

The Destruction of the Indonesian Communist Party in 1965 and the Road Not Taken

By the MLM Revolutionary Study Group in the U.S. (July 2007)

www.mlmrsg.com

One of the greatest crimes of the 20th century was committed in Indonesia. On October 8, 1965, right-wing mobs ransacked the offices of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) and its mass organizations in Jakarta, the capital city. Ten days later, in densely populated Central Java, army paracommandos under the direction of pro-American General Suharto led the attack on the PKI. Tens of thousands of PKI cadre and supporters were rounded up at night, detained, and executed. Anti-communist youth groups were supplied with weapons by the army and sent out to murder PKI members and supporters in thousands of towns and villages. In one area of Central Java known as a stronghold of the party, one-third of the population died in the massacre. According to *Time* magazine:

Backlands army units are reported to have executed thousands of Communists after interrogation in remote jails...Armed with wide-blade 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 part 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 decayed 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.¹

In order to justify this campaign of extermination, the army told people in the towns and villages that the PKI was about to go on a killing spree against all non-communists. PKI members were accused of digging mass graves, compiling lists of people to be executed, and stockpiling special instruments to gouge out eyeballs.²

The massacres, which were most intense in East and Central Java and on Bali, spread to Aceh in northern Sumatra, Sulawesi (the Celebes) and Kalimantan (Borneo). It is not known exactly how many were killed, but Indonesian activists estimate the number at from one to three million people. The only recent massacre of this magnitude was the Rwandan government's attempted genocide of the Tutsi people in 1994, which left 800,000 dead.

¹ *Time*, December 17, 1965. Cited in David Ransom, "Ford Country: Building an Elite for Indonesia," reprinted in *The Trojan Horse: A Radical Look at Foreign Aid*, ed. Steve Weissman, 1975. www.cia-on-campus.org/internat/indo

² John Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder: The September 30th Movement and Suharto's Coup d'Etat in Indonesia*, 2006, p. 26. Roosa's book is a valuable source of information about these events. He also provides a detailed analysis of the origins and actions of the September 30 Movement, which provided Suharto and the U.S. with the pretext to suppress the PKI.

The Hand of U.S. Imperialism in the Massacre

In the 1990s, some details of the U.S. hand in the massacre became known as several former State Department officials admitted their role publicly. Political officers at the U.S. embassy in Jakarta handed the Indonesian army lists of PKI leaders in unions, peasant and student organizations that it had compiled. From this, Indonesian army intelligence was able to create a “shooting list” of 5,000 PKI leaders. In the weeks and months that followed, the U.S. embassy and the CIA’s intelligence directorate in Washington D.C. checked off the names as they were “eliminated.”³ According to Robert Martens, a former member of the U.S. embassy’s political section who had spent two years compiling the lists:

It really was a big help to the army. 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 the decisive moment.⁴

As the anti-PKI bloodbath was just getting underway, the U.S. provided essential logistical equipment to General Suharto’s forces. These included light aircraft, jeeps and most importantly, hundreds of the highest-powered mobile radios available at that time. The radios were secretly flown into Indonesia at the last minute by U.S. planes based at Clark Field in the Philippines. They plugged a major hole in army communications by enabling units in Java and the outer islands to talk directly with Suharto’s command (KOSTRAD) in Jakarta. These radios were monitored by the U.S. National Security Agency throughout the massacre.⁵

In 1965 the U.S. imperialists were alarmed at the situation developing in Southeast Asia. In March, the 303 Committee of the National Security Council approved a CIA-State Department political action program designed to reduce the influence of the PKI and the People’s Republic of China and to support anti-communist elements in Indonesia. After visiting Sukarno in April, Ellsworth Bunker told President Johnson that “U.S. visibility should be reduced so that those opposed to the communists and extremists may be free to handle a confrontation, which they believe will come, without the incubus of being attacked as defenders of the neo-colonialists and imperialists.”⁶ A high-level U.S. intelligence report prepared in early September 1965 predicted that the Indonesian government would become completely dominated by the PKI within two to three years.⁷

U.S. officials saw events in Indonesia and Vietnam as closely intertwined and believed that decisive action had to be taken in both countries. In a 1965 speech in Asia,

³ Kathy Kadane, “Ex-Agents say CIA Compiled Death Lists for Indonesians,” San Francisco Examiner, May 20, 1990. www.namebase.org/kadane.html

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Peter Dale Scott, “The United States and the Overthrow of Sukarno, 1965-1967,” *Pacific Affairs*, 58, Summer 1985, pp. 7-8. Citations are from the internet version at www.namebase.org/scott.html

⁶ David Easter, “‘Keep the Indonesian Pot Boiling,’ Western Covert Intervention in Indonesia, October 1965-March 1966,” *Cold War History*, Vol. 5, No. 1, February 2005, p. 58. The U.S. political action program for Indonesia included the use of the ten radio transmitters of the Voice of America based at Clark Air Force Base in the Philippines.

⁷ Roosa, p. 14.

Richard Nixon argued in favor of bombing North Vietnam in order to protect Indonesia's "immense mineral potential."⁸ According to William Bundy, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs:

By 1965 [Indonesia] was hostile to us, engaged in a sterile but dangerous military confrontation with Malaysia and Singapore, and headed very shortly for Communist control and an effective alliance with Communist China.... The situation in Vietnam in 1965, stood, alongside the trend in Indonesia, as the major dark spot in the area. And in early 1965, it became clear that unless the United States and other nations introduced major combat forces and took military action against the North, South Vietnam would be taken over by communist force.⁹

William Colby, the head of CIA operations in Southeast Asia from 1962-1966, not only welcomed the massacre in Indonesia, but applied its lessons as head of the infamous Operation Phoenix in South Vietnam.¹⁰ If Vietnam was the major post-World War II defeat for U.S. imperialism, the destruction of the PKI was its greatest single victory. With its oil and other natural resources, large population and strategic location, Indonesia was at least as important to the U.S. as Indochina, albeit in different ways.

How Did This Happen?

In 1965, the PKI was a formidable organization. It had 3.5 million members and was the largest communist party in the world that was out of power. The PKI's allied organizations claimed a combined membership of nearly 20 million out of a total population of 110 million. It had ministers and staffers in governmental bodies from the national cabinet to local municipalities.

However, since the early 1950s, the PKI had adopted a political line and strategy of a peaceful path to socialism. By building an alliance with the "progressive sectors" of the government, the PKI believed that Indonesia's reactionary pro-imperialist forces, with their core in the army, could be prevented from making a decisive move to close off the party's gradual march to power. Thus, the PKI and its followers were politically and militarily disarmed in 1965 and were left without effective options in confronting the army-led death squads.

At the decisive moment, the PKI expected President Sukarno and sympathetic military officers would come to their aid. While Sukarno called for peace, pro-American General Suharto ignored him and proceeded to gradually strip Sukarno of power.

⁸ Quoted in Peter Dale Scott, "Exporting Military-Economic Development: America and the Overthrow of Sukarno," in Malcolm Caldwell (ed.), *Ten Years' Military Terror in Indonesia*, 1975, p. 241.

⁹ Department of State Bulletin, May 22, 1967. The reactionary actor John Wayne stated more bluntly: "We went into Vietnam, and Indonesia got enough guts to throw the Communists out of Indonesia." *New York Times*, December 24, 1967. Both quotes are from Arnold Brackman, *The Communist Collapse in Indonesia*, 1969, pp. 190, 202-203. Brackman's book is virulently anti-communist and anti-Sukarno.

¹⁰ Operation Phoenix was a joint U.S.-South Vietnamese program set up by the CIA in 1967 to uproot the political infrastructure of the National Liberation Front by assassinations of its cadres and supporters. It was modeled after and planned by the same CIA operatives who oversaw the destruction of the PKI in 1965-66.

Suharto's three decade-long military dictatorship turned Indonesia into a compliant U.S. neo-colony in Southeast Asia.

The role of the CIA and the U.S. military in this bloody counter-revolution has become more exposed over the years. However, the causes for this defeat that were internal to the PKI have not been examined closely enough. This is not simply a question of setting the historical record straight. Without a deeper understanding of fundamental errors in the PKI's political line and work, the massacre in 1965 will continue to cast a long shadow over revolutionary activists with the message that imperialism and reactionary regimes are too powerful to challenge. An analysis of these events also provides some critical lessons for communist and anti-imperialist forces worldwide, especially concerning countries where peaceful, electoral paths to "socialism," or some variant, are being pursued.

In doing our research for this paper, we have been limited to available sources in English. We expect that essential information exists in Indonesian and Dutch publications, and that political activists in Indonesia who have first-hand knowledge will deepen our understanding of these events.

The PKI under Dutch Colonial Rule and Japanese Occupation

An understanding of the roots of the PKI's traumatic defeat in 1965 requires a brief examination of the political line and work of the PKI during three periods: The struggle against Dutch colonialism in the 1920s and 1930s; the Japanese occupation from 1942-1945; and the independence struggle against the Dutch from 1945-1949.

Founded in 1920, the PKI was the first communist party in Asia. The early development of the PKI was due in large part to successful work within the Sarakat Islam (Islamic Association), especially its trade union and peasant branches. Sarakat Islam was the first nationalist organization that advocated full independence, with a membership of two and a half million in 1919.

Social conditions also favored the rapid growth of the PKI in the early 1920s. The Dutch colonialists systematically plundered the vast natural resources of Indonesia, including its rubber, sugar, tin and tobacco. Seasonal laborers on Dutch sugar plantations earned less than ten cents (U.S.) per day. The Dutch had no interest in colonial education, other than training a small number of Indonesian civil servants. Even by 1938, only 204 Indonesians graduated annually from Dutch-run high schools.¹¹

In 1925, the leadership of the PKI embarked on a course of preparing for an insurrection to overthrow Dutch rule. A strike by railway workers was to be the signal for a general strike that would launch a broad-based revolutionary upsurge. The uprisings in West Java and West Sumatra in 1926-27 gained insufficient popular support and were suppressed quickly by the colonial authorities. The PKI was banned, and most of the

¹¹ George T. Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, 1952, pp. 25, 32.

PKI's leaders were arrested and deported to a concentration camp on New Guinea.¹² In 1935, Musso, in his capacity as a member of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, returned from exile in the Soviet Union to establish an "Illegal PKI" based in Surabaya, East Java, but the PKI was not a major force in Indonesia as World War 2 began.

Non-communist nationalists stepped into the political vacuum, led by Achmed Sukarno, the charismatic son of a Javanese teacher, who developed a hybrid form of nationalism, Islam and socialism to guide the independence struggle. The two political parties that Sukarno led during the late 1920s and early 1930s, the PNI and the Gerindo, upheld the demand for independence, but declined after Sukarno's arrest in 1932. Sukarno was released by the Japanese in 1942, when they were looking to prop up native political leadership to disguise their occupation of Indonesia as liberation from the Dutch.

During World War II, Sukarno and his close ally, Mohammed Hatta, helped secure popular acceptance of Japanese rule and mobilized support for the Japanese war effort, producing later charges that he had been a "fascist collaborator." In Sukarno's view, he was using his position and frequent radio broadcasts to spread nationalist ideas among the masses and force concessions from the Japanese, leading to self-government.¹³

The PKI's forces were divided geographically during World War 2. One group led by Sardjono worked for the Allies at a propaganda center in Australia.¹⁴ A group of Indonesian intellectuals spent the war years working underground in the Netherlands with the Dutch Communist Party. A third group, the Illegal PKI, operated inside Indonesia.

The Illegal PKI worked within an underground intelligence network led by Amir Sjarifuddin that was funded by the Dutch. This network was broken up by the Japanese political police in 1943. The chairman of the PKI when it surfaced in 1945, Mohammed Jusef, was part of a guerilla group that sabotaged rail lines in West Java. The PKI underground infiltrated the Peta, the Indonesian self-defense units set up by the Japanese, with the aim of organizing its members for uprisings against the Japanese in the event of an Allied landing in Indonesia. There were two mutinies in Peta units in 1944 at Blitar and Indramaju.¹⁵ The Illegal PKI also developed work in several Japanese-run training institutes in Jakarta, where communist youth, including the future leader of the PKI in the 1950s and early 1960s, D.N. Aidit, secretly planned to overthrow first Japanese and then Dutch colonial rule.¹⁶

However, due to political and organizational weaknesses, these PKI groups were not able to develop organized guerilla warfare against the Japanese imperialists.¹⁷

¹² Ibid., p. 84, 86. Kahin estimates that 5,000 people were involved in these uprisings. See also *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 1965, in which Ruth McVey traces the early years of the PKI up to its temporary eclipse in 1927.

¹³ Sukarno often concluded his speeches with "Long Live Japan!" followed by "Long Live the Land and the People of Indonesia!" J.D. Legge, *Sukarno: A Political Biography*, 1972, p. 163.

¹⁴ Arnold Brackman, *Indonesian Communism*, 1963, p. 34.

¹⁵ Kahin, pp. 114, 122.

¹⁶ Benedict O'G. Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution, Occupation and Resistance 1944-1946*, 1972, pp. 36-60.

¹⁷ Speaking of this period, Aidit later said, "The party also had no experience in armed struggle, something very necessary in a period of revolution." Brackman, p. 43.

Conditions were ripe for such a struggle against the Japanese occupation forces, which brutally oppressed the Indonesian people. Forced labor (“romusha”) sent 300,000 Indonesian men as far away as Burma to build roads from which only 70,000 returned. Thousands of Indonesian women were forced into sexual slavery to service the Japanese troops. A system of forced rice deliveries created widespread hunger and suffering in the countryside. Numerous localized peasant rebellions were directed against the Japanese and local collaborators, but they were mainly led by traditional religious leaders. It was not until 1945 that the PKI was able to pull together its scattered groupings into a politically unified force.

Communist Strategy in China and the Philippines

In contrast to the Indonesian experience, the Communist Party of China (CCP) was able to make great leaps in advancing the revolutionary struggle during World War II. Like the PKI, the CCP suffered a serious setback in the late 1920s, when Chiang Kai-shek’s Guomindang (GMD) turned on the CCP, massacring tens of thousands of communists in Shanghai and other areas. Under Mao Zedong’s leadership, the CCP summed up and repudiated its costly rightist error of subordinating its work to the GMD. The CCP also rejected a “left” line of attempting to capture major cities in southern China without sufficient political and military power in the countryside.

Particularly favorable conditions existed for the development of “red political power”—large and small revolutionary base areas—in southern China in the late 1920s. Groups of warlords, backed by different imperialist powers, waged war against each other, splitting up the reactionary forces pitted against the CCP.¹⁸ As the GMD consolidated its control in the early 1930s, the CCP’s base areas were threatened with extinction. As a result, the CCP-led Workers and Peasants Army marched to northwest China in 1934-1935 on the famous Long March.

From its new base in Yen’an, the CCP was positioned to launch peasant-based guerilla warfare against the Japanese imperialists, who were occupying north and central China with millions of troops. At the same time, the CCP forced the pro-American GMD dictatorship to form an unstable, broad united front for the purpose of fighting the Japanese imperialists. Though the GMD did little fighting against the Japanese and repeatedly attacked the communist forces during the war, the principled stand of the CCP won it widespread support in the cities and the countryside.

At the end of World War II, the CCP, its military forces and the broad class forces under its leadership were in a strong position to take to a new level the revolutionary struggle against the bureaucratic capitalists, the big feudal landlords and the U.S. imperialists, who threw their full force behind the GMD. From 1946-1949, the communist armies, supported by reliable liberated areas, moved from the strategic

¹⁸ In *Why Is It That Red Political Power Can Exist in China?* Mao wrote in 1928 that armed revolutionary bases cannot exist in colonies under direct imperialist rule. Mao’s general point was wrong, as demonstrated by the experience of national liberation struggles during World War 2 (e.g., Vietnam and the Philippines) and by Korea, Algeria and Guinea-Bissau in the post-war period. www.marx2mao.com/Mao/WRPC28.html

defensive to the strategic offensive. In 1949, the Chinese revolution won nationwide victory as Mao Zedong announced in Beijing, “the Chinese people have stood up.”¹⁹

In the U. S. colony of the Philippines, the Philippine Communist Party (PKP), faced a similar situation to that of the PKI in Indonesia. After Japan became the new imperialist occupier of the Philippines in 1942, the PKP correctly aimed its struggle against the Japanese military. While bourgeois nationalist forces joined U.S.-led guerilla units, the PKP formed its own units in the countryside (the Anti-Japanese National Army, or Hukbalahap). The Hukbalahap coordinated military action with the U.S.-led forces, but maintained its political and military independence.

The PKP, however, fell into serious errors when U.S. occupation forces, commanded by General MacArthur, returned to the Philippines in 1944. The PKP was not prepared, politically or militarily, to continue the struggle against U.S. imperialism. In some areas, communist units gave up their arms in exchange for promises of legal participation in the neo-colonial government that the U.S. was preparing to proclaim in 1946. After a period of violent suppression, the PKP veered to the “left,” calling for armed uprisings in 1949-1952 that would lead to a quick seizure of power. This military adventurism was easily crushed by the Philippine army, fortified with U.S. military aid and advisors.²⁰

These errors were not rectified until the late 1960s, with the reconstitution of the Communist Party of the Philippines based on Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought. Under the leadership of Jose Ma. Sison, the CPP adopted a line of developing agrarian revolution and people’s war in the countryside as the main form of struggle.²¹ Today the military arm of the CPP, the New People’s Army, operates in more than 120 guerilla zones with deep roots among the peasantry in Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao. The CPP also leads a mass movement in the cities that targets the U.S.-puppet Arroyo regime as part of the struggle for national democracy and socialism.

The Independence Struggle: 1945-1949

As in the Philippines, there was considerable potential for the PKI to make revolutionary advances with the defeat of Japan and with the severe dislocations of Dutch

¹⁹ Mao Zedong developed the theory of protracted people’s war waged on a firm base of support among the peasantry in the countryside, where the enemy’s power is the weakest, in five articles written in 1938: *Problems of Strategy in the Guerilla War Against Japan, On Protracted War, The Role of the Chinese Communist Party in the National War, The Question of Independence and Initiative Within the United Front, and Problems of War and Strategy. Selected Works, Volume 2.* www.marx2mao.com/Mao/Index.html#v2

²⁰ Jose Ma. Sison with Rainer Werning, *The Philippine Revolution: The Leader’s View*, 1989. pp. 41-44.

²¹ Sison’s analysis of the Philippines as a semi-feudal, semi-colonial society and the path of the revolutionary struggle in the Philippines, *Philippine Society and Revolution*, was first published in 1970 (under the nom de guerre of Amado Guerrero). Recently republished, this is an important founding document of the CPP, and has been amplified and enriched by documents from a rectification campaign in the early 1990s and other writings since then. CPP documents are available at www.philippinerevolution.net

colonial power that took place during the war. However, these opportunities were lost during the struggle for independence due to a lethal combination of rightist and “left” adventurist actions.

On August 17, 1945, just days after the Japanese surrender to the Allied imperialists, the Republic of Indonesia was declared by Sukarno and Hatta. Throughout cities and towns on Java, the *pemuda* (youth) began to take over Japanese government offices, and then began to seize arms. First in Semarang and then in Surabaya, armed *pemuda* engaged in heavy combat with Japanese forces. By the end of October, most of Central and East Java was in Indonesian hands. A mass of heterogeneous armed groups and *badan perjuang* (struggle organizations) sprouted up all over Java.

At the same time, the Sukarno government began to organize a new Indonesian army. Its top commanders had served in the Dutch colonial army, but the bulk of it was composed of members of the Peta, the strongly nationalist local self-defense forces organized by the Japanese. The Republican army was built up slowly by disbanding and incorporating local militias into regular units. The pacesetter in this effort was Colonel A.H. Nasution, who led the Siliwangi Division in West Java, and who later became a prominent pro-U.S. general.

Since the Dutch did not have any significant military forces in the region yet, it fell to the British to protect Western imperialist interests in Indonesia. In September and October, the British moved in largely Indian and Nepalese Gurkha troops, allegedly for the sole purpose of repatriating Japanese forces and Dutch internees. However, when the British demanded that the Indonesian forces in the port city of Surabaya disarm, heavy fighting broke out between the British and nationalist forces, including PKI-led units. Most of a British-led brigade was overrun at one point. Even with the use of tanks, air power and naval bombardment, it took the British forces three weeks to retake the city. The Battle of Surabaya was an important turning point for the Indonesian people, as it demonstrated their willingness to fight and die for independence in large numbers.

On October 21, as armed conflict with the Japanese and the British raged on much of Java, the PKI appeared as an open organization for the first time since the uprisings of 1926-1927. The PKI formed regional branches in seven cities on Java and established a *Lasjkar Merah* (Red Militia). At its congress in January 1946, the PKI asserted that the Suharto-Hatta leadership was struggling for “independence for the bourgeoisie.” The party opposed negotiations with the Dutch and demanded an end to the disarming of popular organizations by the government.²²

However, several weeks later a group of PKI members who had worked with the Dutch in Australia during World War 2 met in Jogjakarta to oppose the Jusef leadership. At a new congress held in April, the returned exiles led by Sardjono took full command of the PKI and scrapped the program of the First Congress. The purged PKI stated that the immediate task was to defend and strengthen the government “as a democratic structure, through the formation of a national front to oppose fascist-reactionary colonialism.” From this point until early 1948, the PKI supported the cabinets formed by

²² Anderson, pp. 216, 343.

the right wing “socialist” Sutan Sjahrir, including their repeated attempts to find a negotiated settlement short of “100% independence.”²³

While the Republican government negotiated, the Dutch imperialists came to reclaim their prize colony. By 1946, when the British withdrew, the Dutch had landed 90,000 troops in Indonesia. The next three years were characterized by on-and-off fighting and protracted negotiations between the Republic and the Dutch. The Linggajati talks in September 1946 produced a truce. In the summer of 1947, the Dutch military launched attacks that shrank the areas of nationalist control to Central Java and part of Sumatra.

After five months of fighting, an agreement was signed on the U.S. carrier Renville. The Renville agreement set up a “United States of Indonesia,” in which the Republic would be outweighed by the Dutch-controlled outer islands. A year later, the Dutch repudiated the agreement and launched a second major attack, occupying the main Republican controlled areas. These Dutch incursions created new opportunities for extensive guerilla warfare. By early 1948, the 145,000 Dutch troops in Indonesia were stretched thin and were more on the defensive than the offensive.

During 1946 and 1947, the PKI’s guerilla forces developed substantial experience. However, the party attached itself *politically* to the rightist policies of the Sukarno-Hatta-Sjahrir government, giving up its independence and initiative within the united front against the Dutch colonialists. The PKI supported the Linggajati and Renville agreements, thereby undercutting its ability to rally the most radical sections of the independence movement.²⁴

The 1948 Madiun Provocation and a Premature Attempt to Seize Power

The political polarization within the Republic between the Sukarno government and a variety of leftist forces was magnified by developments in the international communist movement, especially the formation of the Cominform in 1947 and its reversal of the Popular Front line of the 1930s. Support for revolutionary struggles in Indochina, Malaya, China and elsewhere was proclaimed as part of a worldwide battle between two camps—the capitalist camp led by the U.S., and the socialist camp led by the Soviet Union.

In early 1948, this orientation was taken up by the PKI and the FDR (People’s Democratic Front), in which the PKI played a leading role. The FDR denounced the agreements with the Dutch and advocated that the Republic set up diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. In August 1948, Musso returned to Indonesia after 12 years in the Soviet Union with a plan entitled “A New Road for the Indonesian Republic.” Within weeks, Musso reorganized the PKI, brought the left wing of the Socialist Party and the youth organization Pesindo into the party’s ranks, and launched a political offensive to take leadership of the Republic from Sukarno and Hatta.

²³ Anderson, pp. 345-347.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 269-296.

Alarmed by the new direction taken by the PKI, the Sukarno-Hatta forces and army commanders such as Nasution set out to demobilize PKI-led militias and PKI-influenced military units within two divisions of the Republican army.²⁵ This led to growing friction between the army and the PKI's military forces in Central and East Java. After a series of provocations by the army, including kidnappings of PKI cadre, fighting broke out in Solo on September 16. Two days later in nearby Madiun, mid-level leaders of the PKI and its militia, expecting an imminent attack by the Siliwangi division from West Java, staged a revolt. They disarmed other groups and declared a regional Republic.²⁶

The seizure of power at Madiun was reinforced by the arrival of Musso, who declared a new all-Indonesian Republic and denounced Sukarno as a collaborator with the Japanese and the Dutch. President Sukarno responded by making a speech calling for the forcible suppression of the revolt. The top PKI leaders, including Musso, were killed in action or executed. 35,000 PKI members and supporters were imprisoned; thousands were killed. This white terror only ended when the Dutch attacked the Republic in early 1949.²⁷

While the PKI uprising at Madiun was provoked by right-wing forces in the army, it took the form a localized putsch.²⁸ It revealed the lack of an overall strategy of developing the peasant movement and guerilla warfare with independent communist leadership, which establishes political power in base areas as the revolutionary struggle develops. Had the PKI adopted such a strategy, it would have been much more difficult for the right-wing elements in the Republic to provoke the PKI into a premature attempt to seize power.

This defeat of the PKI led to a gradual shift in the attitude of the U.S. imperialists to the Indonesian Republic. From 1945-1948, the U.S. had backed the Dutch, as part of trying to rebuild and politically fortify Western Europe against the Soviet Union by means of the Marshall Plan. However, the U.S. saw an opportunity to bring into being an "independent" Indonesia led by anti-communist forces under which the U.S. would replace the Dutch as the dominant imperialist power. This reflected the U.S.' new post-war, post-European colonial strategy in Asia, i.e. a strategy of neo-colonialism.

²⁵ Ann Swift, *The Road to Madiun: The Indonesian Communist Uprising of 1948*, Cornell Modern Indonesia Project Monograph Series, 1989, p. 44.

²⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 67-74. There were a few small and isolated PKI-led uprisings in Central Java, but they quickly collapsed. Kahin, p. 296.

²⁷ Swift, p. 90.

²⁸ As a political strategy aiming at a shortcut to liberation, putschism shares much in common with *armed revisionism*. As practiced by pro-Soviet parties in the 1970s and 1980s, armed struggle became a form of pressure—a bargaining chip—to gain a share of political power in reactionary states. In South Africa and El Salvador, the practice of armed revisionism by the SACP and the FMLN, respectively, parlayed the sacrifices of countless revolutionaries into careerist agreements to dissolve the people's revolutionary movements and establish and administer new structures of neo-colonialism. This strategy, as well as *focoism* (which claims that the initiation of armed struggle by small groups of guerillas would by their example bring forward the masses of the peasantry), arose in opposition to the line of protracted people's war, which is based on the development of a mass base before the initiation, and throughout the period, of revolutionary warfare.

In the middle of the Dutch offensive in 1949, the U.S. intervened, through the United Nations, to force an end to the fighting and the signing of another neo-colonial “independence” agreement. The Hague Agreement called for a federated “Republic of the United States of Indonesia,” payment of reparations to the Dutch for seized property, and an assumption of the colonial debt. The Dutch kept the eastern province of West Irian (Papua).²⁹ The Dutch would continue to own and operate almost all of Indonesia’s inter-island shipping, banking, trade companies, and agricultural estates. China and the Soviet Union immediately denounced this agreement and called the Sukarno-Hatta government a “reactionary, neo-colonial regime.”

As the PKI would later sum up,³⁰ from 1945 to 1949 the party did not take advantage of a favorable situation for developing people’s war based in Java and other islands--agrarian revolution and guerilla warfare based in the peasantry within a broad anti-Dutch, anti-feudal united front. Such a strategy had the potential of mobilizing the vast majority of the people against the Dutch colonialists under communist leadership. Moreover, it would have strengthened the PKI for a protracted revolutionary struggle against the post-1949 bourgeois Indonesian state.

While the PKI leadership did not seriously consider taking this road to revolution during the struggle for independence, it is important to recognize that Mao’s development of the strategic line of people’s war as part of a new democratic revolution leading to socialism was not embraced by the Comintern or the Cominform. Mao’s writings on this subject did not become widely available in the international communist movement until after the triumph of the Chinese revolution in 1949.

²⁹ The transfer of sovereignty to the new federated Indonesian state took place on December 27, 1949. In August 1950, a unitary Republic of Indonesia was proclaimed, which successfully defeated several Dutch-backed rebellions in the outer islands.

³⁰ A Self-Criticism by the PKI Political Bureau after the 1965 right-wing coup summarized the political weaknesses of the party during this period: “The P.K.I. entered the 1945 August Revolution without adequate preparations. Its serious shortcoming in theory and its lack of understanding of the concrete conditions of Indonesian society had resulted in its inability to formulate the nature of the revolution, its tasks, its programme, tactics and slogans, as well as the correct principles and forms of organization.....

The P.K.I. was unable to make use of this highly favourable opportunity given by the August Revolution of 1945 to overcome its shortcomings. The P.K.I. did not consistently lead the armed struggle against Dutch imperialism, did not develop guerrilla warfare that was integrated with the democratic movement of the peasants, thus winning their full support, as the only way to defeat the war of aggression launched by the Dutch imperialists. On the contrary, the P.K.I. even approved of and itself followed the policy of reactionary compromises of Sjahrir's right-wing socialists. The P.K.I. did not establish the alliance of the working class and the peasantry by leading the anti-feudal struggle in the countryside, and did not establish, on the basis of such a worker-peasant alliance, a united front with all other democratic forces. The P.K.I. did not consolidate its strength, on the contrary, it even relegated to the background its own role.” “Statement of the Political Bureau of the Indonesian Communist Party,” August 17, 1966, www.massline.info/Indonesia/PKIscrip p. 8.

Wrong Lessons

What did the leaders of the PKI learn from the 1945-1949 period? Unfortunately they drew the wrong lessons. Returning from exile, a new leadership under D.N. Aidit took over the PKI in 1951. The militant trade union federation SOBSI, which was strongly influenced by the PKI, led a wave of strikes in 1950-51. Even after the PKI experienced another wave of persecution that drove it underground for a year, the PKI announced its intention in early 1952 to rebuild the party by renouncing armed revolutionary struggle, and by hewing to a peaceful path to a “people’s democratic government.”

In order to build an alliance with the national bourgeoisie, the PKI set a new policy of supporting Sukarno and the Indonesian state.³¹ As part of the price to establish an alliance with the Sukarno government and assure the party’s legality, the PKI agreed to dissolve the PKI-Malam (Night Time)—the underground organization of the party—and to disband a small PKI-led guerilla force in Central Java.

As Rex Mortimer wrote in *Indonesian Communism Under Sukarno*, “The PKI sought a peaceful road to power in Indonesia and this was an aim from which the Aidit leadership never deviated... Animated by a nationalist and accommodating spirit, and conscious both of the strength of its foes and the weakness of its own position, the party resolved to stick like a leech to Sukarno and, by a combination of ingratiation and carefully staged pressure, to insert itself into his power structure.”³²

The PKI’s abandonment of the necessity of providing revolutionary leadership to the struggle to end the exploitation and oppression of the Indonesian people revealed itself as a revisionist political line.³³ For the PKI under Aidit’s leadership for the next 15

³¹ For example, in 1952 Aidit criticized party members who resented singing the Indonesian national anthem or saluting the national flag. Aidit said, “The red-white banner is our revolutionary flag, which should be defended to the last.” Brackman, *Indonesian Communism*, p. 184.

³² Rex Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism Under Sukarno: Ideology and Politics, 1959-1965*, 1974, p. 303. Recently reprinted, this is the best book available in English on the political thinking and practice of the PKI in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Mortimer was a leading member of the pro-Soviet Communist Party of Australia, and during the early 60s he was the principal liaison between the CPA and the PKI. While critical of the PKI for supporting Sukarno uncritically and for negating the PKI’s independent role, Mortimer believes that it was not realistic for the party to take the road of armed struggle, and he gives short shrift to the self-criticism of the remaining PKI leadership in 1966. Mortimer’s book brings out valuable information about the inner workings of the party, but downplays the decisive character of the revisionist line set by the PKI leadership and its role in disarming the party’s mass base politically and militarily.

³³ The term *revisionist* is applied to people or organizations that see themselves as upholding Marxist principles and/or creatively adapting them. A revisionist political line makes reforms ends in themselves rather than connecting the people’s resistance and struggle for reforms to a revolutionary rupture with existing property and political relations. It also denies, often based on wishful thinking, the ferocity with which the ruling class(es) will try to retain state power. More generally revisionism denies that the state is an instrument of class rule, which leads to the view that a peaceful transition to socialism is possible.

years, every step it took along the peaceful road to socialism--every joint appearance with Sukarno, every PKI member appointed to a government position--made it more difficult to change course. The PKI leadership was dizzy with success. Rapid gains in party membership and political influence were seen as indicators that the PKI had developed the capacity to take the reins of power in a short period of time.

The PKI hailed Bung (Brother) Sukarno as the leader of the revolution, and stated that its ideology and Sukarno's were essentially the same. The Aidit leadership promoted Sukarno's ideology of *Nasakom*, an acronym for Nationalisme, Agama (religion) and Komunisme. The PKI also adopted *Pantjasila*, Sukarno's five principles for the Indonesian state: belief in God, nationalism, humanism, social justice and people's sovereignty.³⁴ The PKI claimed that the implementation of Sukarno's 1959 Political Manifesto (*Manipol*), which called for a two-stage "revolution" leading to "socialism," was the same as implementing the PKI's own program.

Sukarno, for his part, came to view the PKI as the most consistent and hard working supporter of his nationalist foreign policy and episodic progressive domestic initiatives, such as the repudiation of most of Indonesia's debt to the Netherlands in the late 1950s. The PKI and its mass organizations provided the feet on the ground for Sukarno's initiatives, and he protected the party from repression by the army for more than ten years.

The Bandung Line

Sukarno's assertion of Indonesia's leadership among the "non-aligned nations" took shape in his hosting of the Bandung Conference. Held in Bandung, Indonesia in April 1955, this conference was a meeting of Asian and African states, most of which were newly independent and had conflicts with one or more imperialist powers. It included countries such as Egypt, India and Indonesia, a number of anti-communist states (including members of the U.S.-initiated Southeast Asian Treaty Organization), and the socialist People's Republic of China.

The "Bandung line," as advocated within the international communist movement at the time, either misunderstood or largely ignored the class character of these newly independent states and the neo-colonial relations within them, especially new mechanisms for political and economic control and military cooperation developed by the U.S. under the banner of "anti-colonialism." On the one hand, most of these countries were ruled by the national bourgeoisie (represented, for example, by Sukarno and by Nkrumah in Ghana) with varying degrees of popular support from the petty bourgeoisie, workers and peasants. On the other hand, comprador bourgeois and feudal elements held strong points of economic and political power, backed up by the European and U.S.

³⁴ J.D. Legge characterized Sukarno's method of governance as a long-running "theatre state," reflecting an effort "to focus attention on what the government *was* rather than on what it was *doing*." p. 334.

imperialists. Thus, these countries had not broken out of the Western economic orbit, and their political independence rested on shaky ground.³⁵

Even though Sukarno's nationalism was not fully anti-imperialist, it was seen as a threat by the U.S., which was attempting to build a wall of reactionary states around the Soviet Union and China. Thus, the U.S. supported a series of unsuccessful revolts by reactionary Islamic forces in Indonesia's outer islands during 1957-58 in an attempt to dismember Indonesia. Two attempts were made on Sukarno's life.

Sukarno took the opportunity to declare a state of emergency in 1957, which lasted until 1963. In 1959 he instituted a system of "guided democracy," supported by the PKI and the army. Elections were cancelled indefinitely, and Sukarno ruled by decree with the aid of a hand-picked National Assembly. Military officers were brought into the government for the first time. After the seizure of Dutch properties by PKI-led workers in 1957, Sukarno authorised the military to take over control and management of the

³⁵ A number of countries today are similar in various ways to the Sukarno government from 1949-1965, including Venezuela, Bolivia, Iran and Zimbabwe. This is particularly true of Venezuela and Bolivia, where a combination of mass struggle, political ferment among junior military officers, and electoral campaigns has brought social-democratic, nationalist governments to power. With large oil reserves and high oil prices on the international market, the Chavez government has been able to implement some progressive reforms, especially in the areas of education and medicine. However, even Venezuela is still caught in the web of imperialist economic relations, and is incapable of building a self-reliant socialist economy with internally integrated agricultural and industrial sectors.

In those countries whose governments find themselves in conflict with the U.S., the workings of imperialism as a globalized system and the continuing strength of internal forces of reaction create a broad section of allies and potential allies for revolutionary forces who base themselves principally among, and represent the interests of, the workers and peasants/agricultural proletarians. In the years ahead, as mass-based struggles for a full rupture with imperialism and for revolutionary social transformations come to the fore, a new and more favorable political polarization can develop. It then becomes possible to win many of the social forces currently led by Chavez, Morales, Mugabe and Ahmadinejad to the struggle for new democratic revolution and socialism. But this can only happen if the political independence and initiative of the masses of people are developed for revolutionary struggle, not as a pressure group or a cheering squad for bourgeois nationalist governments.

High profile political clashes between the governments of these countries and U.S. imperialism in recent years have led some to the position that struggles for national independence, not people's liberation struggles, are the only serious or significant challenges to imperialism today. This is cause for some forces to deny support to people's movements within these countries.

This is a particularly sharp question around Iran today. Some argue that in order to oppose the U.S. imperialists' threats to launch a military attack on Iran, it is essential to defend the Iranian government. (In the U.S. the Workers World Party holds this position and claims that the government in Iran is progressive.) Instead, while it is essential to oppose a U.S. attack on Iran, it is necessary to extend our solidarity to the Iranian people and the revolutionary forces who are reorganizing and gaining strength. Their struggle will not only remove the reactionary theocrats from power, but are the only force that has the potential to pursue a thoroughgoing anti-imperialist political program.

companies. A typical Sukarno speech railed at “colonialism and imperialism,”³⁶ and he allowed the PKI to operate openly. However, during these years Sukarno also forged an alliance with the armed forces, which was a major and ultimately decisive component of the continuing imperialist domination of Indonesia.

The PKI Advances along a Peaceful Path

During this period, the PKI made significant progress in implementing the peaceful path to power it had mapped out. By 1957, it was the largest political party in Java, the most densely populated island.³⁷ The 1957 elections gave the party an absolute majority in legislative assemblies in twelve areas on Java. In the late 1950s, the governor of Bali brought PKI members into the civil service. Aidit and Political Bureau member Njoto were appointed as advisory ministers to Sukarno in 1962, and Njoto became a member of an enlarged cabinet in 1964.³⁸

The PKI built up its nationalist credentials by supporting Sukarno’s campaigns to free West Irian from Dutch colonialism in 1962, to oppose the formation of a neo-colonial Malaysia in 1963-64,³⁹ and to pull Indonesia out of the United Nations in 1965 after Malaysia was admitted. During these years, the PKI stressed the importance of national struggle against external imperialist forces over class struggle. This posture allowed the PKI to avoid sharp conflicts with the forces of internal reaction, strengthen the party’s relationship with the president, and enable it to grow rapidly during the early 1960s.

Sukarno addressed the PKI’s Sixth Congress in 1959, where he stated that he was “very pleased with the PKI...because the PKI clearly states that it is indispensable to have national unity.”⁴⁰ Sukarno increasingly defined himself as a visionary exponent of “Indonesian socialism,” and even announced in 1965 that Indonesia was entering the stage of socialism. Sukarno peppered his speeches with overheated references to “revolution” (e.g., “the world today is a revolutionary ammunition dump” and “our revolution is a summing up of many revolutions in one generation”) with no hint of any

³⁶ “Colonialism and imperialism are living realities in our world. Their sentiment of superiority, of arrogance towards us who were once their colonial subjects is thrust down our throats by their press, by their politicians, by their very tourists who only reflect attitudes inculcated in them by the forces in their own societies. Their political, economic or military interference is always with us, sometimes subtly, often insultingly.” Legge, p. 344.

³⁷ In 1954, Aidit was elected to Parliament along with 16 other PKI deputies.

³⁸ Mortimer, p. 126. Njoto also served as a principal speechwriter for Sukarno and largely wrote his 1965 Independence Day speech. Brackman, *The Communist Collapse in Indonesia*, p. 34.

³⁹ After suppressing the communist movement in Malaya in the late 1940s, the British colonists prepared a native elite to take power. In 1963, the British granted independence to Malaysia, which consisted of Malaya and British possessions on northern Kalimantan (Borneo). All of Kalimantan was claimed by Indonesia. Malaysia has maintained close ties to the U.S. and British imperialists since then.

⁴⁰ Mortimer, p. 84.

of the specific changes he wanted to make in Indonesia or how to realize them.⁴¹ All of this verbiage amounted to rhetorical calls for more social justice in a neo-colonial country in which the critical levers of power were held by big landlords and bureaucrat capitalists and, most importantly, by the army.

In relation to the armed forces, the PKI's strategy was to avoid a confrontation at all costs. Instead, it relied on Sukarno and "progressive forces" within the government and the military to keep the "reactionary forces" in check. Meanwhile the PKI worked to insert its cadre as government personnel and shift the balance of forces in its favor. As a result of the campaigns against the outer island secessionist movements, and the West Irian and Malaysia campaigns, the PKI had developed a network of supporters in the armed forces. It was more influential in the air force and navy than the more right-wing and much larger 300,000 strong army.

During the campaign to crush the U.S.-instigated rebellions in the outer islands in the late 1950s, Sukarno agreed to arm some local forces of the PKI. However, after the defeat of the PRRI-Permesta and Darul Islam, he required the armed units of the PKI to disarm or be integrated into the Indonesian army.⁴²

In a lecture to the army staff and command school in 1963, Aidit, in his capacity as a government minister, stressed that the armed forces were an instrument of the people, and their function was to implement Sukarno's policies. In another lecture at the Naval Academy in 1964, Aidit called for the armed forces to "serve the struggle of the Indonesian people" and advocated "the doctrine of the oneness between the armed forces and the people."⁴³ These speeches, of course, rang alarm bells in the American embassy.

Aidit's Theory of a "State with Two Aspects"

In early 1963, Aidit announced the new theory that the Indonesian state had a "pro-people's aspect" and an "anti-people's aspect." The first aspect was composed of the "progressive stands and policies of President Sukarno supported by the PKI and other groups of the people.... The second aspect represents the enemies of the people manifested by the stands and policies of the right-wing forces and die-hards. The people's aspect has now become the main aspect and takes the leading role in the Republic."⁴⁴ In a series of speeches at the army staff school in 1964, Aidit elaborated, "The important problem in Indonesia now is not to smash the state power as in the case in many other

⁴¹ Legge, p. 351.

⁴² Jose Ma. Sison, correspondence.

⁴³ Mortimer, p. 115. In a 1963 speech, Aidit lauded the Indonesian armed forces: "It can be seen from their inception that they have been anti-fascist, democratic and anti-imperialist in character. The duty of the PKI is, therefore, to closely unite the people and the armed forces, so that in any crisis the armed forces, or their greater part, will stand firmly on the side of the people and revolution." *The Indonesian Revolution and the Immediate Tasks of the Communist Party of Indonesia*, FLP, 1964, p. 70.

⁴⁴ "Self-Criticism by the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Indonesian Communist Party," September 1966, www.massline.info/Indonesia/PKIscrit p. 18.

states, but to strengthen and consolidate the pro-people's aspect...and to eliminate the anti-people's aspect."⁴⁵

This peaceful transformation would take place by "revolutionary action from above and below." By "revolution from above" the PKI meant that it would "encourage the state power to take revolutionary steps aimed at making the desired changes in the personnel and in the state organs." By means of "revolution from below," the PKI would "arouse, organize and mobilize the people to achieve the same changes."⁴⁶

This revisionist theory of "a state with two aspects" was in direct opposition to the Marxist-Leninist understanding of the nature of the capitalist state. Historical experience has demonstrated that the state can be an instrument in the hands of either the exploiting classes or the proletariat, but it cannot serve the interests of *both*. Time and again, the bourgeoisie has demonstrated that it will not hesitate to use the armed organs of the state to violently suppress any serious challenge to its rule. Thus no fundamental change in the social system can be brought about without disintegrating and overthrowing this reactionary state machine, especially its armed forces.

The PKI and the International Communist Movement

The theory that the Indonesian state had "two aspects" was adopted by the PKI even as it publicly sided with the Chinese Communist Party against the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the early 1960s. As polemics raged between revolutionaries and revisionists, the PKI leaders took whatever fit their own political strategy from the Soviet and Chinese parties.

In the late 1950s, the PKI leadership was squarely in line with the CPSU: Maintaining world peace, and promoting peaceful competition and peaceful coexistence with imperialism and the peaceful transition to socialism (the "three peacefuls") were the foremost tasks of Communist Parties. The Soviet Union sought to influence Sukarno and the PKI and build up the Soviets' anti-imperialist credentials by shipping large quantities of arms to Indonesia between 1958 and 1965 to be used in conflicts with pro-U.S. secessionists in the outer islands, the Dutch in West Irian and the British in Malaysia.⁴⁷

After the 81 Parties meeting in Moscow in 1960, the PKI took an intermediate position. It endorsed most Soviet positions but backed the CCP on the need for more militant anti-imperialist struggle and a focus on the peasantry. However, the PKI was not interested in the CCP's views on the necessity for armed struggle and the importance of struggling for communist leadership in nationalist movements. So when the PKI finally came down on the side of the CCP, "for all practical purposes the PKI came to endorse the road of armed struggle as applicable to everyone but itself." Mortimer recalls that in talks with PKI leaders in November 1964, he was struck by "their ability in the same

⁴⁵ Mortimer, p. 135.

⁴⁶ PKI Self-Criticism, p. 19.

⁴⁷ Bruce Porter, *The USSR in Third World Conflicts: Soviet Arms and Diplomacy in Local Wars 1945-1980*, 1984, p. 19.

breath to insist on the necessity of armed struggle and to justify their own peaceful strategy.”⁴⁸

One of the arguments that Aidit used to justify his rejection of an armed struggle for power was that “Indonesia has no frontiers with a country already completely liberated from imperialist power.”⁴⁹ Following Aidit’s logic, it would not have been possible to successfully seize power first in Russia, which was surrounded by hostile imperialist powers, and then in China, where the CCP received little material aid from the nearby Soviet Union during the 1930s and 1940s.⁵⁰ And of course it would be impossible to launch and carry out people’s war anywhere in the world today.

Overall, the Chinese Communist Party had a revolutionary foreign policy during the 1960s. It supported the struggle of the Vietnamese people politically and militarily, provided arms and training to national liberation struggles in Africa and the Middle East, and promoted revolutionary struggle against U.S. imperialism and reactionary regimes all over the world. However, in its relations with the PKI, the CCP, or at least a portion of its leadership, did not follow this general line during the critical years from 1963-1965.

In 1963, PKI Chairman Aidit traveled to Beijing for several months. During this trip, he made several speeches at the Higher Party School of the CCP Central Committee in Beijing that included his theory of a “state with two aspects.” At the same time, Aidit was hailed as “a brilliant Marxist-Leninist theoretician” and firm opponent of Soviet revisionism by Peng Zhen, the Beijing mayor and the main liaison between the CCP and the PKI. In May 1963, *Red Flag*, the CCP’s leading ideological journal, published a major article praising the PKI. On a visit to Indonesia in May 1965, Peng praised the “creativity” and the “correct line and policies” of the PKI. Foreign Languages Press in Beijing also honored Aidit by publishing his *Selected Works* in 1963.⁵¹

The CCP’s support for the PKI was the result of several interrelated factors. First, in the early 1960s, there were powerful revisionist forces lodged at the top levels of the CCP. Peng Zhen had more in common with Aidit than he did with Mao, as he was one of the first high-ranking revisionist leaders to be knocked down during the Cultural Revolution, which began in 1966.

In addition, the “Bandung line” of the middle and late 1950s continued to have an influence on Chinese foreign policy during the early 1960s. On the level of state-to-state diplomacy, socialist China was able to work within the Non-Aligned Movement that emerged from the Bandung Conference to break out of international isolation and frustrate the U.S.’s containment strategy. However, as a *strategic* political line for

⁴⁸ Mortimer, pp. 351, 352.

⁴⁹ *Indonesian Society and the Indonesian Revolution*, 1958, cited in Brackman, p. 205.

⁵⁰ For more on the tense relationship between the Comintern and the CCP during these years, see “The Political, Military and Negotiating Strategies of the Chinese Communist Party (1937-1946) and Recent Developments in Nepal,” February 2007, by the MLM Revolutionary Study Group. www.mlmrsg.com

⁵¹ Mortimer, pp. 133-134; David Mazingo, *Chinese Policy Toward Indonesia, 1949-1967*, 1976, pp. 217, 228; J.D. Armstrong, *Revolutionary Diplomacy: Chinese Foreign Policy and the United Front Doctrine*, 1977, pp. 142-144.

Marxist-Leninists in countries oppressed by colonialism and neo-colonialism, the Bandung line took a heavy toll in diminishing and denying the independence and initiative of communists within the united front against imperialism. It subordinated the struggle for new democratic revolution and socialism to support for bourgeois nationalist governments such as Sukarno's. Thus, the Bandung line bolstered the PKI's support for Sukarno's policies, and discouraged any criticism of the PKI's strategy of peacefully maneuvering itself into power.⁵²

Furthermore, in the early 1960s the Chinese government had strong political and economic ties with the Sukarno government. The CCP was apparently not willing to jeopardize these relationships by placing strong pressure on the PKI to abandon its peaceful path to power and to initiate agrarian revolution and armed struggle in the Indonesian countryside.⁵³ The content of private discussions between PKI and CCP leaders are not known, but the Chinese Communist Party did not publicly criticize the revisionist strategy of the PKI until after the right-wing coup in October 1965.

Sukarno, the Army and the PKI

In 1962, the PKI provided the foot soldiers for Sukarno's campaign to liberate West Irian, which involved more political agitation than military action. Sukarno was also relying on U.S. mediation efforts to get the Dutch to relinquish control.⁵⁴ At the same time, the U.S. made an offer of over \$200 million in economic aid, linked to an austerity plan of the International Monetary Fund. Sukarno and his advisers were leaning towards this solution to deep economic trouble.⁵⁵ This was emblematic of Sukarno's and the national bourgeoisie's tendencies to conciliate with U.S. imperialism, and their inability to implement a thoroughgoing anti-imperialist, anti-feudal program throughout the 1945-1965 period.

As it turned out, the confrontation with the British over Malaysia scuttled the U.S.-IMF plan and allowed the PKI to ride a new wave of nationalism. This led to takeovers of some British companies (but not oil installations)⁵⁶ and the burning of the British embassy in Jakarta. Senior military officers again benefited from this popular upsurge, since they took over management and the profits from these newly nationalized enterprises. During this period the Indonesian army developed into a powerful bureaucratic section of the capitalist class. While Sukarno used the army in his campaigns

⁵² For further discussion of the Bandung line, see "Chinese Foreign Policy during the Maoist Era and its Lessons for Today," pp. 7-11, by the MLM Revolutionary Study Group, January 2007. www.mlmrsg.com

⁵³ The desire of the CCP to win over the PKI during the sharp polemics between the CCP and CPSU may have also played a role. This again points to the ongoing tension between China's national interests as reflected in power-bloc maneuvering and the revolutionary internationalist stance and policies promoted during the Cultural Revolution.

⁵⁴ Mortimer, p. 191. Robert Kennedy and Ellsworth Bunker represented the U.S. in these negotiations.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 206.

⁵⁶ In 1963, Sukarno granted a 20 year guarantee to British and American oil companies operating in Indonesia. Armstrong, p. 123.

to wrest West Irian from Dutch control and to oppose Britain's formation of Malaysia, the U.S. stuck to its long-term strategy of building up a decisive base of support in the army officer corps.

In the course of the confrontation over the formation of Malaysia, Sukarno issued a call for millions of "volunteers" to fight the British. The PKI led the movement, hoping that its members and supporters would receive military training and arms. Other than in Kalimantan where limited fighting took place, very few did. At parades of volunteers, the army kept close tabs on the rifles handed out.⁵⁷

Up to 1964, even in a situation where real wages were rapidly declining and living conditions for the workers and peasants were becoming more desperate, the PKI avoided mass agitation and struggle that might have antagonized Sukarno and the military. Instead, the party placed greater emphasis on development programs for self-reliant economic development. Furthermore, the PKI concentrated its educational work on preparing intellectuals to serve the needs of work with the national bourgeoisie, and to supply cadres for various positions in the government:

To raise the prestige of the PKI in the eyes of the bourgeoisie, and to make it respected as the party of intellectuals, the four-year plan stipulated that all cadres of the higher ranks must obtain academic education, cadres of the middle ranks high school education, and cadres of the lower ranks lower middle school education. For this purpose, the party set up a great number of academies, schools and courses. So deeply-rooted was the intellectualism gripping the party leadership that all party leaders and prominent figures of the popular movements were obliged to write four theses in order to obtain the degree of "Marxist Scientists."⁵⁸

U.S. Imperialism Regroups

From a position of support for the anti-communist Sukarto-Hatta governments in the early 1950s, the U.S. government grew increasingly concerned about Sukarno's independent foreign policy and about the rebirth and rapid growth of the PKI, which mushroomed from 8,000 members in 1952 to over a million in 1959. The Cold War was at its height, and the U.S. imperialists did not want a big gap in the ring of reactionary states surrounding the People's Republic of China.

From U.S. bases in the Philippines, the U.S. supported the 1957-1958 rebellions in the outer islands, which were aimed at detaching them from Indonesia. The U.S. was particularly interested in oil industry centered in Sumatra. After these revolts failed, the U.S. regrouped and mapped out a long range *neo-colonial* strategy of identifying, funding, advising and supplying the internal forces needed to prevail in a showdown with the PKI.

A document by the National Security Council in 1959 outlined the consistent orientation of the U.S. government from that time forward. It would prioritize "requests for assistance [from the Indonesian military] in programs and projects which offer opportunities to isolate the PKI, drive it into positions of open opposition to the

⁵⁷ Mortimer, p. 243.

⁵⁸ PKI Self-Criticism, p. 22.

Indonesian Government, thereby creating grounds for repressive measures politically justifiable in terms of Indonesian self-interest.”⁵⁹

The first step was to begin an upgraded military assistance program to the Indonesian army to counter the PKI, in the order of \$20 million annually. Beginning in the late 1950s, two pro-American generals, Nasution and Suwanto, developed a new strategic doctrine for the Indonesian army that gave priority to counter-insurgency. An important part of this was the army’s organization of its own political infrastructure down to the village level in the guise of “civic action” programs.⁶⁰

The Kennedy administration set up a U.S. military training group (MILTAG) in 1962 to assist in this effort. U.S. accounts of these programs described them as benevolent civic projects--building roads and draining swampland to create new rice fields. However, a 1964 memo to President Johnson from Secretary of State Dean Rusk made it clear that the chief importance of MILTAG was its contact with anti-communist elements in the Indonesian army and political groups:

Our aid to Indonesia...we are satisfied...is not helping Indonesia militarily. It is, however, permitting us to maintain some contact with key elements in Indonesia which are interested in and capable of resisting a Communist takeover. We think this is of vital importance to the entire Free World.”⁶¹

In total, 2,800 Indonesian military officers trained in the U.S. between 1955 and 1965, nearly 25% of the officer corps.⁶² The U.S. military had identified a rising colonel by the name of Suharto and started to groom him for his future role. Students in all of Indonesia’s elite universities were given paramilitary training by the Army in a program advised by a U.S. colonel in the Reserve Officer Training Corps. Brigadier General Thajeb brought student leaders together to create the Indonesian Student Action Command (KAMI), which led the first assaults on PKI offices in Jakarta in October 1965.⁶³

On another regime-change track, the U.S. was making contact with leading intellectuals in the Masjumi Party, a vehicle of big commercial and landowning Muslims, and the nominally “socialist” Indonesian Socialist Party (PSI). They were brought to the U.S. to study for advanced degrees in economics and administration at the University of California at Berkeley, MIT and Cornell with funds supplied by the Ford Foundation. When they returned to Indonesia, these newly minted professors became the Army’s high-level civilian advisors. These U.S. graduates made up a majority of the General Suharto’s first cabinet after he consolidated power in 1966.⁶⁴

The army began to develop as a state-within-a-state that could compete with the PKI politically, as well as prepare itself to take power in the future. It had its own party-type organization (Golkar), a trade union, newspapers and sympathetic cultural figures. The army also entered the economy in a big way after the nationalization of Dutch

⁵⁹ Roosa, p. 182.

⁶⁰ Scott, pp. 4-5. Citations are from the internet version at www.namebase.org/scott.html

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 16, fn. 46.

⁶² Roosa, p. 183.

⁶³ Ransom, pp. 10, 11.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

enterprises in 1957. Top army commanders became big businessmen and accumulated funds for their political wings and front groups.⁶⁵

The PKI's Work in the Countryside

In the Indonesian countryside, less than half the peasants owned the land they worked, and of these the average landholding was 0.65 hectares.⁶⁶ In the 1950s, the PKI developed a strong following among the *abangan* peasants of Java.⁶⁷ However, the party's strategy hardly threatened the power of the landlords. It called for the formation of peasant cooperatives, and for increases in production through improved farming methods. These campaigns paralleled Sukarno's exhortations for the Indonesian people to work harder and make more sacrifices for the nation.

In 1959, the PKI shifted its emphasis. In order to create more organized connections with the villages, the party organized a "Go Down" campaign modeled on China's land reform movement in the 1950s.⁶⁸ This campaign was based on implementing the Basic Agrarian Law proclaimed by Sukarno in 1959. Over the next few years, the PKI-led peasant organization (BTI) made some progress in increasing peasants' shares of their crops and lowering usurious interest rates. However, land redistribution was much slower due to landlord resistance, official corruption, and gaping holes in the land reform law. By the end of the first stage of the government's land reform in late 1963, just 1% of the landlords' surplus land had actually reached the peasants.⁶⁹ When landlords failed to respect the law, the BTI chairman advised its peasant members to go to the police or the public prosecutor for assistance.⁷⁰ In a 1963 speech, Aidit stated that the PKI was raising the slogan, "For the maintenance of civil order, help the police."⁷¹

By 1964, the PKI felt strong enough (the membership of the BTI had grown to seven million) to launch more militant struggle in the countryside. The PKI hoped this would build up its mass base and secure for itself a more prominent place in Sukarno's administration. As peasant upheaval in mid-1964 developed outside the scope of the land reform laws ("unilateral actions"), it ran into heavy resistance from landlords and right-wing Muslim forces in Java and Bali, many of which were funded by the army and U.S.

⁶⁵ Roosa, pp. 184-185. According to Ransom, "The generals controlled plantations, small industry, state-owned oil and tin, and the state-run export-import companies, which by 1965 monopolized government purchasing and had branched out into sugar milling, shipping and distribution."

⁶⁶ Mortimer, p. 287.

⁶⁷ Ruth McVey writes that, "Rural Javanese society divides into *santri*—strict Muslims who tend to a relatively individualist and competitive view of life--and *abangan*, who though nominally Muslim adhere to a traditional, communalistic Javanese value system."

⁶⁸ Mortimer, p. 278. But note that the CCP, as opposed to the PKI, had already uprooted the power of the landlords with the victory of the revolution in 1949.

⁶⁹ D.N. Aidit, "Set Afire the Banteng Spirit! Ever Forward, No Retreat!" Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1963, p. 25. A banteng is a wild bull.

⁷⁰ Mortimer, p. 295.

⁷¹ Aidit, pp. 7-8.

civic action teams. Armed clashes resulted, with the local authorities usually intervening on the side of the landlords and anti-communists.

As the BTI began to take losses, the PKI leadership appealed to Sukarno to intervene. BTI leader Asmu warned that “terror must not be opposed by terror, but with mass actions uniting the people together with the army and other patriotic forces.”⁷² In the fall of 1964, the PKI retreated and began to place greater emphasis on social welfare and cultural work in the countryside. Rex Mortimer contrasts the PKI’s peasant strategy to that of the CCP:

In a sense, Aidit had arrived at a peaceful version of Mao Zedong’s strategy in the Chinese revolution. Mao too advocated an alliance with the national bourgeoisie and was prepared to cooperate with the Chiang Kai-shek government at various times, but never at the price of surrendering exclusive control over his peasant bases and peasant armies. Apart from the question of armed struggle, however, there was another crucial difference between the Chinese and Indonesian cases: Mao had the immense advantage that the consolidation of his control over extensive peasant areas *preceded* his overtures to the KMT [GMD] and did not, as was the case with the PKI, have to be built up within the confines of a top-level alliance.⁷³

1965: The Year of Decision

In spite of the reverses it had suffered in the countryside, by 1965 the PKI leaders believed they were in a better position than ever—with a membership of 3.5 million, leadership over mass organizations with 20 million members, and strong ties to Sukarno—to press their campaign for inclusion in the national government. The PKI’s estimate of the balance of forces was that:

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 being relentlessly pressed into a tight corner. The PKI is struggling so that the pro-people’s aspect will become still more powerful and finally dominate, and the anti-people’s aspect will be driven out of state power. . . . The struggle of the revolutionary Indonesian people is carried out by combining people’s revolutionary mass actions from below with revolutionary actions by the bodies of the state power from above.⁷⁴

A “left” veneer was applied to this openly revisionist analysis by the PKI’s announcement of the “Method of Combining the Three Forms of Struggle.” This consisted of guerilla warfare in the countryside, strikes by workers (especially transport workers) in the cities, and work among the armed forces. This “combination” was fundamentally incorrect because it failed to recognize the strategic necessity of first and foremost developing people’s war that was closely integrated with the work of rallying the peasantry to the revolutionary cause. In any event, even the limited form of rural guerilla warfare envisioned in this strategy was not implemented by the PKI.

The PKI opened 1965 with a propaganda offensive against bureaucratic capitalists, corrupt officials and U.S. imperialism. PKI-led demonstrations forced the

⁷² Mortimer, p. 322.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 380.

U.S. to close down its consulates outside Jakarta and withdraw the Peace Corps. Under pressure from the PKI, the Sukarno government began to implement production sharing agreements in the oil industry and increased its royalties from Shell and Caltex. Shell operations in East Kalimantan were nearly taken over by the Indonesian employees with backing from a local army commander.

The PKI singled out the army leadership for attack. Aidit thought the party could neutralize the anti-communists in the army by wooing pro-Sukarno officers in the other branches of the armed forces. The PKI spoke approvingly of Sukarno's pronouncement, "The Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia will form an invincible power if they unite with the people like fish in water."⁷⁵

In 1965 the PKI also launched a campaign for the establishment of a "fifth force," a large militia independent of the armed forces.⁷⁶ The party advocated the placement of "political advisers" from the three ideological streams of *Nasakom* (nationalists, Islamic groups and communists) at all levels of the military, from the chief-of-staff to the lowest levels of command. The army leadership strongly opposed both proposals. The air force commander, Omar Dani, came out in support of the "fifth force" and announced that Marxism-Leninism would be taught in the air force command and staff school. In the summer of 1965, several thousand volunteers, mainly from PKI-led youth and women's organizations, received weapons training at Halim air force base near Jakarta.⁷⁷

The PKI was acutely aware that it lacked a military force, and sought to build it among the "progressive sections" of the armed forces. This strategy was bound to fail. There could be no last-minute solution to the fact that the PKI had not developed a people's army with mass support in the countryside, which was the only way the revolutionary movement could stand up to military suppression, and advance towards the conquest of political power.

The army generals and the U.S. embassy monitored the PKI's maneuvers closely. Declassified U.S. government documents reveal that the army high command and the U.S. had reached a decision by the beginning of 1965 to suppress the PKI by armed force. They formed a working group that was known as the "council of generals." According to the CIA's published analysis of this period, Army commander Achmad Yani and four other right-wing generals began meeting in January 1965 "to discuss the deteriorating political situation and what the Army should do about it."⁷⁸

Around this time, Yani told a U.S. military adviser that "We have the guns, and we have kept the guns out of their [the Communists'] hands. So if there's a clash we'll wipe them out." At a meeting of State Department officials in the Philippines in March 1965, Ambassador Harold Jones indicated what advice the U.S. was providing to Yani and his council of generals: "From our viewpoint, of course, an unsuccessful coup

⁷⁵ Mortimer, p. 384.

⁷⁶ Sukarno later stated that the idea of a "fifth force" had been suggested to him by Zhou Enlai on one of his trips to Beijing. *Ibid.*, p. 381; Scott, p. 11.

⁷⁷ Mortimer, p. 383.

⁷⁸ Roosa, p. 189.

attempt by the PKI might be the most effective development to start a reversal of political trends in Indonesia.”⁷⁹

Creating the Pretext to Crush the PKI

These generals and the U.S. developed a strategic plan for a “rolling coup d’etat”: The first stage was to suppress the PKI; the second was to remove Sukarno and his supporters from power. There were two major obstacles to this plan. Sukarno was too popular to attack directly, and there was a danger that an unprovoked attack on the PKI would be denounced by Sukarno, who had a history of protecting the PKI from political elimination. In order to carry out this operation, the U.S.-backed generals needed a pretext to justify suppressing the PKI and eventually removing Sukarno from power. Exactly how this pretext was created has been a long-standing subject of debate among scholars and political activists.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Roosa, pp. 189, 190.

⁸⁰ The most important issue is how the September 30 Movement was organized, including the relationship of the PKI to the Movement. The official line of the Indonesian reactionaries and the U.S. government is that the PKI and President Sukarno organized the Movement in order to decapitate the army leadership and stage a leftist coup d’etat that would pave the way for PKI domination of the Sukarno government. This view is represented by Helen Louise-Hunter’s *Sukarno and the Indonesian Coup: The Untold Story*, 2007, a recycled version of a 1968 CIA book on these events.

In *Pretext for Mass Murder: The September 30th Movement and Suharto’s Coup d’Etat in Indonesia*, 2006, John Roosa argues that PKI Chairman Aidit and the head of the PKI Special Bureau (Sjam), but not the party leadership as a whole, were involved in organizing the Movement in order to head off a coup by the generals council. Roosa points to the presence of Aidit at Halim air force base on October 1 where he was in contact with Lt. Col. Untung and the other officers leading the Movement. Roosa also credits the trial statement by Political Bureau member Sudisman and the Self-Criticism of the remaining PKI leadership in 1966 that point to involvement by Aidit. In this view, Aidit had the limited aim of pre-empting a right-wing coup, bringing the PKI into the Sukarno government, and creating new political space for the PKI for its peaceful road to power.

Another position, argued by Wim Wertheim, Peter Dale Scott and others, is that the September 30 Movement was a “false flag” operation orchestrated by the CIA and the Suharto forces. They assert that the PKI Special Bureau--which was tasked with developing contacts within the armed forces--was led by a double agent (Sjam) who manipulated Aidit and the military officers into forming the Movement. They point to several actions that indicate that the Movement was set up for failure, including killing the generals instead of capturing them. Thus, the Movement’s actions provided Suharto with the desired “evidence” to hold the PKI responsible for the murder of the generals and the daughter of a general (Nasution) who escaped.

A definitive answer to the question of who organized the September 30 Movement may never emerge, since key figures (Aidit and Sjam) are dead, and the covert action files of the CIA and the Indonesian Army are closely guarded secrets. Our research has also been limited to English language-only sources. Those with access to materials in Indonesian and Dutch, and with first-hand knowledge of these events, will be able to explore this subject more thoroughly. However, one thing is clear. The PKI was not responsible for the executions of the generals. The U.S. imperialists and their Indonesian henchmen must be held criminally and morally responsible for the mass murder of up to three million members of the PKI and its mass organizations.

In mid-1965, army psychological operations specialists spread a stream of rumors that the “council of generals” was preparing a coup to overthrow Sukarno and suppress the PKI, and that the PKI had received arms from China. The price of rice quadrupled between June 30 and October 1, and the black market price of the dollar skyrocketed.⁸¹ In a further effort to create an atmosphere of crisis, clashes broke out in the provinces in late September between the PKI and anti-communist *santri* Muslims. On September 27, General Yani came out publicly against the fifth force and the *Nasakomisation* of the armed forces.

As a result, a group of junior officers were convinced that a right-wing army coup was close at hand. Led by Lt. Col. Untung, the commander of the Presidential Guard and a hero of the West Irian campaign, they organized themselves into the September 30 Movement. Their goal was not to stage a coup d’etat, as the Indonesian reactionaries and the U.S. have charged. The officers’ plan was to arrest the “generals council” and bring them before Sukarno to be dismissed as coup plotters.

This plan failed on all levels. On October 1, the hastily formed units from Halim air force base that were sent to kidnap the generals instead killed three who resisted and executed three others after they were captured.⁸² Sukarno refused to endorse the Movement, throwing the officers into disarray. Two battalions of rebel troops sent to the main government buildings at Merdeka Square milled around for a day without orders or food. The rebels occupied the government’s radio station and announced the formation of a “Revolution Council” without a coherent political program or function.

While the Movement floundered, General Suharto, the commander of KOSTRAD, the army reserve force, took stock of the situation and implemented the contingency plans that were already in place. Suharto declared himself the new army commander, replacing the murdered Yani, and united the key military commanders in Jakarta behind his leadership. Suharto then mobilized Special Forces (RPKAD) units to take the rebels’ base. The Movement’s leadership decided not to put up a fight and fled. The September 30 Movement had lasted for all of 12 hours.

Within days, the army leaders around Suharto charged that the PKI was the “mastermind” behind the Movement and the execution of the generals. In response, the PKI leadership spent the week following the events of October 1 reassuring party members and its popular base, urging them to refrain from provoking the army and anti-communist groups.⁸³ On October 5, the PKI Central Committee issued a declaration that

⁸¹ Mortimer, p. 385-86. Through currency speculation and other actions, the CIA may have been attempting to destabilize the Indonesian economy, just as it did in the months prior to the right-wing generals coup in Chile in 1973.

⁸² In short order, army psy-ops specialists issued claims that PKI members had tortured, mutilated and castrated the captured generals. According to one story in the newspapers, 100 women of the pro-PKI Indonesian Women’s Movement had used razors to slice up the genitals of the generals. The Suharto regime set up a “Museum of PKI Terror” at the site where the generals’ bodies were buried. The claim that the murder of the generals was the start of a massive, ruthless campaign by the PKI against all non-communist forces was a key part of the legitimizing ideology for the 32 year long Suharto dictatorship. Roosa, pp. 7-10, 198.

⁸³ Mortimer, p. 388.

the party would support any political settlement Sukarno announced. Then on October 8, right-wing mobs in Jakarta began to destroy and burn PKI offices and houses. The army banned PKI activities and initiated mass roundups of party leaders and suspected members. The PKI leadership went into hiding, expecting that President Sukarno would intervene and come to their rescue.

A vivid illustration of the paralysis that gripped the party cadre is provided in this account by a PKI member and wife of a Central Committee member:

After September 30, we went on with our work for some days in the normal manner, but no one with whom we came in contact was able to inform us as to what had happened or what we were expected to do. As the atmosphere in Djakarta grew worse, we just sat at home and waited for instructions. My husband had been given no guidance about what to do in such an eventuality. We did not expect things to turn out so badly; we thought there would be a setback for the party but that eventually it would be sorted out by Sukarno. That is why the party disintegrated so rapidly.⁸⁴

In the face of this crisis, Sukarno insisted on a political solution and forbade punitive actions. However, the army, with U.S. backing, simply ignored the President. On October 17, army commando units were ordered into Central Java to *sikat* (“sweep” or “clean out”) the PKI and its supporters in the province. A ruthless campaign of extermination was set in motion. The death tolls were highest in Central and East Java and in Bali, which had been the sites of violent clashes over land reform the previous year. The massacre continued well into 1966.

Aidit was arrested and executed by the army in Central Java in late November. By the end of 1966 all members of the PKI Political Bureau had been executed or taken prisoner except Jusef Adjitorop, who was receiving medical treatment in China.

Stage two of the “rolling coup d’etat” was aimed at President Sukarno. General Suharto left Sukarno in place in order to legitimize the new regime. On October 16, Sukarno was forced to appoint Suharto army commander. In March 1966, Suharto took over the authority to appoint and dismiss cabinet ministers, while maintaining Sukarno as a figurehead president until the following year.

Multinational corporations immediately moved in to carve up Indonesia’s natural resources. As the result of a conference held in Geneva in 1967, the copper in West Irian went to the Freeport Company (Henry Kissinger was on the board) and its nickel to an American and European consortium; the tropical forests of Sumatra, West Irian and Kalimantan went to a group of American, Japanese and French companies; and the giant Alcoa Company got the largest share of Indonesia’s bauxite.⁸⁵

1966 Self-Criticism and Attempts to Initiate Armed Struggle

In the wake of the massacre, two PKI groups emerged which repudiated the line of the PKI under Aidit’s leadership. The underground “Political Committee of the PKI” issued a statement criticizing the concept of a state with “two aspects” and pointed to the bourgeoisification of party leaders and cadre due to their positions in the Sukarno

⁸⁴ Mortimer, p. 391.

⁸⁵ Patwant Singh, *The World According to Washington: An Asian View*, New Delhi, 2004, p. 64.

government. A Beijing-based group of PKI members led by Adjitorop also came out against Aidit's line.⁸⁶

Sudisman, the only top PKI leader who had escaped the army dragnet, began to reorganize the PKI in Jakarta. After Sudisman's capture in late 1966, Widjayastra, Hutapea and Sukatno led several hundred PKI members in an effort to initiate armed struggle in South Blitar on the southern coast of East Java. After the poorly armed guerillas began to move out of their base to dispense revolutionary justice to the worst executioners of PKI members in nearby districts, the army moved in and within a month retook the area. Eight members of a new ten-man Political Bureau were killed. In 1967-68, several hundred PKI members in exile in China were given military training in the hope that they would return to Indonesia, but this plan could not be implemented because of the loss of the guerilla base in South Blitar.⁸⁷

The PKI also began to reorganize in one area in West Kalimantan. These forces were armed due to the participation of pro-PKI soldiers and officers in the 1963-64 "Crush Malaysia" campaign. In July 1967, fifty communist guerillas raided an Indonesian air base at Singkawang. The PKI cadres had a strong mass base in some cities but not in the countryside, especially among the Dayak tribes. Thus, the Indonesian military was able to suppress the PKI and its armed units in this area. In 1971, the North Kalimantan Communist Party was founded and had some armed units. However, it was unable to sustain and develop its revolutionary armed struggle.⁸⁸

From September 1966 on, both remaining PKI groups made a more extensive critique of "Aiditism" as an Indonesian variant of modern revisionism, and called for a Maoist line of agrarian revolution and armed struggle to overthrow the U.S.-backed Suharto regime. A statement by the underground in Indonesia criticized Aidit's political line and strategy as based on parliamentarianism, capitulation to Sukarno and the national bourgeoisie, denial of class struggle, and adoption of a peaceful road to socialism.

In a lengthy Self-Criticism ("Otokritik"), the reorganized Political Bureau of the PKI, based in Beijing, called for the ideological, political and organizational rectification of the party, and for a renewed effort to build a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist party, armed people's struggle, and a revolutionary united front of all classes opposed to

⁸⁶ Mortimer, p. 397. For more on the post-1965 PKI groups, see Robert Alexander, *International Maoism in the Developing World*, 1999, pp. 258-263.

⁸⁷ Sison correspondence. In contrast to the Indonesian experience, in 1969 the CPP leadership initially based the New People's Army in the second district of Tarlac, Central Luzon, where it had wide support among the peasants. At the same time it sent cadres to develop a guerilla zone in the Cagayan Valley (northeast Luzon) and an area in southern Luzon in order to make it more difficult for the army to concentrate its forces against the revolutionary army in its early stages of development.

⁸⁸ Justus van der Kroef, "The Indonesian Maoists: Doctrines and Perspectives," Occasional Papers/Reprints Series in Contemporary Asian Studies, University of Maryland Law School, No. 3, 1977, p. 27; Sison, "Notes on People's War in Southeast Asia," May 2007. <http://www.josemariasison.org/inps/NotesonPWinSEArt.htm>

imperialism and feudalism.⁸⁹ In all of this work, the Political Bureau emphasized work in the countryside.

In rebuilding the Party, the Indonesian Marxist-Leninists must devote their attention to the creation of the conditions to lead the armed agrarian revolution of the peasants that will become the main form of struggle to win victory for the people's democratic revolution in Indonesia. This means that the greatest attention should be paid to the rebuilding of Party organizations in the rural areas. The greatest attention must be paid to the solution of the problem of arousing, organizing and mobilizing the peasants in an anti-feudal agrarian revolution....

The tasks faced by the Indonesian Marxist-Leninists are very arduous. They have to work under the most savage and barbarous terror and persecution which have no parallel in history. However, the Indonesian Marxist-Leninists do not have the slightest doubt that, by correcting the mistakes made by the Party in the past, they are now marching along the correct road, the road of people's democratic revolution. No matter how protracted, tortuous and full of difficulties, this is the only road leading to a free and democratic New Indonesia, an Indonesia that will really belong to the Indonesian people. For this noble cause, we must have the courage to traverse the long road.⁹⁰

Finally, the Political Bureau criticized the PKI's organizational policies, which flowed from its revisionist political line of a march to power without preparing and organizing the masses of people for revolutionary struggle. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the PKI opened its doors to hundreds of thousands of new recruits with little political training. In contrast to this concept of a "mass party," the *Otokritik* stated,

The mass character of the Party is not determined above all by a large membership, but primarily by the close ties linking the Party and the masses, by the Party's political line which defends the interests of the masses, or in other words by the implementation of the Party's mass line. And the mass line of the Party can only be maintained when the prerequisites determining the Party's role as the advanced detachment are firmly upheld, when the Party members are made up of the best elements of the proletariat who are armed with Marxism-Leninism.⁹¹

It is useful to consider the question of where Sukarno and the nationalist sections of the bourgeoisie that he represented would have ended up politically if the PKI had adopted and implemented a revolutionary line during these years. Opportunities to neutralize or win over sections of the national bourgeoisie, including Sukarno himself, would have presented themselves. However, a process of polarization between the forces of the armed revolution and those of the armed counter-revolution inevitably would have developed, compelling the Sukarno forces to take sides at some point.

Similar Defeats in China (1927) and Chile (1973)

⁸⁹ In 1969, a former PKI group based in Moscow issued "Urgent Tasks of the Communist Movement in Indonesia," which criticized the Maoist *Otokritik*. The pro-Soviet group claimed that "new tactics" were needed to change the "balance of political forces" prior to the initiation of armed struggle—thus putting it off into the indefinite future. Van der Kroef, pp. 28-29.

⁹⁰ PKI Self-Criticism, pp. 25, 26.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

The situation faced by the PKI in the 1950s and early 1960s was not unique historically. Only three decades earlier, the newly formed Chinese Communist Party operated in very similar political conditions, with similar results. In the 1920s, as the CCP built a united front with the Guomindang (GMD), its cadre became GMD members and military instructors in the GMD army, and the CCP opposed the development of party-led militias in the countryside. By not maintaining its own political and military independence in the united front with the GMD, the CCP was set up for successive bloodbaths in 1927 and the following years when Chiang Kai-shek, with U.S. and British backing, turned on them. Only in the wake of this bitter defeat did Mao's strategy of protracted people's war based in the countryside win out.

In Chile, the promotion of bourgeois nationalist governments over mass based revolutionary struggle led to a disastrous repeat of the experience in Indonesia. In 1973, a CIA-backed coup of right-wing generals headed by Pinochet overthrew President Allende, leading to the massacre of more than 30,000 revolutionary activists and supporters.

As the U.S. moved to undermine Chile's "socialist" government, it received indispensable assistance from the pro-Soviet Chilean Communist Party. The CP, the largest left organization in Chile, told its working class base to turn in their weapons in order to assure the army of their peaceful intentions. The CP claimed that Chile's "constitutionalist generals" would uphold democracy, and it toed Moscow's line about working for a peaceful transition to socialism in Chile. This revisionist line directly played into the hands of the fascists and the U.S. imperialists, who were able to unleash a coup and a bloody massacre against a movement that had been disarmed politically and militarily.⁹²

Indonesia Today

After three decades of military dictatorship and a return to "democracy" in 1998, Indonesia remains a neo-colony of the U.S. and other Western powers. Bureaucrat capitalists allied with imperialism have opened up the country to rapacious exploitation by multinational oil, mining and logging corporations and low-wage assembly plants. Big landlords and agri-businesses dominate the rural areas. While waves of small farmers have been driven into the cities, the majority of the people still live in the countryside.

The vast majority of the 235 million people of Indonesia have suffered from a succession of U.S. and IMF-imposed austerity plans. A measure of deteriorating economic conditions in Indonesia is that the country became a net oil importer in 2004 and is straining to make payments on its foreign debt. The Indonesian military, hardened by counter-insurgency campaigns in East Timor and Aceh, still holds the key reins of power.⁹³ These conditions have not changed fundamentally since Indonesia achieved formal independence in 1949.

⁹² See Jorge Palacios, *Chile, An Attempt at "Historic Compromise": The Real Story of the Allende Years*, 1979, pp. 329-349.

⁹³ After American-trained Indonesian soldiers killed 270 unarmed demonstrators in Dili, East Timor with U.S. weapons in 1991, Congress cut off further U.S. military aid to Indonesia.

In a recent article, Jose Ma. Sison, Founding Chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines, describes the favorable conditions for rebuilding the revolutionary movement in Indonesia:

In Southeast Asia, there is something precious to learn from the experience of the Communist Party of the Philippines in preserving and developing the people's army and in waging people's war for more than 38 years. If protracted people's war is viable in a country like the Philippines, it should be even more viable in a country like Indonesia, with a bigger number of people suffering from semicolonial and semifeudal oppression and exploitation and with an archipelagic and rough terrain of a scale far larger than that of the Philippines.... We are gratified to know that proletarian revolutionaries here are determined to pursue the people's democratic revolution through protracted people's war and to grasp and realize such three magic weapons as the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist party, the people's army and the united front.⁹⁴

The Indonesian revolution, like all revolutions, will have its own specific features and course of development. At the same time, the experience of comrades in the Philippines in initiating and waging people's war, as well as the experiences of Maoist parties and people's wars in India, Turkey and Nepal,⁹⁵ will be of great assistance to today's young and veteran revolutionaries in Indonesia in charting a new road to power.

However, over the following seven years, U.S. Special Forces units carried out 36 training exercises with their Indonesian counterparts while Congress looked the other way. In 2002, training programs for Indonesian officers in the U.S. were restarted as part of the so called "war on terror." Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire*, 2004, pp. 137-38.

⁹⁴ Sison, "Notes on People's War in Southeast Asia," May 2007.

<http://www.josemariasison.org/inps/NotesonPWinSEAart.htm>

⁹⁵ After liberating 4/5ths of the country through ten years of people's war, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) has joined an interim government with seven parties representing the interests of Nepal's bureaucratic capitalists and big landlords, who are tied to India and the U.S. In order to reach this agreement, the CPN(M) has dissolved its liberated areas, sequestered its troops and arms under UN supervision, and agreed to merge the People's Liberation Army with the Nepalese Army, the renamed Royal Nepalese Army. The attention of CPN(M) cadre and its youth group has shifted to mass agitation and political struggle within constitutional bounds.

Serious investigation and debate on this question has already begun among revolutionaries around the world. One useful study guide is a bibliography compiled by the MLM Revolutionary Study Group, titled "Assessing Recent Developments in Nepal: A Bibliography on the State, a Peaceful Transition to Socialism, Democracy and Dictatorship, Negotiations and Their Relevance to the International Communist Movement in the 21st Century." This includes two statements by the Communist Party of India (Maoist) that are critical of the new strategy of the Nepalese comrades. The MLM Revolutionary Study Group has also written an article on the political, military and negotiating strategy of the Chinese Communist Party from 1937 to 1946, and its relevance to the situation in Nepal today. Both papers are available at www.mlmrsg.com

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