

Lessons of the 1965 Indonesian Coup

Chapter Three: 1965—Stalinism's bloody legacy

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The Indonesian military coup of October 1-2, 1965 was the outcome of a carefully-orchestrated and long-planned operation by the CIA and the US-trained and backed commanders of the Indonesian armed forces.

Throughout 1965 class tensions mounted. The year began with peasants seizing the estates of large landowners and oil and rubber workers occupying US-owned enterprises. President Sukarno had brought the army commanders, led by General Nasution, and the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) leadership into his cabinet to suppress the movement.

The PKI leadership halted the takeovers but the mass movement was becoming increasingly difficult to control. There was growing discontent over the sentencing of 23 peasants to 15 to 20 years in prison for allegedly beating an army officer to death in the course of resisting military action to suppress land seizures in Sumatra.

On the evening of September 30, 1965, a CIA provocation was organised. A group of middle-ranking military officers, at least one of whom had close personal relations with General Suharto, arrested and executed the army chief of staff, Lieutenant-General Ahmad Yani, and five other leading generals, and announced the establishment of a Revolutionary Council.

The round up of the generals did not include two key figures. The first was Suharto, then the commander of the Strategic Reserve Forces (Kostrad), comprised of the military's crack troops. The mutineers led by Lieutenant-Colonel Untung made no attempt to arrest Suharto nor cut off his headquarters in Jakarta despite being in a position to do so. The Defence Minister, General Nasution, also escaped. He was supposedly on the plotters' death list but miraculously survived.

Untung's so-called coup bid was a charade. Within 24 hours Suharto routed the rebels, virtually without a shot being fired, and took control of the capital, backed by Nasution.

By the end of the week, Suharto's reconstituted army command eliminated all pockets of resistance, and launched the greatest anti-communist pogrom in history, orchestrated by the US embassy and the CIA. The White House, Pentagon and CIA, already fighting an undeclared war in Vietnam, were determined to drown the Indonesian revolution in blood.

US diplomats and CIA officers, led by the US ambassador to Indonesia, Marshall Green, worked hand in glove with Suharto's death squads to exterminate every known member and supporter of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI).

CIA-organised holocaust

In preparation for the coup, US officials had spent at least two years compiling death lists which were handed over to the military with a clear instruction: exterminate them all. Suharto's men were ordered to report back after each set of killings so the names could be checked off on the CIA's lists.

Some of the American officers involved described what took place. "It really was a big help to the army," said a former political officer in the US embassy in Jakarta, Robert Martens. "They probably killed a lot of people and I probably have a lot of blood on my hands, but that's not all bad."

"There's a time when you have to strike hard at a decisive moment."

Martens headed an embassy group of State Department and CIA officers who, from 1962, compiled a detailed who's who of the leadership of the PKI. They included, he said, names of provincial, city and other local PKI committee members, and leaders of PKI-backed trade union, women's and youth groups.

The operation was masterminded by former CIA director William Colby, who was then director of the CIA's Far East Division, and thus responsible for directing US covert strategy in Asia. Colby said the work to identify the PKI leadership was a forerunner to the CIA's Phoenix Program in Vietnam, which attempted to exterminate supporters of the National Liberation Front in the late 1960s.

Colby admitted that the work of checking off the death lists was regarded as so important that it was supervised at the CIA's intelligence directorate in Washington. "We came to the conclusion that with the sort of draconian way it was carried out, it really set them (the PKI) back for years."

Deputy CIA station chief Joseph Lazarsky described with undisguised relish how Suharto's Jakarta headquarters provided the US embassy with running reports on the roundup and killing of PKI leaders. "We were getting a good account in Jakarta of who was being picked up. The army had a 'shooting list' of about 4,000 or 5,000 people."

"They didn't have enough goon squads to zap them all, and some individuals were valuable for interrogation. The infrastructure was zapped almost immediately. We knew what they were doing. We knew they would keep a few and save them for the kangaroo courts, but Suharto and his advisers said, if you keep them alive, you have to feed them."

All this was conducted with the approval of Green who was later appointed US ambassador to Australia, where he played a leading role in the preparations for the dismissal of the Whitlam government in 1975.

At least one million people were slaughtered in the six month holocaust that followed the coup. This was the estimate of a team of University of Indonesia graduates commissioned by the army itself to inquire into the extent of the killings.

Instigated and aided by the army, gangs of youth from right-wing Muslim organisations carried out mass killings, particularly in central and

east Java. There were reports that at certain points the Brantas River near Surabaya was "choked with corpses". Another report from the east Javan hill town of Batu said there were so many killed within the narrow confines of a police courtyard that the bodies were simply covered over with layers of cement.

On the island of Bali, formerly considered to be a PKI stronghold, at least 35,000 were killed by the beginning of 1966. There the Tamins, the storm-troopers of Sukarno's PNI (Indonesian National Party) performed the slaughter. A special correspondent of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* told of bodies lying along the roads, or heaped in pits, and of half-burned villages in which peasants dared not leave the charred shells of their huts.

In other areas suspects were forced to kill their alleged comrades with their own hands to prove their loyalty. In the major cities anti-Chinese pogroms were conducted. Workers and public servants who went on strike in protest at the counter-revolutionary wave of terror were sacked.

At least 250,000 workers and peasants were thrown into concentration camps. An estimated 110,000 were still held as political prisoners at the end of 1969. Executions continue to this day, including several dozen since the early 1980s. Another four prisoners, Johannes Surono Hadiwiyono, Safar Suryanto, Simon Petrus Sulaeman and Norbertus Rohayan, were executed nearly 25 years after the coup, a clear sign that the Suharto regime still fears the resurgence of the Indonesian proletariat and poor peasantry.

Stalinist betrayal deepens

While hundreds of thousands of suspected PKI members and supporters were being hunted down and slaughtered, the PKI leadership and their Stalinist counterparts in the Kremlin, Beijing and the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) urged PKI cadre and workers and peasants to offer no resistance, giving a green light for the generals to proceed with their mass executions.

The Stalinists deepened their reactionary line of demanding that the masses subordinate themselves to the national bourgeoisie and Sukarno, who was maintained by Suharto as a puppet president, and to the armed forces themselves.

On October 1, 1965 both Sukarno and PKI secretary general Aidit responded to the formation of the so-called rebel Revolutionary Council by moving to the Halim Air Base in Jakarta to seek protection.

On October 6 Sukarno called for "national unity," that is, "unity" between the military and its victims, and an end to violence. The Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the PKI immediately urged all members and mass organisations to support the "leader of the Indonesian revolution" and offer no resistance to the military. Its statement was reprinted in the CPA's paper *Tribune*:

"Having studied the appeal by the supreme commander-in-chief of the armed forces of the Indonesian Republic, by the leader of the Indonesian revolution, president Sukarno, the political bureau of the central committee of the Communist Party of Indonesia declares full support for the appeal and appeals to all party committees and party members and sympathisers, as well as revolutionary mass organisations led by the PKI members to facilitate the carrying out of this appeal."

Meanwhile, Sukarno, the "leader of the Indonesian revolution," was collaborating with the military repression in the hope of saving his own neck. He called for a thorough purge of those allegedly involved in the "September 30 affair," (the alleged coup bid led by Colonel Untung), and permitted PKI leaders to be arrested and murdered. On October 15 he appointed Suharto as army chief.

Five months later, on March 11, 1966, Sukarno handed Suharto unchallenged decree-making power. He "ordered" Suharto to "take all steps" to re-establish order and to safeguard Sukarno's "personal safety and authority". Suharto's first exercise of his new powers was to formally outlaw the PKI. In recognition of the value of his services, Sukarno was retained as the titular president of the military dictatorship until March 1967.

The PKI leadership continued to demand that the masses bow to the authority of the Sukarno-Suharto regime. Aidit, who had fled, was captured and executed by the army on November 24, 1965 but his line was maintained by the PKI's Second Secretary Njoto. In an interview given to a Japanese newspaper correspondent he emphasised:

"The PKI recognises only one head of state, one supreme commander, one great leader of the revolution President Sukarno... It is President Sukarno united with the forces of the people who will decide the destiny and future of Indonesia."

All party members, Njoto continued, should "fully support the directives of President Sukarno and pledge themselves to implement these without reserve... Our party is making every effort in its power to prevent a civil war."

In other words, while the military butchers and their CIA mentors organised the systematic liquidation of not only the PKI leadership but the most class conscious sections of the Indonesian masses, the PKI ordered its cadre to ensure that no-one fought back.

The utter bankruptcy and treachery of the Stalinist "two-stage" theory of insisting that the masses tie their fate to Sukarno and the national bourgeoisie could not have been spelt out more graphically.

The betrayal of the PKI was endorsed and reinforced by the Stalinist bureaucracies in Moscow and Beijing. The Kremlin blamed "putschist" and "adventuristic" elements in the PKI for the defeat and called repeatedly for the "unity" of the Indonesian "revolution" around Sukarno's NASAKOM (Nationalism, Islam and Communism).

On October 12, 1965 Soviet leaders Brezhnev, Mikoyan and Kosygin sent a special message to Sukarno: "We and our colleagues learned with great joy that your health has improved ... We have with interest heard about your radio appeal to the Indonesian people to remain calm and prevent disorders ... This appeal will meet with profound understanding."

At a Tricontinental Conference in Havana in February, 1966, the Soviet delegation tried in every way to block a public condemnation of the counter-revolutionary terror raging against the Indonesian masses. Its stance won praise from the Suharto regime. The Indonesian parliament passed a resolution on February 11 expressing "full appreciation" for the "efforts of the delegations of Nepal, Mongolia, the Soviet Union and others at the Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America, who successfully neutralised the efforts of the counter-revolutionists of the so-called September 30 movement, and their protectors and leaders, to intervene in the internal affairs of Indonesia".

Thus, the betrayal of the Stalinists was so brazen that the parliamentary lapdogs of the military junta were able to refer to the CIA's September 30 set-up as an attempted counter-revolution!

The Beijing Stalinists similarly wiped their hands of the fate of the Indonesian masses. They even went ahead in Jakarta with a World Conference Against Foreign Bases and stood by without protest as their Indonesian comrades were arrested in the conference hall itself.

The legacy of the 'bloc of four classes'

The Stalinist betrayal in 1965 was the culmination of more than 20 years of treachery in which the PKI, working on the basis of the Stalinist "two-

stage" theory and, in particular, the Maoist ideology of a "bloc of four classes," tied the working class and peasant masses to the bourgeois nationalist regime of Sukarno.

Aidit spelt out the ideological framework of the bloody defeat of the Indonesian revolution shortly after returning from 18 months in China in July 1950 and wresting control of the PKI leadership:

"The working class, the peasants, the petty-bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie must unite in one national front."

Aidit slavishly followed the line of the Maoist regime in China which suppressed the independent struggle of the working class and attempted to establish a "New Democracy", a bourgeois state, in alliance with sections of the national bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie after the collapse of Chiang Kai Shek's dictatorship.

Parroting Mao, he called for a "people's democracy" and a "united front of all anti-imperialist and anti-feudal forces in the country. That is to say, the working class, the peasantry, the petty-bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie."

In keeping with the counter-revolutionary "two-stage" theory of Stalinism, "The task of this alliance is to bring about not socialist but democratic reforms".

Aidit demanded that the workers and peasant masses support not only the national bourgeoisie but also "all other patriotic and anti-colonial forces including the left (rather progressive) landlord group".

It was this line, which Aidit hammered out incessantly, which was used to suppress workers' and peasants' struggles, tie the working class to the Sukarno regime, and create the conditions for the US-backed military to strike.

Time and again, PKI members and supporters were instructed to strangle the class struggle and the revolutionary strivings of the oppressed masses in order to preserve the "national united front":

"The basic principle we must adhere to in the conduct of the national struggle is to subordinate the class struggle to the national struggle."

The "two stage" theory of Stalinism insists that in the colonial and semi-colonial countries such as Indonesia, the oppressed masses must not engage in struggles that threaten the national bourgeoisie nor raise the program of socialist revolution. The class struggle has to be stifled to prop up the national bourgeoisie and establish a national capitalist democracy.

The bloody counter-revolutionary consequences of this Stalinist line were first demonstrated in China in 1926-27 when the butcher Chiang Kai Shek inflicted a crushing defeat on the Chinese working class after the Communist Party had been instructed by the Kremlin leadership to join his bourgeois nationalist Koumintang.

The massacres carried out by Chiang confirmed Leon Trotsky's warnings that the weak and belated bourgeoisies of the oppressed nations are organically incapable of conducting any consistent struggle against imperialism and feudalism. That is because, to do so requires the mobilisation of the masses in revolutionary struggle and such a struggle immediately comes into conflict with the class position of the national bourgeoisie as exploiters of their "own" working class and peasantry.

As Trotsky explained in his writings on the betrayal of the Chinese Revolution:

"To really arouse the workers and peasants against imperialism is possible only by connecting their basic and most profound life interest with the cause of the country's liberation. A workers' strike small or large an agrarian rebellion, an uprising of the oppressed sections in city and country against the usurer, against the bureaucracy, against the local military satraps, all that arouses the multitudes, that welds them together, that educates, steels, is a real step forward on the road to the revolutionary and social liberation of the Chinese people... But everything that brings the oppressed and exploited masses of the toilers to their feet inevitably pushes the national bourgeoisie into an open bloc with the imperialists. The class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the masses of workers and

peasants is not weakened, but, on the contrary, is sharpened by imperialist oppression, to the point of bloody civil war at every serious conflict." (Trotsky, *Problems of the Chinese Revolution*, New Park 1969, p.5)

The criminal role played by the PKI in tying the Indonesian masses to Sukarno's national bourgeois regime made Trotsky's analysis tragically prophetic.

The unresolved tasks of genuine national liberation, land redistribution, democracy and economic development in Indonesia and all historically-oppressed countries can be achieved only by the working class leading the peasant masses in the socialist revolution. That is, national self-determination can only arise as a by-product of the socialist revolution led by the proletariat.

The victory of this struggle is bound up with the development of the world socialist revolution to overthrow imperialism on a world scale.

This is the kernel of the Marxist theory of Permanent Revolution developed by Leon Trotsky and vindicated by the victory of the October 1917 Russian Revolution.

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