



## ECHOES OF MAO TSE-TUNG IN DJAKARTA

An Interview with **D. N. Aidit**,  
Secretary General of the Indonesian Communist Party

A Report from A. Doak **Barnett**

Djakarta  
May 21, 1955

On one of the wide avenues which crisscross Djakarta, capital of Indonesia, there is a modern white building bearing a sign in bold letters: Central Committee of the Communist Party of Indonesia. It is headquarters for the 16-man body which controls one of the largest and most important communist parties in Southeast Asia.

The PKI (as the Indonesia Communist Party is generally labeled here) is an orthodox communist organization. However, its situation is quite different from that of many communist organizations elsewhere. In **Indonesia** the **Communist** Party is legal and competes openly in the arena of party and parliamentary politics.

The **PKI** is not only legal; it is also in the unique position of supporting--for its own tactical reasons--the present noncommunist cabinet headed by Prime Minister **Ali** Sastroamidjojo of the PNI (Indonesian Nationalist Party). In Indonesian politics, characterized by a multitude of parties, cabinets made up of strange bedfellows are not uncommon. But even by Indonesian standards, the present PNI cabinet contains a peculiar combination. Besides the Nationalists, the cabinet represents seven other parties ranging from the anticommunist, **right-wing** Muslim Nahdatul **Ulama** to small Marxist splinter groups such as the Labor Party and Progressive Faction. However, despite the fact that PKI cooperation was essential in defeating the previous Prime Minister Wilopo in **1953** and in making possible the formation of the present cabinet, the Communists' **17** representatives in parliament do not hold a single cabinet post.

The PKI, therefore, supports the Sastroamidjojo cabinet without participating in it. The peculiarity of this situation is underlined by the fact that the present cabinet is not a very popular one. By supporting the cabinet, the PKI has shared the onus for many unpopular government policies (or lack of policies) and has been forced to refrain from the sort of verbal assaults

against the authorities in power which one expects from a Communist Party,

But that is only one side of the picture, By supporting the present cabinet, and by following the "national front" line defined by Communist Party chief **Aidit** in May 1952, the PKI has bought toleration for its open, legal activities. Consequently, it has been able to push an energetic propaganda and organizational campaign, which has built up the party from an ineffective group of less than 10,000 to a disciplined party of about a half-million members, Its policies have helped to confuse and split the anticommunist opposition, and the party has gradually improved its reputation and respectability, blurring the memory of its disastrous, Moscow-dictated Madiun revolt of 1948.

In an interview which I had with Indonesia's Prime Minister last week, Sastroamidjojo said to me: "I do not see a threat in world-wide communism to values I hold, I believe in coexistence.....I do not believe in their ideology, but let them have their ideology.....As soon as they meddle in our affairs, we will object.....The PKI has the same ideology as international communism.....But I do not think the PKI's ties with international communism go beyond ideology and sympathy. There are not strong organizational ties with international communism. They are a national party." Attitudes of this sort have permitted the PKI to build up its organizational strength rapidly since 1953, and at present it is one of the five major parties in a country where political organization is fractionalized into dozens of parties.

The PKI is now energetically preparing for Indonesia's first national elections. (The present parliament was appointed when the Republic was first set up.) Its political workers are more active than those of any other party, Its hammer-and-sickle posters are plastered all over the countryside. And it is spending large sums of money; the top leader of a major Indonesian opposition party told me that the PKI is spending "more than all the other parties put together."

In view of these facts, my Djakarta hotel roommate and I decided we would try to obtain an interview with **Aidit**, PKI Secretary General, and talk to him about the Communists' election plans and platform, Although both of us had interviewed the leaders of many of the other major Indonesian parties, we were not too hopeful that we could see **Aidit**; he had granted no interviews with foreigners for some time. We decided on the direct approach, took a taxi to the Central Committee headquarters, and walked in.

It was midafternoon, and the Communist Party staff, like almost everybody in Indonesia at that time of day, obviously was napping, A young man came up to us, however, and asked us what we wanted. We gave our names and asked to see **Aidit**, and the young man disappeared, While we were waiting we had a chance to look around us, The clean whitewashed rooms appeared quite

-3-

ordinary. In front there was a reception hall, with colored bas-reliefs featuring the **hammer** and sickle and peace doves, but the small offices in the rear looked **like** offices everywhere. On the table in the room where we waited there was only one magazine; **it** was a slick Indonesian-language version of a Chinese Communist **pictorial**.

The young man who had greeted us returned shortly and said we could not see **Aidit** that day, but he would let us know later whether we might come another time. Our first reaction was that we had been given a brush-off. To our **surprise**, we later learned that we had been wrong. Back at our hotel we received a request to submit questions and were told to appear at PKI Central Committee headquarters at noon on Friday the thirteenth. Needless to say, we kept the appointment.

Five people were present at the interview: **Aidit**, two unidentified men (one Indonesian and one Chinese-Indonesian) who interpreted, and we two interviewers. First we discussed the written answers to our questions, and then we talked informally for a full hour.

I was startled to see how young **Aidit** is. There are not many greybeards in Indonesian politics, **but Aidit** is politically precocious even for Indonesia. He is an experienced politician, however; he began his political career at the age of 16, and therefore he has participated in political movements for 16 years, even though he will only be 32 on his next birthday, **July 30**.

According to a short written biography which was presented to us, **Dipa Nusantara Aidit** was born in 1923, "**the child of a low-ranking employee of the forest department in Sumatra.**" He completed seven years of elementary school and then was "sent by his parents<sup>H</sup> to Djakarta to study at a commercial middle (high) school, **"although Aidit himself had no interest in commerce."**

In 1939, at the age of 16, **Aidit** began his political career when he became active in a youth organization called **Persatuan Timur Muda (Eastern Youth Union)**, and from 1940 until the Japanese occupation in 1942 he was "**one of the leaders**" of the Youth Corps of the Gerindo Party, linked to the Communist Party which was then underground in Indonesia.

During the Japanese occupation, **Aidit**, according to his official biography, organized "together with his **comrades**" the **Persatuan Buruh Kendaraan (Transport Workers Union)**, later dissolved by the Japanese. In 1943 he joined the underground Communist Party, and "together with Communist and non-Communist youth, he established the underground antifascist organization called **Gerakan Indonesia Merdeka,**" or Gerindom (Free Indonesian Movement), which "played an important part in the preparation of the independence proclamation on August 17, 1945."

After the war, according to this biography, **Aidit** helped to establish three Communist-led mass organizations: Angkatan Pemuda Indonesia (Indonesian Youth Organization), **Barisan** Rakjat (People's Corps, a peasant organization), and **Barisan** Buruh Indonesia (Indonesian Workers Corps, which later became SOBSI, now the largest union federation in Indonesia). For a period of seven months after November 1945, **Aidit** was imprisoned by the British and Dutch, but when he was released he became active in the Agitprop Department of the Communists' Central Committee.

**Aidit's** rise within the party began in 1947. In that year he was elected to the Central Committee. In 1947 and 1948 he was also Secretary and member of the Executive Council of the Front Demokrasi Rakjat (Democratic People's Front), in which the Socialist Party, Socialist Youth and Workers' Party, as well as the Communists, participated. By the beginning of 1948, **Aidit** was a candidate member of the Communists' Politburo.

Then came the Communists' Madiun fiasco. In an open rebellion, approved by Moscow, the Indonesian Communist Party tried to seize power. The rebellion was crushed and Secretary General **Muso** was killed. **Aidit** came to the fore in the resulting confusion. In the Central Committee Plenum in early 1951, he was "re-elected" to the Politburo and became First Secretary. Since then he has been in the top post. His rivals were subsequently demoted, and at the Fifth PKI National Congress in March 1954, **Aidit** was chosen Secretary General. It is clear, however, that his authority is not as centralized or monolithic as that of some Communist leaders elsewhere; there are still numerous factions within the PKI. But, at the age of 31, **Aidit** definitely is top boss at the moment.

One would never guess when meeting **Aidit** for the first time that he is boss of a large, orthodox, Communist Party. His manner is mild, like that of almost all leading Indonesian political figures whom I have met. But in talking with him, I soon obtained an impression of shrewdness. And before our interview was over I had a feeling that his mild manner concealed a toughness underneath.

We began by discussing the organization of the PKI and its election plans. **Aidit** first stated that the PKI now has a membership of "approximately 500,000 members and candidate members\*"; he did not say how many of each there are. Some political observers here believe the hard core of full members would number far below this figure, and even a half-million is a small number compared to the seven million registered members claimed by the largest party in Indonesia, the Masjumi (Islamic) Party. But the Communist Party disciplines its members more effectively than does any other group, and the Masjumi leader, Natsir, told me that his party expected greater competition from the PKI than from any other party in the forthcoming elections,

-5-

The PKI, **Aidit** said, plans to run 231 candidates for parliament and 422 for the constituent assembly which will formally adopt a constitution for Indonesia, (Parliament and the assembly will have roughly 260 and 520 seats respectively, filled on a proportional representation basis from 15 election districts.) Then, in a statement which was peculiarly negative for a political leader to make before an election, he said: "**The PKI expects to win not more than one-third of the total amount of seats.**" The only explanation I could think of for this phraseology was the fact that the PKI seems to be trying to prevent alarmism about its developing strength which might lead to repressive measures. Actually, **Aidit's maximum** estimate is higher than that of foreign diplomatic observers in Indonesia, who believe the PKI might win from 10 to 15 per cent, and a maximum of 25 per cent, of parliament's seats. Even 15 per cent of **the** seats would be a powerful bloc, however, in a country where there are so many parties. But most people in Indonesia are wary of making firm predictions, because there is no precedent for national elections and therefore very little to go on,

According to **Aidit**, the PKI's organization is "**spread** in all provinces and all counties or government administrative units of county level throughout Indonesia (more or less 200)." The **party's** membership, he said, "**mainly** consists of peasants followed up by the workers, studying youth, and government **officials.**"

We then asked him several questions about the PKI's "**national front**" policy. **Aidit** first pointed out the differences between the PKI and the PNI which it is supporting. "**The PKI aims at a Communist society, the PNI does not. The PKI recognises the leading role of the proletariat in the revolution, the PNI does not.**" Then he went on to say: "**But, for national independence, the PKI together with the PNI and other nationalist parties, yes, and also with various parties founded on religion, have the same interests. Together, we desire that the foreign imperialists quit our country.....The possibility of forming a coalition government after the general elections does not only exist between the PKI and the PNI but also with the other nationalist parties and the parties based on religion, in the first place those based on the Islamic faith.**" When pressed to elaborate, **Aidit** continued: "**Now** we are aiming at a broader national front, including nationalists, Muslims, Christians, not only with the PNI but with other nationalist parties. We would like even the Hasjumi to come into a national front. Also the PSI (socialist Party); we would like it very much. There is not a single party which should be excluded." This sweeping and rather amazing statement had little relation to practical politics. Both Natsir, Masjumi chief, and Sjahrir, PSI head, described to me the strong **anti-Communist** stand of their parties, and any **coalition** between them and the PKI seems remote indeed. But **Aidit's all-inclusive** offer of cooperation would seem to indicate that for tactical reasons the PKI would be willing to join with all sorts of parties in forming a cabinet after the elections in order to forestall a **Masjumi-Socialist**

cabinet, which many observers at this point feel is the likeliest possibility. In any case, the PKI seems to be pushing the "national front," "coalition" idea--a standard **communist** tactic in some situations--about as far as it can go.

One of my principal interests during the interview was to learn to what extent the ideological stand and the program of the PKI in its present situation (which is quite different in many respects from the situation in China in recent years) correspond to those of the Chinese Communist Party in the years preceding its assumption of power in 1949. I asked **Aidit** to describe the social and economic program of the PKI.

"The most important points of the PKI's program for **Indonesia**," he said, "are: the nationalization of all properties belonging to the Dutch imperialists and the agrarian reform (the confiscation of the lands of the landlords and the distribution of lands without payment to the peasants, in the first place to the landless peasants or to those with inadequate land).

"The PKI is of the opinion that Indonesia has to go through a bourgeois democratic revolution first before the proletarian revolution. At present Indonesia is in the stage of the bourgeois democratic revolution.

"Because Indonesia is an agrarian country, the main force of the Indonesia revolution is the peasants. Since capitalism in the period of imperialism already constitutes an international force, it goes without saying that the Indonesian proletarian movement is a party of the world proletarian movement. The PKI considers the coalition of anti-imperialist classes in Indonesia to be a necessity. The classes which the PKI considers should be in a coalition in combating imperialism in Indonesia are the following: the national bourgeois class, the urban petty bourgeoisie, the peasantry, and the working **class**."

In answer to further questions from us **Aidit** elaborated **some** of the points he had made in these statements.

"By imperialists we mean in the first place Dutch imperialists. In our PKI program we say we **won't** take action against others, but it will be different if they help the Dutch... The Dutch are still a big problem. They say we **aren't** capable of handling our own affairs. That is why there is disturbance in both the economic and security fields; they (the Dutch) are themselves causing it."

"Agrarian reform," he added by way of explanation of his first remarks, "is to **eliminate** the landlord system and to distribute land free to the **people**.....**There** are no exact figures on land ownership, but in the villages of Indonesia over one-half of the land belongs to the **landlords**." I asked about plans for collectivization. "The consciousness of the peasants will determine collectivization after land reform. We desire it. But

-7-

whether it will be immediate or we will have to wait some time will depend on the consciousness of the peasants<sup>n</sup>

Then Aidit linked agrarian reform and industrialization, about which he had already stated: "What we want is more industry,\* especially industry **"like iron and steel."** "We believe industrialization can be implemented only if it is preceded by agrarian reform," he said. "Only with this agrarian reform will the purchasing power of the peasants be increased and will peasants be able to purchase the products of industry, If there is no agrarian reform and peasants are too poor, then industry will have no opportunity to develop."

Most of this sounded very familiar to me. In broad outline it corresponds to the general ideological line pursued by Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Communists during the later years of their struggle for power, As I listened to Aidit expound his line, I could not help but wonder to what extent the PKI program borrows from Mao's Chinese Communist program in a doctrinaire fashion, and to what extent this might lead to ideological weakness in the PKI line, since neither the situation in Indonesia nor the position of the PKI corresponds exactly to its counterpart in China,

The idea of a two-stage revolution, the emphasis on appeals to nationalist, anti-imperialist sentiment and agrarian discontent, the proposal of a four-class coalition, the description of the peasants as the "main force" of the revolution under the leadership of the proletariat, the desire for ultimate collectivization and industrialization, all correspond to the ideological line followed by Chinese Communists. One cannot help but think that if the PKI were formulating its own program, without benefit of the Chinese experience which Peking has itself proclaimed as the "model" for the rest of Asia, the formulation might be somewhat different,

The attempt to base a revolution generally upon nationalist feeling and peasant discontent is certainly logical in a predominantly agricultural country recently freed from colonial control,

There is no doubt, furthermore, that there is a great residue of anti-Dutch feeling, and resentment against the economic position which the Dutch still hold in Indonesia; it is reflected in the national passion for obtaining control over West Irian. One might say that the major victory of nationalism in Indonesia has already been won, with the achievement of independence in 1949; but the same could have been said in China concerning the 1945 victory over the Japanese, and yet there the force of "anti-imperialist" nationalism continued to be a strong revolutionary current. Perhaps one difference between China and Indonesia, however, is the fact that in China the Communists actually built up their strength during the struggle for victory over the Japanese and the momentum of their movement helped to carry them

forward, whereas in Indonesia the Communists are now attempting to build up their strength after the main victory over the Dutch.

Much more important questions can be raised about the **Indonesians' copying** of the Chinese land program. The formula outlined by **Aidit** corresponds closely to that of the **Chinese--** confiscation and distribution of **landlords'** holdings. In China, landlordism, although sometimes exaggerated, was certainly a major national problem, and there was widespread peasant discontent, as well as a long history of peasant rebellion. Many qualified observers believe, however, that landlordism, although possibly growing at present, is not a problem in Indonesia to nearly the same degree that it was in China. Although accurate statistics are lacking, few non-Communist observers would accept **Aidit's** high estimate of landlord holdings in **Indonesia**. Nor is there so strong a tradition of peasant rebellion in Indonesia as in China. There certainly are many agrarian problems in Indonesia, and since the population is mainly rural it is not surprising that the Communists follow **Mao's** reliance on the peasantry as the "main force" for a revolutionary movement. But redistribution of landlord holdings **à la** Mao may not have the same basis, and therefore may be **a** less effective slogan in Indonesia than in China.

Perhaps an even more flagrant example of ideological eclecticism, however, is the definition of the four classes included in the **PKI's "class coalition"**: the national bourgeois class, the urban petty bourgeois class, the peasantry, and the working class--the same four classes as in China. In China the "**national** bourgeoisie" was included, because there was in the port cities a modern Chinese industrialist and business class, new but significant, which resented foreign economic predominance; the Communists hoped to attract, or at least neutralize, these men. In Indonesia, however, there is no such class of any significance. Apart from the Dutch, a majority of the entire Indonesian bourgeoisie, both "**national**" and "**petty**," is made up of people of Chinese race, who have remained a distinct minority even when they have taken on Indonesian citizenship. I have not met anyone who thinks it conceivable that large numbers of Chinese in Indonesia will support the PKI; the PKI itself, in fact, plays down any identification with China or the Chinese to avoid feeling the effects of the prevalent anti-Chinese sentiment. Logically, one might expect the **PKI** to find it **advantageous**, in terms of its domestic policy, to label the Chinese bourgeoisie as enemies of their hoped-for revolution in order to appeal to Indonesian nationalism. But since China is now **Communist**, this could be embarrassing, to say the least, internationally. Consequently, the **PKI** seems to be **rather** ambivalent about **Indonesia's** Chinese population,

I asked **Aidit** about **his** attitude toward the recent Indonesian-Chinese treaty on dual citizenship. He replied, "We approve of this agreement and consider it to be something that will provide a solution to dual citizenship, a thing which is not



desired by either the Republic of Indonesia or the People's Republic of China. I am of the opinion that a person cannot possibly be a patriot if he does not clearly adhere to one **citizenship** of which he is proud and which he will defend **resolutely.**" Later, he added that "**discrimination** against Chinese-Indonesians is a result of the former Dutch policy. They gave a privileged position to the Chinese. That is why there are the existing antagonisms. The PKI stands for an end to economic discrimination against Indonesians of any origin."

When asked how many members of Chinese origin there are in the PKI, **Aidit** replied: "We do not have the exact figure. But it is very small. I think it would be less than **two per cent.**" He was obviously playing down the Chinese component in the PKI, but the low figure is confirmed by estimates of others. **Some** people believe, in fact, that the demotion within the party not long ago of a leading figure named Tan Ling Djie, a **Chinese-Indonesian**, may well have been related at least indirectly to a general policy of keeping Chinese-Indonesians out of the top ranks of the PKI, because of the anti-Chinese nationalist feeling in Indonesia.

Not only is the question of Chinese in Indonesia a ticklish problem for the PKI, but **also** the problem of relations with Moscow and Peking must be a cause of considerable **uncertainty.**

We asked **Aidit**: "What are the ideological and **organizational** ties between the PKI and the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R. and the Communist Party of China?" He replied: "The ideology of the PKI is the ideology of the proletarian class, that is to say, the same as the ideology of Communist Parties in all other countries, the same as the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Communist Party of China, and the **Communist Party of the U.S.A.** Since the dissolution of the Comintern in **1943**, the PKI has no organizational ties with any Communist Party abroad. Apart from studying the writings of their **own** PKI leaders, the members of the PKI have the duty to study the writings of foreign working class leaders, in the first place the writings of **Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao Tse-tung.** The history of the **Communist Party of the Soviet Union and of the Communist Party of China** are the most important books to be studied by the **PKI members.**" Later he elaborated: "We study the various publications of Communism from all over, China, Russia, even the **U.S.**" "Is Mao or Stalin more important to **you?**" I asked, remarking that what he had said earlier sounded closer to **Mao** in my opinion. "**Stalin** also wrote on the peasant question," he replied. "**Comrade Mao Tse-tung** took as a basis the writings of Stalin and adapted them to China. We will do the **same.**" "But will you start from Stalin or from **Mao?**" I asked. He saw that I was trying to pin him down, so he laughed and said, "**We start from Marx.**"

It was obvious that **Aidit** was aware of the problem of having two, rather than just one, ideological Meccas, and was treading a careful line by acknowledging the authority of both.

As a firm denial that there is any conflict in so doing, he said, "**there** is no basis for thinking of a **split** between China and Russia." We asked him if he had visited either Moscow or Peking. He replied that he had gone to Moscow for **Stalin's** funeral but has "**not yet**" visited Peking. "Do you plan to go?" I asked. "I haven't thought about it **yet**," he answered,

Despite all of his hedging, I finally asked if the **PKI** regarded the Chinese **Communist** Party as its model, "Generally speaking, **Aidit** replied, "we can say that what the Communist Party in China has done is the model for what the **PKI** wants to do in Indonesia, but we have to pay attention to what the Indonesian people themselves want."

There is a good deal of speculation in Djakarta about how this problem of relations **between** the **PKI** and Moscow and Peking has been worked out in **practice**, but there is little factual **basis** to go on. After discussing whether Moscow or Peking exerts the stronger control or influence over the **PKI**, or whether they share authority, most informed observers admit that they do not really know. They usually end by asserting that the two Meccas must be a problem for the **PKI**, in any case. The **majority** of these same observers believe, however, that the Chinese Communist Embassy in Djakarta and that part of the Chinese community which is under its influence provide the **PKI** with a **major** portion of the **sizable** amount of money which it is now spending.

Although the **PKI's** basic relationships with the two centers of world communism are difficult to determine, the most **apparent** ideological inspiration and organizational (financial) support seem to link it with Peking.

If the **PKI** aims to carry out a revolution modeled on that of the Communists in China, however, there is one fundamental factor which is missing, **namely** military power. The Chinese Communists did not operate on a legal, parliamentary level; they carried out "**armed** revolution against armed **counterrevolution**." One of the most essential elements, in fact, of the revolutionary formula which the Chinese proclaim as the model for other "**colonial** and **semicolonial**" areas is the **creation** of peasant armies to fight against the existing government from rural "liberated area" bases.

Since the failure of its Nadiun revolt in 1948, the **PKI** has not made any significant progress toward acquiring a basis for military power. It does not control the army or police, nor does it seem to have immediate prospects of doing so. It does not have armed **guerrillas** in the countryside; the only groups which do at present are violently **anti-Communist** Islamic groups such as Darul Islam, which now are a greater direct security threat to the government than are the Communists.

In a sense, therefore, the **PKI's** program has an entirely different context from that of the Chinese **Communists**, even though the influence of the latter is obvious. The Chinese Communists

-11-

talked of a class coalition, but they spoke from territory which they controlled and had armies to back them up. The PKI is talking of "**coalition**" and a "national front" to attract voters and win more seats in parliament. In many respects, the PKI's feeling that it must cooperate with anyone at present is a sign of weakness,

There is no doubt, however, that the PKI's membership has grown at a fairly rapid rate during the past two years. The Communists are likely to emerge from the promised Indonesian elections--now scheduled for this September--as one of Indonesia's major legal parties as the result of increased representation in and influence within parliament,

It is well to remember, also, that the current PKI Party Program, first published in 1953, states that "the Communist Party of Indonesia regards its works in parliament not, the main work of the Party and the parliamentary struggle not the only form of **struggle.**" Clearly, the main work and struggle aim at acquiring a basis of real power--especially military power. If the PKI builds up a strong enough position to feel surer of **itself**, and is unable to satisfy its desire for power through parliamentary means, it could try either a coup as in Czechoslovakia, or **Mao's "armed revolution"** as in China. But the calmer observers here do not feel that either is an imminent possibility.

A. J. B. B.