

Lessons of the 1965 Indonesian Coup

Chapter Two: Stalinists betray the mass movement

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In December 1957 the whole fabric of imperialist domination over the Indonesian economy was shaken by a massive eruption of the working class and peasantry. Factories, plantations, banks and ships were seized and occupied.

Sukarno's bourgeois nationalist regime was only able to survive because the Stalinist Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) leadership sabotaged the mass movement, insisting that the masses hand over the property they had seized to the US-backed army which was sent in by Sukarno to take control.

A dispatch in the New York Times of December 8, 1957 provided some idea of the scope and intensity of the upsurge: "The movement of the workers in Jakarta, to the extent we have been able to determine, took place without the government's sanction, and in opposition to the declarations of Prime Minister Djuanda, of the Army Chief-of-Staff, General Abdul Haris Nasution, and of other high governmental functionaries, according to whom such measures were inadmissible and rendered their participants liable to severe penalties..."

"The three Dutch banks here, the Netherlands Trading Society, the Escompto and the Netherlands Commercial Bank, were seized by the delegates. They read a proclamation before their enthusiastic comrades and then before the Dutch administrators, stating that the seizure was made in the name of the Association of Indonesian Workers and that the banks would become the property of the Indonesian Republic."

The Dutch newspaper Volksrant reported with alarm on December 11, 1957: "In Jakarta the Communists continue to hoist red flags on the Dutch enterprises ... Today the main office of Philips in Jakarta and that of the Societe D'Assurances Nillmij have been 'expropriated' by the Indonesian personnel under the leadership of 'Communist' trade union functionaries."

The movement was not confined to Java. According to the New York Herald-Tribune of December 16: "Workers of SOBSI, central trade union organisation dominated by the Communists, seized Dutch bakeries and stores in Java and banks in Borneo." The New York Times of the same day reported that in Palembang, capital of South Sumatra, "security forces arrested a number of workers belonging to the central trade union organisation controlled by the Communists for having taken 'arbitrary action' against three Dutch proprietors. Thirty seven red flags hoisted by the workers before the houses occupied by the Dutch employees were confiscated".

Other bourgeois papers spoke of "a situation of anarchy in Bali" and a fleeing Dutch plantation owner was quoted as saying that in Atjeh and Deli, on the east coast of Sumatra, the mass actions were directed not only against the Dutch companies but also against the American and British. Similar reports came from North Sumatra, the Celebes and other islands.

There were reports too that the uprisings inspired resistance in

Australian-occupied Papua New Guinea. At Karema 20 people were wounded when native people fought soldiers after a native nurse reported that she had been insulted.

The rebellion throughout Indonesia erupted in response to a call by Sukarno for a general strike against all Dutch enterprises. He had previously raised the question of nationalisation of Dutch industry at a mass rally. Sukarno's aim was to use the threat of nationalisation to pressure the Netherlands to withdraw from West Papua, which it retained under the 1949 Round Table Conference agreement, so that Indonesia could then take control.

Seeking to balance between the rapacious dictates of Dutch, US and British imperialism, the seething discontent of the oppressed masses and the growing strength of the US-backed military on which his regime relied, Sukarno sought to use the pressure of the masses to force the hand of Dutch imperialism.

Workers themselves began to occupy the Dutch companies. Sukarno was totally unprepared for such a response. He immediately authorised the military to move in to take control of the enterprises which had been seized by the masses.

The Political Bureau of the PKI rushed to Sukarno's assistance, issuing a resolution that urgently appealed to the people "to quickly resolve the differences of opinion on the methods of struggle against Dutch colonialism by negotiations, so that in this way unity in the people and between the people, the government and the army may be strengthened".

At the same time the PKI appealed to the workers, "not only to set going the occupied enterprises, but to make them function in a still more disciplined and better way and to increase production.

"The government must appoint a capable and patriotic direction for these enterprises and the workers must support this direction with all their strength."

In addition, the PKI insisted that the takeovers must be confined to the Dutch companies, seeking to reassure US and British imperialism that their interests would not be harmed: "All the actions of the workers, of the peasants and the organisations of youth are directed against the Dutch capitalists. The other capitalist countries did not take a hostile attitude in the conflict between Holland and Indonesia in West Irian. That is why no action will be engaged against the enterprise of the capitalists of other countries."

Recognising the efforts of the PKI to choke the movement of the masses, Tillman Durbin wrote in the New York Times of December 16: "Members of the National Consultative Council of Communist orientation are known to have actually pronounced forcibly against the seizures by workers and have called such movements undisciplined 'anarcho-syndicalism'. The Communists defend a program of seizure directed by the government such as it is now applied."

Sukarno himself was ready to flee the country for a "holiday" in India, but the handing over of the Dutch enterprises to the military, on the instructions of the PKI, rescued his bourgeois regime. The Stalinist leadership of the PKI not only saved the day for the Sukarno government. They created the conditions for the military generals and their US backers to prepare for their bloody counter-revolution eight years later.

The perspective fought for by the PKI leadership was the Stalinist "two stage" theory that the struggle for socialism in Indonesia had to first pass through the stage of so-called "democratic" capitalism. The revolutionary strivings of the masses for socialist measures had to be suppressed and subordinated to a "united front" with the national bourgeoisie.

In line with this reactionary perspective, the Stalinist bureaucracies in the Soviet Union and China hailed Sukarno and his regime throughout this entire period. Krushchev, for example, visited Jakarta and said he would give Sukarno every assistance in "all eventualities". In fact most of the weapons that were to be used to massacre the Indonesian masses in 1965 were supplied by the Kremlin.

Military preparations begin

In 1956 the US-backed army had begun preparations for military dictatorship to crush the movement of the masses. In August the commander of the West Java military region ordered the arrest of Foreign Minister Roeslan Abdulgani on a charge of corruption. In November the army Deputy Chief of Staff, Colonel Zulkifli Lubis, attempted unsuccessfully to seize control of Jakarta and overthrow the Sukarno government. The next month there were regional military takeovers in Central and North Sumatra.

In October 1956 Sukarno moved to strengthen his hand against the masses and to appease the military by calling for political parties to disband themselves. This call was later extended to an attempt to form a National Council of all parties, including the PKI, to rule the country. When military commanders in East Indonesia, Kalimantan, Atjeh, and South Sumatra rejected the plan and took control of their provinces, Sukarno declared a state of emergency. Finally a new "non-party" cabinet was formed which included two PKI sympathisers.

In response to the mass upsurge of December 1957 the operations of United States imperialism were immediately stepped up. The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had been active since the 1940s, spending millions to subsidise pro-US elements within the national bourgeoisie, particularly the Socialist Party (PSI) of Sumiro, a colleague of Hatta, and its larger Moslem ally, the Masjumi party of Sjafruddin Prawiranegara, with whom Hatta had also retained close links.

Throughout 1957 and 1958 a series of CIA-inspired secessionist and right-wing revolts were orchestrated in the oil-rich islands of Sumatra and Sulawesi, where the PSI and Masjumi dominated politically.

The first was the Permesta military revolt which began in March 1957 and continued into 1958, ending in a CIA-backed attempted coup in February 1958.

The United States government provided substantial financial support, military advisers, arms and a small airforce of B-26 bombers, piloted from bases in Taiwan and the Philippines. US Secretary of State Dulles even publicly expressed his support for the right-wing rebels.

An aircraft carrier of the US Seventh Fleet was sent to Singapore and for some time it appeared that the US might directly intervene in Sumatra under the guise of defending Caltex oil personnel and property.

The Indonesian military command finally decided that the rebellion, having failed to win any popular support at all, had to be ended. The Sukarno leadership survived.

But the role of the army had been enormously strengthened. Over the next six years the US poured huge resources into it, laying the basis for General Suharto to begin his climb to power after leading the military campaign to seize control of West Papua in 1962.

Between 1959 and 1965 the US supplied \$64 million in military grant-aid to the Indonesian military generals. According to a report in *Suara Pemuda Indonesia*: "Before the end of 1960, the US had equipped 43 battalions of the army. Every year the US trained officers of the right-wing military clique. Between 1956 and 1959 more than 200 high-ranking officers were trained in the US, while low-ranking officers are trained by the hundreds every year. Once the head of the Agency for International Development in America said that US aid, of course, was not intended to support Sukarno and that the US had trained a great number of officers and ordinary people who would form a unit to make Indonesia a 'free country'."

At the same time, Sukarno instituted his system of "Guided Democracy". In July 1959 the parliament was dissolved and Sukarno imposed a presidential constitution by decree again with the full support of the PKI. He further boosted the hand of the military, appointing army generals to leading positions.

The PKI warmly embraced Sukarno's "Guided Democracy" and his supposed consensus or *Konsepsi* alliance between nationalism, Islam and communism called "NASAKOM".

In pursuit of their "national united front" with Sukarno and the national bourgeoisie, the PKI leaders promoted the most deadly illusions in the armed forces.

Only five years before the bloody defeat inflicted upon the Indonesian workers and peasants at the hands of the military, the PKI line was put most crudely in a statement by the leadership of SOBSI, the PKI-led trade union federation, on May Day 1960:

"The SOBSI maintains the viewpoint that the armed forces of the Republic are still the true son of the popular revolution ... and therefore from the officers down to the NCOs and soldiers ... they cannot be drawn into actions which are treacherous to the Republic. Besides, president Sukarno, who identifies himself with the people, possesses a strong influence over members of the armed forces and he refuses to be a military dictator."

A new upsurge

In 1962, Indonesia's military annexation of West Papua was fully backed by the PKI leadership, along with the suppression of the resistance of the West Papuan people to the occupation.

In Indonesia itself, the underlying economic and class tensions, produced by the continued exploitation of the Indonesian masses by the imperialist corporations and their national bourgeois lackeys, re-emerged.

The period of "Guided Democracy," that is, of the collaboration of the PKI leadership with the national bourgeoisie in suppressing the independent struggles of the worker and peasant masses, failed to resolve any of the pressing economic and political questions. Export income declined, foreign reserves fell, inflation continued to spiral, and bureaucratic and military corruption became endemic.

From 1963 onwards the PKI leadership increasingly sought to avoid the growing clashes between the party's mass activists and the police and military. PKI leaders stressed the "common interests" of the police and "the people". PKI leader D.N. Aidit inspired the slogan "For Civil Order Help the Police".

In April, 1964, in an interview with S.M. Ali of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* Aidit set out for the international bourgeoisie the

Stalinists' perspective of a peaceful and gradual "two stage" transformation to socialism in Indonesia.

"When we complete the first stage of our revolution which is now in progress, we can enter into friendly consultation with other progressive elements in our society, and without an armed struggle lead the country towards socialist revolution."

He presented a scenario in which the masses would be confined to placing pressure on the national bourgeoisie: "The chastening effect of the present stage of the revolution will maintain a kind of revolutionary pressure on Indonesia's national capitalists."

"There will be no armed struggle unless there is foreign armed intervention on the capitalists' behalf. And when we successfully complete our present national democratic revolution the chances of any foreign power interfering with Indonesia's international affairs will become extremely remote."

In August, 1964, Aidit urged all PKI members to rid themselves of "sectarian attitudes" toward the army, calling on all left-wing artists and writers to make the "soldier masses" the subject of art and literary works.

In late 1964 and early 1965 hundreds of thousands of peasants took action to seize the land of the big landowners. Fierce clashes developed with landlords and police. To forestall the revolutionary confrontation which was rapidly developing, the PKI called on its supporters to prevent violent conflict with the landlords and to improve cooperation with other elements, including the armed forces.

At a meeting of the PKI central committee Aidit urged the suppression of peasants' actions and denounced party cadre who, "carried away by their desire to spread the peasant actions, immediately became impatient, indulged in individual heroism, were insufficiently concerned with developing the consciousness of the peasants and wanting a definite event, were not careful enough in differentiating and choosing their targets."

PKI leaders justified halting the land takeovers and handing back the land to the landowners by referring to the "impending probable" formation of a "NASAKOM cabinet".

In early 1965 workers in the oil and rubber industries owned by US corporations began to seize control of them. The PKI leadership responded by formally joining the government. At the same time, leading generals were brought into the cabinet.

The PKI ministers not only sat beside the military butchers in Sukarno's cabinet, but they continued to promote the deadly illusion that the armed forces were part of the "peoples' democratic revolution".

Aidit delivered a lecture to army staff school trainees in which he referred to the "feeling of mutuality and unity that daily grows strong between all the armed forces of the Indonesian Republic and the various groups of Indonesian people, including the communists".

In this way, the Stalinists completely disarmed the most class conscious sections of the working class. The elementary Marxist understanding of the state as the "body of armed men" employed by the ruling class to maintain its rule was criminally denied.

Aidit rushed to assure the bourgeoisie and the military that the PKI opposed the revolutionary mobilisation of the masses. "The important thing in Indonesia now is not how to smash the state power as is the case in many other states, but how to strengthen and consolidate the pro-people's aspect ... and to eliminate the anti-people's aspect".

The Sukarno regime moved against the working class by banning all strikes in industry. The PKI leadership raised no objections because industry was considered to belong to the NASAKOM government.

Just before the coup, the PKI, well aware of preparations for military rule, called for the establishment of a "fifth force" within the armed forces, consisting of armed workers and peasants. Far from fighting for the independent mobilisation of the masses against the military threat, the PKI leadership sought to constrain the deepening mass movement within the bounds of the capitalist state.

They grovelled to the generals, seeking to assure them that the PKI's proposal would lead to the strengthening of the state. Aidit announced in a report to the PKI central committee that the "NASAKOMisation" of the armed forces could be achieved and that the fifth force could be established with the cooperation of the armed forces. Right up to the very end, the PKI leadership suppressed the revolutionary aspirations of the working class.

As late as May 1965, the PKI Politburo sowed the illusion that the military and state apparatus was being modified to isolate the "anti-people's aspect" of state power:

"The strength of the pro-people's aspect (of state power) is already becoming steadily greater and holds the initiative and the offensive, while the anti-people's aspect, although moderately strong, is relentlessly pressed into a tight corner. The PKI is struggling so that the pro-people's aspect will become more powerful and finally dominate, and the anti-people's aspect will be driven out of the state power."

The Indonesian and international working class paid a bitter and bloody price for this Stalinist perfidy when Suharto and the generals struck on September 30, 1965.

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