 1965 was the question of state power and the class character of the state -- the problem of smashing the capitalist state, with or without Sukarno, and creating the workers' state.

"I DO NOT REPENT!"

The reborn PKI will answer these questions and solve this problem, as Sudisman bravely said in his speech to the judge-executioner.

We opened this chapter with Sudisman's self-criticism.

Let us close it with his final words in defense of revolution, words which have no immediate relevance to the ever-pressing problem of what to do at the given moment -- but which catch the soul of the Indonesian proletariat and guarantee its future victory:

In keeping with this sense of responsibility, I must explain that it is somewhat difficult to answer the question put by the President of the Court: Does the prisoner repent of his actions?

The question in itself is quite simple: it is the reply that is difficult. Usually, the simpler the question, the more difficult the answer, since it cannot be answered by a simple Yes or No, without qualification.

After all this, out of respect for my communist beliefs, my communist responsibility, and solidarity with my dead comrades, Aidit, Lukman, Njoto and Sakirman, I have come to my decision.
I DO NOT REPENT.

Moreover, aware that other victims have fallen, I as a Communist cannot do less than they.

We live to fight and we fight to live. We do not live just for the sake of living. We live to defend life valiantly, to the death.

In the course of human history, from the first cry of the newborn babe to death, there has always been struggle -- at times hard struggle, in violent battle. A battle can be very violent, but not all violent battles are crowned with victory.

The objectives of life are: To have the courage to enter this violent struggle on the battlefield and at the same time to try to win the battle. This is the dream of all fighters, including communist fighters. And this has also been my life's dream.

Life would be sterile without imagination and ideals.

What a wonder of wonders is life itself! We live to fight and we fight to live. This is my communist goal. This goal cannot be attained without responsibility, and for me responsibility is like a pearl. To express this, I have written a small poem in prison which goes:

Facing one attack after another,
Suffering interrogation after
interrogation,
Withstanding tortures and more
tortures,
With my head and with my heart,
Ready to face death for the PKI,
This is the pearl of responsibility!

And now that I face the verdict, I say with the words of the writer, Andrew Carr: No tears for Sudisman! . . .

Since I am a Communist born in Java, I feel obliged to say something in keeping with Javanese tradition:

First, I want to thank all who have helped me in the struggle.

Second, to the mass of progressive revolutionaries, to those who believe that they have been hurt during the struggle through fault of mine: Forgive me.

Third, to my family, my wife and children, as I face the verdict I ask your blessing with all my heart.

Long live the Indonesian Communist Party!

CHAPTERS [Index](#) [Intro](#) [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [Search](#)

[HOME PAGE](#) | [FREE TRIAL](#) | [JOIN WWP](#)

Your feedback is welcome
webweaver@workers.org

Copyright © 1998 workers.org