

Lessons of the 1965 Indonesian Coup

Chapter Four: Pabloite accomplices of counter-revolution

Terri Cavanagh
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In the months following the bloody CIA-organised military coup of October 1-2, 1965, every known member and supporter of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and all working class parties, and hundreds of thousands of other Indonesian workers and peasants, were massacred or thrown into concentration camps for torture and interrogation.

The systematic extermination and ruthless suppression of working class opposition intensified after March 11, 1966 when Sukarno, the bourgeois nationalist leader retained by the military as President, granted unfettered decree-making power to the coup leader and army chief, General Suharto.

The betrayal of the tumultuous revolutionary movement of the Indonesian masses by the Stalinist leadership of the PKI was a profound defeat with enormous implications for the international working class.

The PKI blocked the repeated attempts of the workers and peasants to seize the factories and plantations. It tied the masses to the bourgeois nationalist regime of Sukarno and ultimately joined the US-backed military leaders, the future butchers of the masses, in the Sukarno cabinet. After the coup the Stalinists ordered their cadre to enforce Sukarno's appeal for "unity" with the military and to prevent any resistance to the holocaust that was being unleashed.

The blow struck to the Indonesian revolution reverberated throughout Asia and around the world. In particular it encouraged and enabled the massive escalation of the US invasion of Vietnam, it crushed the hopes and revolutionary striving of the masses in Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines, and it strengthened the hand of the unstable bourgeois regimes in the Indian sub-continent.

Mandel and Hansen whitewash Stalinist treachery

But the response of the Pabloite revisionists of the "United Secretariat," led by Ernest Mandel and Joseph Hansen, was to minimise the magnitude of the great Indonesian betrayal, to whitewash the counter-revolutionary role of the Stalinists, and, above all, to cover up their own responsibility for the bloodbath.

While the Indonesian masses were being slaughtered, Professor Mandel attempted to paint the most reassuring picture of the future prospects of the Indonesian revolution, in order to dull the consciousness of the international working class.

"Naturally the struggle has not ended in Indonesia," he wrote from the comfort of his Belgian university chair in an article published in the Pabloite journal *World Outlook* on March 11, 1966.

"A part of the Communist cadres have been able to go underground," he

went on. "The discontent of the hungry masses is increasing from day to day; the empty stomachs of the workers and peasants are not filled through massacres. The revolt will widen against the corrupt regime. Sukarno understands this and will resume his eternal balancing act; he has just eliminated the most ferocious of the generals from his cabinet. The people will again have their turn."

This whitewash of the immense betrayal of the Indonesian masses demonstrates the counter-revolutionary consequences of Pabloite opportunism, which emerged in the Trotskyist movement from the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Led by Michel Pablo, elements such as Mandel adapted to the post-World War II stabilisation of capitalism and the seeming strengthening of the Stalinist bureaucracies which suppressed the revolutionary upsurge of the international working class in the immediate post-war period. They abandoned Trotsky's struggle for the construction of the Fourth International as the world party of socialist revolution and claimed that the Moscow and Beijing-line Stalinist bureaucracies and parties would be pressured by the masses into playing a progressive role. On this basis, they set out to liquidate the Fourth International into whatever Stalinist or social democratic formation then dominated the labour movement in each country, declaring that the road to socialism consisted of centuries of horribly deformed workers' states of the type established in Eastern Europe and China.

In 1953 this liquidationism was combatted by the formation of the International Committee of the Fourth International in response to an Open Letter issued by American Socialist Workers Party leader James P. Cannon calling for the defence of "orthodox Trotskyism". However, by the early 1960s the SWP leaders themselves had increasingly adapted to the prolonged post-war boom. They hailed the apparent successes of national bourgeoisie and petty bourgeois elements, such as Castro in Cuba, as a substitute for the seizure of power by the working class led by revolutionary Marxist parties, proclaiming that socialism could be achieved through such "blunted instruments". This was the perspective on which they reunified with the Pabloites in 1963 to form the United Secretariat.

Central to the Pabloite renunciation of proletarian revolution was the reactionary objectivist method which presented the struggle for socialism as a quasi-automatic "historical process" achieved through the spontaneous movement of the masses led by whatever political tendencies were at hand, regardless of their class composition and program.

Thus the Indonesian "people" would prevail regardless of the terrible crisis of leadership produced by the perfidy of the mass Stalinist party. Sukarno, by now the willing tool of General Suharto, was supposedly muzzling the most ferocious generals. And, even after its unspeakable betrayal, Mandel referred to the PKI as a "Communist" party.

Mandel's snow job was ratified by the "United Secretariat" in a statement issued on March 20, 1966. Its conclusion was that the emergence of General Suharto as the "strong man" of the counter-revolution was of little consequence, because "It is extremely unlikely that the counter-revolutionists now in power in Jakarta will be able to stabilise the situation for any length of time."

Today, with Suharto's military junta still riding ruthlessly on the back of Indonesia's oppressed millions, it is crucial to study how the Pabloite opportunists provided the essential political cover for the PKI and the Sukarno regime itself.

The "United Secretariat" statement sowed the most deadly illusion that even General Suharto's American-trained killers would be compelled to act in the interests of the Indonesian masses against imperialism as part of Sukarno's phoney "confrontation" with the newly-formed state of Malaysia: "The army leaders themselves will not readily give up their nationalist, anti-imperialist verbiage which reflects real conflicts of interest with British imperialism and the ruling comprador bourgeoisie and semi-feudal landowners of Malaysia."

While the Indonesian masses were left leaderless in the face of Suharto's horrific slaughter, the Pabloites loftily declared their confidence that somehow the masses would be victorious.

"The masses, though leaderless and deeply shaken, have not lost all fighting potential, particularly in the countryside. It will prove impossible to get the thousands of squatters to evacuate the imperialist-owned or 'nationalised' plantations managed by corrupt army officers, or to compel the thousands of plantation and oil workers to revert to the 'normal' working conditions of colonial times."

Above all, the Pabloites continued to insist that the masses place their trust in the Stalinist leaders of the PKI, arguing that they could be convinced to play a revolutionary role, even after they had strangled every mass movement against the Sukarno regime.

"If they succeed in regrouping and in regaining a mass following in some regions of the countryside by calling on the peasants to immediately take over the land held by the landlords, the plantations and army administration, they could gain on a progressive scale due to the inability of the Indonesian reaction to solve the country's basic economic plight and due to the divisions in the ranks of the army which that inability will undoubtedly provoke."

In 1957, and again in 1964-65, the PKI had directed workers and peasants to surrender the factories, banks, oil installations, plantations and other enterprises they had occupied, saving the day for Sukarno and the Indonesian bourgeoisie. Now, the Pabloites claimed, they could play a progressive role.

Mandel's article and the "United Secretariat" statement were published, together with an article by a Pabloite member of the PKI, by the US Socialist Workers Party in a pamphlet called "The Catastrophe in Indonesia" dated December 1966. It was complete with an introduction by Joseph Hansen, an SWP leader who had played a poisonous role in the 1963 reunification with the Pabloites. Hansen, subsequently exposed as a Stalinist agent who became an FBI plant in the SWP, was a central instigator in the SWP's 1963 break from the ICFI. Hansen sought to reassure the pamphlet's readers that "one of the new features of world politics today" was "the quickness with which the masses recover from defeats that formerly would have left them prostrate for decades".

The stunning indifference of the Pabloites to the fate of the Indonesian masses was not simply the product of the callousness and contempt for the working class which characterises their fetid petty-bourgeois milieu but was also a bid to cover-up the critical factor in the Indonesian betrayal the role played by the Pabloites themselves and their Indonesian representatives.

It is a measure of the cynicism of the Pabloites and their subservience to the Stalinists and the national bourgeoisie that none of the articles and

statements published in the 1966 pamphlet so much as mentioned the existence of a section of the "United Secretariat" in Indonesia, let alone explained the part it played in the events leading up to the coup.

There was just one brief appeal for the legalisation of and release of all members of the PKI, the Partai Murbah (a social democratic formation) and the Partai Acoma, even though the Acoma party had relations with the Pabloites at least as early as 1953 and was admitted as a section of the "United Secretariat" in 1960, just as the American SWP was intensifying its unprincipled reunification manoeuvres with the Pabloites.

This fleeting reference to their own members was a guilty attempt by the Pabloites to hide the part that they and their Indonesian proteges played in providing the PKI Stalinists with much-needed credibility throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

How Pabloism emerged in Indonesia

The Partai Acoma originated as a breakaway from the PKI in 1948. By falsely claiming to be Trotskyist, it served to divert and trap working class and peasant opposition to the support of the PKI for the national bourgeois regime of Sukarno. Led by an MP, Ibnu Parna, its programmatic documents presented the PKI as a "Marxist-Leninist party like us." As we shall show, this was a fraud in relation to both the PKI and the Partai Acoma.

The need for such a fake "Trotskyist" safety valve was demonstrated by the explosive events of 1948.

The collaboration of the PKI leadership in the post-war administrations headed by Sukarno and their acceptance of the Indonesian bourgeoisie's rotten agreements with the Dutch colonialists aroused intense working class opposition.

From July 5, 1947 to January 23, 1948 President Sukarno's Republican administration was headed by Amir Sjarifuddin who was both Prime Minister and Defence Minister. Sjarifuddin was a secret member of the PKI, as was the Deputy Prime Minister and a Minister of State. In addition, two Ministers of State were open members of the PKI. This administration signed the Renville Agreement with the Netherlands which maintained Dutch control of the lion's share of the sugar, rubber, coffee, tea and oil industries, required the withdrawal of guerrilla forces from Dutch-occupied territory and provided for the liquidation of the PKI-led "people's armed units" into the bourgeois "Indonesian National Armed Forces" controlled by Sukarno and his generals.

Such was the popular opposition to the acceptance of the US-imposed pact with the Dutch that the government was brought down and replaced by one headed by right-wing Vice-President Hatta as Prime Minister.

Strikes then erupted, demanding a parliamentary government. The PKI leadership supported the suppression of this movement by Sukarno who appealed for "national unity". When this betrayal was opposed by a section of the PKI, the PKI leadership responded savagely, executing the leaders of the opposition faction.

Partai Acoma emerged from this dissenting group. While it opposed the PKI leadership, the Acoma party maintained that the Indonesian revolution had to be carried out by the PKI as a "Marxist-Leninist party". Subsequently the Acoma leaders established contact with the "United Secretariat" which encouraged their pro-Stalinist positions and illusions in Maoism.

It is apparent that the Partai Acoma diverted wide layers of workers and peasants looking for an alternative to the class collaborationist program of the PKI.

From 1953 to 1955, for example, the Acoma's strength in the 200,000-strong Indonesian Peasants Association (SAKTI) delayed for two

years plans by the PKI leadership to merge SAKTI with two PKI-controlled peasants' organisations, the RTI and the BTI.

Pabloites prepare betrayal

An article published in February 1958 in the Pabloite journal *Quatrieme International* provides a graphic indictment of the role played by Pabloism in opposing the fight for revolutionary Marxist leadership in the working class.

The article, "The Indonesian Revolution on the March," by Sal Santen, a close associate of Pablo, was written at the height of the revolutionary convulsions of December 1957, when workers and peasants seized control of Dutch and other imperialist-owned plantations and enterprises.

The article provided a criminal cover for the counter-revolutionary role of the PKI, which ordered the masses to hand over their conquests to the military in order to shore up the Sukarno administration.

According to Santen: "It must be added that the Communist militants, the basic and average cadres of the PKI and of the SOBSI, the big Indonesian workers' union organisation, have nothing of the bureaucratic character of Aidit (Communist Party leader) and Co. They are in front; they are the ones who took over the initiative in occupying the factories, the plantations, the banks and the ships. There is no doubt that the most conscious of them are inflamed by the revolutionary audacity of Tan Malakka, by Leon Trotsky's ideas of the permanent revolution."

Acting on this perspective, the Indonesian Pabloites politically disarmed the tens of thousands of workers and peasants who came forward into struggle only to find their way blocked by the PKI. Just at the point when the decisive task was to educate the most class conscious elements in the necessity for an uncompromising struggle against the Stalinist "two-stage" and "bloc of four classes" line of the PKI, and the need for a thorough arming with the program of Permanent Revolution, the Pabloites worked for the opposite.

Opportunist to the core, they equated Trotsky with Tan Malakka, an early PKI leader who opposed the plans for a revolt in 1926 and split from the PKI to form his own organisation. They falsified the Marxist theory of Permanent Revolution, transforming it from a conscious strategy to guide the struggles for the dictatorship of the proletariat into a spontaneously generated perspective.

The central tenant of Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution is the perfidy of the national bourgeoisie and their incapacity to lead a real struggle against imperialism. Only the working class can free the masses from national and class oppression, by carrying the socialist revolution and uniting with their class brothers throughout the world in a common struggle to overthrow imperialism internationally.

Such a struggle can only be undertaken consciously under the banner of the Fourth International in an uncompromising struggle against the Stalinist and petty-bourgeois forces, such as the Pabloites, who attempt to disarm the working class and tie it to its own bourgeoisie.

In the hands of the Pabloites, the program of Permanent Revolution became a justification for their own adaption to the national bourgeoisie and the Stalinists. The working class did not need its own revolutionary party to come to power because the PKI was the instrument through which the Permanent Revolution was being realised, albeit unconsciously.

Thus, Santen, speaking on behalf of Pablo and Mandel, declared:

"In any case it is clear that **the whole of Indonesia is moving**. The march of the masses has become irreversible although the process remains contradictory and has already reached the stage of **dual power in a good part of Indonesia, and above all in Java**. The occupation of enterprises, of plantations, of the fleet, and the banks by the masses has only one

meaning: **It is a question of the classical beginning of the proletarian revolution. The Indonesian revolution is in the act of breaking the limits of the national revolution under a bourgeois nationalist leadership. It develops according to the laws of the permanent revolution.**" (Emphasis in the original)

The Pabloites held out the prospect of a peaceful transition to "worker and peasant power":

"A speedy and almost 'peaceful' victory of the revolution up to worker and peasant power (above all in Java) was possible, if the PKI, at the first moment pushed by the spirit of the masses, had not done everything to castrate the action of the masses by subordinating it to the control of the government."

What the Pabloites meant by "worker and peasant power" was completely opposed to the struggle for the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Pabloites lined up as cheer leaders for the counter-revolutionary Stalinist "two-stage" perspective of demanding that the proletariat give up the struggle for socialist revolution.

To sanctify their opposition to the independent mobilisation of the working class and to the forging of a revolutionary proletariat, that is, Trotskyist, party, the Pabloites insisted that the PKI, despite its betrayal of the December 1957 occupations, would be pressured to the left by the masses:

"At the same time, at each aggravation of the situation, the masses have the tendency to push the SOBSI and PKI further. A great deal will now depend on the boldness, on the revolutionary Marxist understanding of the militants, of the average Communist cadres. We feel completely solidarised with them, inspired and enthused by their initiatives, by their boldness which we passionately hope will not stop before the 'taboos' of the Aidits. We salute the Indonesian Trotskyist cadres who are integrated in the PKI with the correct revolutionary perspective that the radicalisation of the masses will be realised above all through the PKI and SOBSI."

This was the greatest crime of Pabloism the liquidation of Trotskyist cadre, and those who were attracted to Trotskyism, into the camp of Stalinism.

Santen added a footnote to emphasise that this treacherous line was advanced in direct opposition to the struggle waged by the International Committee of the Fourth International since its founding in 1953 to defend Trotskyism against Pabloite liquidationism. Santen specifically denounced the ICFI's fight for the construction of sections of the Fourth International to defeat counter-revolutionary Stalinism:

"In contradiction to some sectarian 'orthodox' people, the International does not let itself be fascinated by the reactionary Stalinist policy, but orients itself, above all, on the dynamism of the situation itself, a dynamism that pushes the masses, and through the masses the PKI itself into contradiction with the present order in Indonesia."

This passage should be burned into the consciousness of every worker as the summation of Pabloism's pro-Stalinist dirty work.

In direct struggle against the ICFI, the Pabloites consciously pushed fatal illusions in the PKI Stalinists, precisely at the point where the burning question of the hour was to expose the criminal role of the Stalinists and resolutely fight for a decisive break by the masses from the PKI to construct a revolutionary Trotskyist leadership.

The protracted and implacable struggle waged against the Pabloite opportunists by the ICFI, which appeared for many years to be a fight taken up by small isolated forces in the Fourth International, was a life and death question for millions of Indonesian workers and peasants.

Counter-revolutionary handmaidens

Within weeks of Santen's lines being penned, the rotten fruits of the PKI's betrayal of the December 1957 movement began to emerge. A counter-revolutionary government was formed in Central Sumatra in February 1958 by coup leader Colonel Achmed Hussein and headed by Dr Sjafruddin Prawiranegara. This CIA-backed operation, only possible because of the PKI's disarming of the December 1957 rebellion, was a test run for the bloody coup that was to take place seven years later.

Fully conscious that this was a dress rehearsal for counter-revolution, the response of the Pabloites was to intensify their wretched boosting of the PKI. *Quatrieme International's* editor added a footnote which climaxed with the following purple passage:

"Since the 'rebels' main aim is to do away with Sukarno's 'guided democracy' in which is included the PKI, then any compromise will be at the expense of the PKI. In this case, the immediate perspective is that the PKI, under mass pressure, will be obliged, willy nilly, to execute a major policy about-face as was performed by the Chinese Communist Party in a similar situation in 1949, and to go past the bourgeois-nationalist stage of the revolution to the socialist stage of workers' power. Thus, in fact, but again without acknowledgement, operating on the basis of, and validating the Trotskyist theory of permanent revolution."

Thus the PKI, the hangman of the Indonesian revolution, was depicted as the unwitting instrument of the Permanent Revolution!

Added to this was the lie that the Chinese Stalinists, the mentors of Aidit and the other PKI leaders, had carried through the "socialist stage of workers' power" in 1949. In fact, the peasant armies of the Maoists brutally suppressed the proletarian uprising in 1949, murdered the Trotskyist opposition, and established an extremely deformed workers' state based on the Stalinist perspective of a partnership with the national bourgeoisie, the urban petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry. This was indeed the model upon which the PKI leadership based itself.

Not content with glorifying the Stalinists, the editor's special footnote then promoted the prospects of the national bourgeoisie undertaking a progressive transformation as well. It suggested an alternative scenario premised on the Sukarno government leading a struggle against the CIA-organised "rebels":

"In the other event, that the Sukarno government takes a stronger line of opposition and resistance to the 'rebels,' a further polarisation of all the bourgeois and semi-feudal counter-revolutionary forces will be seen; confronting a shadow bourgeois-nationalist government and the masses. This confrontation of the masses against the new 'slaveholders' rebellion,' against the new 'Kornilov putsch,' will mean a new upsurge of the revolution, while the experience of this kind of revolutionary action by the masses will leave little chance of a relapse to the stability of a bourgeois nationalist regime."

The events of October 1965 were to prove the Sukarno regime to be no less accommodating to General Suharto's killers than the Kerensky government was to General Kornilov's coup bid in 1917. Sukarno displayed the essence of bourgeois nationalism by ending his political career as a puppet President for Suharto's military junta.

The conclusion of the editor's footnote should be inscribed on the tombstone of Pabloism: "In either case our optimistic perspective is justified. **The Indonesian Revolution is on the march! Its victory as a socialist revolution is now in generation.** (Emphasis in original)

From 1957 to 1965 the Pabloites internationally perpetrated this objectivist cover-up of the grave dangers confronting the Indonesian revolution.

The work of the Pabloite section in Indonesia was central to the whole Pabloite world perspective. It was discussed intensively at the so-called Fifth World Congress of the "United Secretariat" in 1957.

"Our Fifth World Congress, in discussing the progress and the road of the world colonial revolution, gave serious attention to the developments in Indonesia. Recognising the Indonesian situation as pre-revolutionary, it

expected a revolutionary explosion very soon," declared the article by Santen.

The entire Pabloite "United Secretariat" has blood on its hands. They aided and abetted the Stalinist betrayal of the Indonesian workers and peasants.

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