Lessons of the 1965 Indonesian Coup

Chapter Five: Pabloites cover up Stalinist treachery

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The crisis of working class leadership was never posed so sharply as in Indonesia between 1963 and 1965. The fate of the Indonesian workers and peasants depended entirely on overcoming and defeating the counter-revolutionary line of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) which bound the working class hand and foot to the tottering bourgeois nationalist regime of Sukarno while the US-backed military prepared for a bloody coup.

The PKI Stalinists, led by general secretary Aidit, repeatedly demanded that workers and peasants hand back factories and plantations which they had seized. They then joined the army generals in taking cabinet posts in the Suharto government and backed the outlawing of workers' strikes.

The more it became obvious that the generals were preparing for a bloody coup, the more the PKI leaders worked feverishly to assure the bourgeoisie and the military that the PKI opposed the revolutionary mobilisation of the masses.

Aidit repeatedly declared that the state power in Indonesia did not have to be smashed but could be reformed from within to "strengthen and consolidate the pro-people's aspect," which included President Sukarno. The PKI leader gave lectures at army colleges in which he heralded a "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".

The PKI leadership could only advance these positions because the Indonesian Pabloites were working equally feverishly to prevent workers from breaking with the Stalinists. They vehemently opposed the construction of a new revolutionary leadership.

The responsibility for the bloody counter-revolutionary consequences of this line can be traced directly to the 1963 Pabloite Reunification Congress at which the American Socialist Workers Party consummated an unprincipled break from the International Committee of the Fourth International and joined the Pabloite "United Secretariat" of Ernest Mandel.

After leading the struggle against Pabloite liquidationism in 1953, the SWP leaders had in the late 1950s increasingly adapted to the pressure of the protracted post-war boom and the apparent quiescence of the working class. They abandoned the struggle for proletarian revolution led by a Bolshevik-type party and sought "regroupment" with petty bourgeois radicals and disaffected Stalinists. In 1963 they joined hands with the Pabloites in claiming that not only the Stalinist parties, such as the PKI, but also the bourgeois nationalist and petty-bourgeois nationalist forces in the backward countries, such as Castro in Cuba and Sukarno in Indonesia, could become vehicles for the establishment of socialism.

The reunification resolution declared that there was no crisis of revolutionary leadership in the oppressed countries: "In the colonial and semi-colonial countries ... the very weakness of capitalism, the whole peculiar socio-economic structure produced by imperialism, the permanent misery of the big majority of the population in the absence of a radical agrarian revolution, the stagnation and even reduction of living standards while industrialisation nevertheless proceeds relatively rapidly, creates situations in which the failure of one revolutionary wave does not lead automatically to relative or even temporary social or economic stabilisation. A seemingly inexhaustible succession of mass struggles continues, such as Bolivia has experienced for 10 years."

In other words, no matter how crushing were the defeats and betrayals inflicted on the masses, they would rise again. There was no need for a Trotskyist party. The criminal character of this opportunist complacency was soon to be spelt out in the blood of the Indonesian masses.

The 1963 conference was based on the rejection of the historical necessity of building sections of the Trotskyist movement in the backward countries. The Pabloite resolution declared: "The weakness of the enemy in the backward countries has opened the possibility of coming to power even with blunted instruments."

In Indonesia, the "blunted instrument" was to be the PKI.

The great betrayal in Sri Lanka

The Pabloite treachery in Indonesia was intimately bound up with the great betrayal in Sri Lanka in 1964 when the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), the Pabloite organisation, joined the bourgeois coalition government of Mrs Bandaranaike, together with the Stalinist Communist Party of Sri Lanka, in order to behead the mass working class movement against capitalist rule.

The LSSP had opposed the formation of the International Committee in 1953 and subsequently played a central role in preparing the American SWP's reunification with the Pabloites. Its opposition to the struggle against opportunism in the Fourth International was rooted in its increasingly nationalist orientation and abandonment of Trotskyist program and principles in order to accommodate with the Stalinists and Bandaranaike's capitalist party, the SLFP, in Ceylon.

The Pabloite Reunification Congress of 1963 covered up the LSSP's national opportunism by claiming that "Our Ceylonese section has progressively corrected the wrong orientation adopted in 1960 of supporting the liberal-bourgeois government of the SLFP. Since the masses began to go into action, it has not hesitated to place itself at their head against its electoral allies of yesterday." Just one year later the fake "Trotskyist" credentials supplied by the Pabloites were used by the LSSP

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to join the capitalist government.

This betrayal by a party hailed by the Pabloites as the "largest Trotskyist party in the world" had disastrous implications internationally, first of all in Indonesia. It strengthened the hand of the Stalinist and Maoist parties, such as the PKI, whose capacity to suppress and disarm the working class would have been shattered had the LSSP upheld the program of permanent revolution and fought for the overthrow of bourgeois rule in Sri Lanka.

Pabloites boost PKI

After the entry of their Sri Lankan section into the capitalist government in Sri Lanka alongside the Stalinists, the Pabloites continued to pursue a very similar pro-Stalinist and pro-national bourgeois line in Indonesia.

The Pabloites' pamphlet, *The Catastrophe in Indonesia*, not only covered up the part played by the Indonesian Pabloite section, the Partai Acoma, as we exposed in the previous chapter.

Even after the bloody coup in Indonesia, the pamphlet continued to promote the prospect of the national bourgeoisie and the PKI playing a progressive role.

It included an article by T. Soedarso, described by US Socialist Workers Party leader Joseph Hansen in the pamphlet's introduction as a "young member of the Indonesian Communist party who succeeded in making his way into exile". Hansen enthusiastically commended Soedarso's article as "an indication of the determination of an important sector of the Indonesian Communist Party to learn from what happened and to utilise the lessons in such a way as to ensure victory when the masses again surge forward, as they surely will".

Soedarso's article treated the counter-revolutionary program of the PKI leadership as a series of "mistakes", including the "errors" of "seeking to achieve socialism by peaceful means," and of pursuing a "policy" of a two-stage revolution and a united front with the national bourgeoisie.

Soedarso expressed no fundamental differences with the Stalinists, agreeing, for example, that "The revolutionary movement could and should support the progressive attitudes or actions of the national bourgeoisie". If ever proof was needed that the semi-colonial bourgeoisie, personified by Sukarno, was inherently incapable of a "progressive" program and would line up behind the slaughter of the working class, the Indonesian bloodbath provided it. For 18 months Sukarno served General Suharto's dictatorship as a puppet president, and even after that, from March 1967, he was retained as a token "president without powers".

The Pabloites likewise belittled the significance of the PKI's entry into the Sukarno NASAKOM coalition government with the military butchers. Soedarso implored the PKI to reverse this "line," as if it were a mere lapse.

Soedarso's virtual apology for this fundamental class treachery was no accident. The cardinal premise of Pabloism was the reversal of Trotsky's struggle against Stalinism. The evolution of Stalinism into a counter-revolutionary bureaucracy was established irrevocably in 1933 when the Stalinist Comintern, approved, without a single dissenting voice, the betrayal of the German Communist Party in handing over the German working class to Hitler without a shot being fired. From that point on Trotsky insisted that the Third International, following the Second, had passed definitely into the camp of the bourgeoisie, and that the Fourth International had to built as the world party of socialist revolution to ensure the continuity of Marxism.

Soedarso's article was a conscious cover-up, organised by Mandel and Hansen, for the reactionary role of Stalinism. The article deliberately did not use the word Stalinism, but fraudulently referred to the PKI as "Communist". And then to make his position crystal clear, Soedarso concluded: "The above criticism is not intended to undermine the role of the PKI nor to arouse distrust in Indonesian Communism."

Thus, a year after the military coup, by which time a million workers and peasants had perished, the Pabloites were whitewashing the lessons of 1965 and still urging the Indonesian workers and peasants to maintain their faith in the PKI.

The Pabloite 'lessons' of Indonesia

Soedarso's article was not an isolated instance. In fact the line advanced in the article provided the essential themes for the statement issued on March 20, 1966 by the Pabloite "United Secretariat". Entitled "*The Lesson of Indonesia*," it opposed any break from the PKI and issued no call for the building of a section of the Fourth International. On the contrary, it declared that the "Indonesian Communists" could "overcome the results of the present defeat" by assimilating certain lessons.

The first "lesson" was stated as follows: "While it is correct and necessary to support all anti-imperialist mass movements, and even to critically support all concrete anti-imperialist measures taken by representatives of the colonial bourgeoisie like Sukarno, for colonial revolution to be victorious it is absolutely essential to maintain the proletarian organisations strictly independent politically and organisationally from the 'national' bourgeoisie."

Not only did the Pabloites continue to sow the most dangerous illusions in the "anti-imperialist" pretensions of the national bourgeoisie, their talk of "independent" proletarian organisations was an utter fraud. The political independence of the working class could only be forged by building a Trotskyist party in pitiless and audacious struggle against the Stalinists whom the Pabloites were trying to resuscitate.

The second Pabloite "lesson" claimed that "While it is correct and necessary during the first phases of the revolution in backward countries to place the main stress on the problems of winning national independence, unifying the country and solving the agrarian question (i.e., the historical tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution which constitute the most burning tasks in the eyes of 80 to 90 percent of the population), it is indispensable to understand that the solution of these tasks is only possible when the working class, in alliance with the poor peasantry, has conquered leadership of the revolution, establishes the dictatorship of the proletariat and the poor peasantry and pushes the revolution through to its socialist phase."

With this opportunist line of "two phases," the Pabloites were trying to breathe new life into the discredited "two stage" theory of the Stalinists, which demanded that the "socialist phase" of the revolution be delayed until the completion of the democratic and national revolution. The Pabloite position was the opposite of Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution which was based on the international character of the socialist revolution and the revolutionary role of the international proletariat. Trotsky emphasised the essential lesson of the Russian revolution that, in this epoch, the democratic and national tasks in the backward and oppressed countries could be achieved only through the proletarian revolution and its extension on the world scale.

The Pabloite call for the "dictatorship of the proletariat and poor peasantry" sought to revive the "Old Bolshevik" formula of the "democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry" discarded by Lenin in 1917. Lenin adopted Trotsky's unequivocal position that the proletariat is the only consistently revolutionary class which can lead the peasants and carry through the democratic and socialist tasks of the oppressed nations as part of the struggle of the working class on a world

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scale.

The third "lesson" advanced by the Pabloites was: "While it is necessary to win the broadest possible mass base in the countryside, a revolutionary party capable of applying that policy must be based upon a hardened proletarian cadre thoroughly trained in Marxist theory and revolutionary practice."

The duplicitous character of this "lesson" can be seen from the fact that it was oriented toward the Stalinists. The references to a "hardened proletarian cadre" and "Marxist theory" were a sham.

In fact, the "United Secretariat" advised the survivors of the PKI leadership to take the road of rural guerrilla warfare.

Its statement expressed the hope that "what remains of that leadership along with the surviving party cadres especially the best educated, those steeled by the terrible experiences they went through in the past six months will have taken the road of guerrilla war, if only out of self-defence.

They urged the Stalinists to turn to a peasant-based guerrilla war, aping the Maoists in China. Maoism is a variant of Stalinism based on peasant hostility to the hegemony of the working class. Arising out the defeat of the 1926-27 Chinese revolution and the destruction of the Chinese Communist Party's working class membership, Mao's turn to the peasantry led to the abortion of the 1949 Chinese revolution. It produced a highly deformed workers' state based on Mao's "bloc of four classes" the national bourgeoisie, the urban petty-bourgeoisie, the peasantry and the working class.

It was this very doctrine which guided the determination of the Aidit leadership of the PKI to prevent a proletarian socialist revolution in Indonesia. In Aidit's words: "The working class, the peasants, the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie must unite in one national front."

The Pabloites' pamphlet was a cynical bid to divert class conscious workers from the most essential lesson of the Indonesian betrayal the necessity for a Trotskyist party to defeat the Stalinists and their Pabloite accomplices who function as counter-revolutionary petty-bourgeois agencies within the mass movement. There was and is only one revolutionary party which can avenge the betrayal of 1965 by leading the Indonesian workers to power an Indonesian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

Conclusion

In 1951 the PKI leadership had set out clearly the path of betrayal it was to pursue. "In the struggle to realise their political convictions, the communists will not use force while the ruling class still leaves the peaceful, the parliamentary way open. If there is the use of force, the spilling of blood, a civil war, it will not be the communists who start it but the ruling class itself."

This counter-revolutionary perspective was only able to be inflicted on the Indonesian masses because the Pabloites tied the most class conscious sections of the working class to the banner and program of the PKI.

The Pabloite betrayals in Sri Lanka and Indonesia demonstrated the counter-revolutionary character of Pabloism. As the International Committee of the Fourth International stated in its 1988 perspectives resolution, *The World Capitalist Crisis and the Tasks of the Fourth International*,:

"In the assistance it rendered to Stalinism, social democracy and bourgeois nationalism, the opportunism of the Pabloite centrists played a vital role in enabling imperialism to survive the crucial years between 1968 and 1975 when its world order was shaken by economic turmoil and an international upsurge of the working class and the oppressed masses in the backward countries. It verified Trotsky's assessment of centrism as a secondary agency of imperialism. The petty-bourgeois defeatists who pontificate on the doomed character of the proletariat while discovering new vistas for the bourgeoisie never bother to concretely analyse how decrepit capitalism survived into the 1980s. The Pabloites care least of all to examine the results of their own policies. Inasmuch as the entire petty-bourgeois fraternity of centrists, radicals and declassed intellectuals dismiss a priori the revolutionary capacities of the working class and accept its defeat as inevitable, they never even consider what the consequences of a correct Marxist policy would have been in Sri Lanka in 1964, in France in 1968, in Chile in 1973, and in Greece and Portugal in 1974.

"The International Committee, on the other hand, derives from the strategical experiences of the proletariat during the postwar period the crucial lesson upon which it bases its preparation for the coming revolutionary upheavals: *that the building of the Fourth International as the World Party of Socialist Revolution to ensure the victory of the international working class requires an uncompromising and unrelenting struggle against opportunism and centrism.*"

A new revolutionary leadership must be built to lead the Indonesian masses to smash the Suharto dictatorship, overthrow the bourgeoisie and throw off the yoke of imperialist exploitation in the fight for the world socialist revolution. Against the Stalinists and Pabloites who are preparing another bloody trap for the masses, an Indonesian section of the ICFI must be forged to lead this struggle.

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