

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Dear Mr. Rogers:

Since the fall of the Wilopo cabinet on June 4, the political gears in Indonesia have been spinning wildly, yet the government has made no perceptible forward movement. The continuing cabinet crisis--now in its fifty-sixth day--should surprise no one, least of all the Indonesian Nationalist Party which slipped into the driver's seat eight weeks ago and put a heavy foot on the clutch.

The PNI has held the fate of the Wilopo cabinet in its hands since the October 17 crisis of last year, which was touched off by a PNI motion in Parliament criticizing the government armed forces policy. In the confusion of demonstrations and refined mutinies which followed passage of the motion, the PNI apparently gained its immediate objectives. The cabinet was allowed to survive, and a tenuous political equilibrium was reestablished. The government, however, had been frightened into passivity.

Three months ago, it became clear that the cabinet's reprieve was running out. A motion of no-confidence in the government land distribution program in North Sumatra was presented to Parliament by Sidik Kertapati a member of a small left-wing farmers' organization. When the PNI Central Committee decided to support the general principles of the Kertapati motion, the Masjumi Party announced that it would withdraw its ministers from the cabinet. Shortly after midnight on June 3, the cabinet voted to surrender its mandate.

The fall of the cautious generally capable Wilopo cabinet at the hand of the PNI is perplexing. Wilopo himself is a high-ranking PNI member, the PNI was officially co-sponsor of the cabinet, and the land distribution program in North Sumatra was originally implemented by PNI Minister of Internal Affairs Iskaq under the Natsir cabinet. It would seem that the PNI had swung in its tracks and attacked its own cabinet.

It is precisely in the riddle of PNI conduct that we see the clearest reflection of the transition Indonesian political life has experienced in the past fifteen months. Two outstanding developments of this period have been the startling recovery of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and the gradual but unmistakable emergence of Islam as a cohesive political force and ideology. In the resulting polarization of political attitudes, the PNI has been drawn sharply to the left. To the great benefit of the Indonesian Communist Party, the process has led to a working alliance between nationalists and communists on several major issues.

It is not yet clear whether the arrangement is a mild political flirtation on the part of the PNI or a more serious affair of the heart. In the North Sumatra land question, the attachment seemed close indeed.

### Planters and Squatters

There could be no finer primer on the political geography of Indonesia than a collection of maps of the Dutch military campaigns in Java and Sumatra during the Revolution. One primary military target was the rich strip of plantation land around Medan on the East Coast of North Sumatra, where foreign planters made fortunes in rubber, palm oil, sisal, and tea in the heyday of colonial rule. The Round Table Conference which gave Indonesia her independence in 1949 also guaranteed the concessions of foreign estates in the new republic. There is little likelihood that independence could have been won at a lesser price.

At the height of the Korean War boom (1950-51), the East Coast was again producing rich profits for foreign estate owners. As the estate companies began to reinvest their huge profits in Africa and South America, it became clear that no single party had a greater interest in the long-term stability of the estate economy than the Indonesian government itself. North Sumatra had become the largest single source of revenue and hard currency for the young Indonesian government. For many anxious officials in Djakarta the revolution was definitely over.

The results of the revolution, however, could not be wished or decreed out of existence. During the Japanese occupation, the government had encouraged land-hungry peasants to occupy and farm the fallow estate lands. Settlers moved into the estates from nearby villages, from the far hills of Tapanuli, and even from the Malay Peninsula. The process was continued during the revolution. By the time of the Round Table Conference, a potentially explosive situation existed. Thousands of acres of rubber trees had been cut, and much of the rich red soil of the tobacco estates near Medan was being plowed for food crops. Thousands of Indonesian farmers were living on land which had to be returned to the foreign planters. The situation called for careful government planning.

Under pressure, foreign planters agreed to return parts of their concessions for distribution to the squatters, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs was able to announce its plan for resettlement in the middle of 1951. Squatters were to receive one hectare of wet rice land or two hectares of dry land, plus a small compensation for the transfer to their new homes. The implementation of the plan was left to tough, single-minded Governor Hakim of the Masjumi Party. Lands were chosen, village sites prepared, and extra funds were obtained from the estate owners to supplement the meagre 300 Rupiah (roughly \$27.) compensation offered by the government. As the economic depression deepened, the migration of settlers began. Then disaster struck.

At Tandjung Morawa, a village near Medan, four farmers were killed by a blast from a police sten gun as they were protesting the forced transfer. The farmers involved--illegal Chinese immigrants from Malaya--had twice refused to move to their new lands. Then one day, tractors and police arrived at Tandjung Morawa to decide the issue. Official claimed that the gun was dropped and accidentally discharged during a

scuffle with the farmers, but the excuse sounded lame.

Newspaper headlines immediately broadcast the tragedy to all corners of Indonesia. For the left-wing and many nationalists, the tractors of Tandjung Morawa became the symbol of the unholy alliance between Indonesian government and foreign imperialists, which communists had been damning for many months. An investigation was demanded in Parliament, and the inevitable motion of no-confidence in the Minister of Internal Affairs (Roem of the Masjumi) was put forward on May 22. The principle of land distribution was opposed only by the extreme left-wing, which favors nationalization of the estates. But government opponents from the right or left could not pass up the opportunity to lash at the Minister of Internal Affairs and Governor Hakim. New reports reached Djakarta of squatters being jailed for refusing to move from the estates, and the fires of protest blazed hotter.

While observers in Djakarta were waiting to hear the attitude of the PNI Central Committee, the problem had already become a political football in North Sumatra, where Mohammad Said, provincial chairman for the PNI, was making violent on his old enemy, Governor Hakim. Rumours circulated that the North Sumatra PNI was threatening withdrawal from the party if the Central Committee adopted a "weak" attitude on the land question. Chairman Said--owner of four cars, a newspaper, and a big dealer in scrap iron--continued his passionate defense of the poor farmers in his newspaper editorials. A typical front page of his newspaper, Waspada, would contain editorialized accounts of the land question, proposals for trade with Red China and Russia, and news of the communist-led movement of protest against the Darul Islam rebels in West Java.

The alliance of nationalists and communists was working smoothly and at high speed in North Sumatra. As elsewhere in Indonesia, cooperation was based on a common fear of the Masjumi Party and a shared antipathy for foreign capital. Obviously, much more than mere political opportunism was drawing the radical wing of the PNI toward the communist camp. The question was now whether the unpredictable PNI Central Committee would follow the radical wing of its party or retreat.

There was no retreat. Toward the end of May, the PNI arrived at the fateful decision and the cabinet fell. Conservative, trouble-burdened Prime Minister Wilopo no longer represented majority opinion in the Central Committee. The PNI of May, 1953 had become, to all appearances, a different organization from the PNI of April, 1952.

### The National Front: A Communist Success

The success of the Indonesian Communist Party during the last year and a half can be traced back directly to an opportune policy of National Front announced in May, 1952. The gist of the new policy was presented on May 26 by young D.N. Aidit, the most promising of Indonesia's new crop of communist leaders:

"There is certainly evidence that the interests of high leaders from many parties are in conflict with interests of their members and lower-ranking functionaries. For example, members of the government parties have participated in treaties and agreements--such as the Round Table Conference,

the Embargo. the San Francisco Treaty, and the MSA agreement--which have harmed the interests of the entire population of Indonesia....

Every communist must therefore strive unceasingly to urge members and lower-ranking functionaries from the Indonesian Socialist Party, the Labor Party, the Proletarian Party, and other parties to form a national united front... or united fronts in factories, villages, and wherever possible ...a national front...among workers, farmers, intellectuals, lovers of culture, women, youth, and so forth."<sup>1</sup>

Without changing or criticizing the program which had resulted in the disastrous communist rebellion at Madiun in 1948, the PKI had now adopted a major change in tactics. During the tenure of the Wilopo cabinet, "front" organizations and committees sprang up and PKI influence grew. The PKI was flourishing by the simple "national front" tactic of giving a clear voice to those claims most likely to attract allies and befuddle the government.

If the success of a national front policy depends on the wisdom of party leaders in choosing timely slogans and claims, the PKI leadership has been exceedingly wise. On several key issues, the party has been as farsighted as it was foolish in 1948 when it revolted and cursed the name of Sukarno.

Foreign Capital: Since the Korean War prosperity vanished, relatively hard times have hit farmers, estate workers, and "national enterprisers". The PKI policy has simply been to present itself as the staunch friend of all three groups and to picture all economic troubles as stemming from the greedy scheming of foreign capitalists and the captive Indonesian government.

In the North Sumatran land conflict, the communists were able to lead the fight against the government through its "front" organizations and by virtue of a well-articulated agrarian program.<sup>2</sup> To urban and agricultural labor, it has shouted its opposition to the forced arbitration of labor disputes, while maintaining a relatively moderate attitude in its own labor organizations. To Indonesian businessmen, it has extended the usual "national front" promises of protection and support; the ludicrous situation arose earlier this year that while important Republicans in Washington were arguing for an extension of the excess profits tax, Indonesian communists were supporting a reduction in corporation taxes here.

Foreign Policy: The essence of Indonesia's "Independent Foreign Policy" is political; the great majority of conscious Indonesians simply do not want to be caught in the political struggle between Russia and America. Indonesia's economy however, is dependent on western capital investment and western markets for her exports (rubber, oil, tin, palm oil, copra). During the tenure of the Wilopo cabinet, increasing numbers of reasonable Indonesians began to think about the possibility of trade with China and Russia. It was argued that Indonesia's foreign policy could not be truly independent unless she traded with both sides. The first step toward such trade must be the opening of embassies in Moscow and Peking, a move heartily supported by nationalist circles.

1. D.N. Aidit, Menempuh Djalan Rakjat, August, 1952, pp 10-14

2. See the magazine Bintang Merah (Red Star), December, 1952.

Darul Islam: The most recent and perhaps most timely of communist slogans have dealt with the Darul Islam rebellion which has been ravaging sections of West Java for several years. The aim of the major rebellious group, led by Kartosuwirjo, is the establishment of a theocratic Islamic State with a pro-American foreign policy. By means of committees to aid Darul Islam victims and organizations to assist the authorities in fighting the rebels, the extreme left-wing has come forward to capitalize on this movement which does so much to embarrass the legal Moslem organizations in Indonesia. To many young nationalists, the communist slogans sound like the epitome of good sense, especially when compared with the frequent Masjumi statements that the Darul Islam problem must be solved by political rather than military means.

The Indonesian Communist Party has thus had the good luck or good sense to choose slogans which have wide appeal outside communist ranks. With increasingly good organization and an improved sense of timing, the party has been able to usurp the role history was to have reserved for the Indonesian Socialist Party of Sutan Sjahrir: the small party with big ideas and great influence.

The North Sumatran land issue was made to order for the PKI. It gave the communists an opportunity to mobilize and utilize sentiments which already existed against the government, foreign economic interests, and the Masjumi Party. It also gave the communists a chance to use their network of farmers' and youth organizations to maximum advantage. It was borne out conclusively in the North Sumatra land question that the PKI succeeds not through chicanery and luck, but through careful study, propaganda, and organization.

It would be nonsense, however, to exaggerate the role of the PKI in the land dispute. It analyzed the situation shrewdly and organized its activities well. But its role has been secondary, comparable to that of an Iago goading the passionate and suspicious PNI on to the actions which precipitated the present crisis.

#### Indonesian Nationalism Must Choose

Indonesian nationalism--as represented in the disjointed, persistent PNI--has obviously arrived at a stage where a choice is indicated between constructive and destructive actions. Its destructive program in the last year seems to have been motivated as much by fear and political opportunism as it has by sincere belief.

I believe the key to the striking change in the PNI attitude during these months has been fear of Islam and the Masjumi Party. Observers agree that a general election under present conditions would result in a clear-cut Masjumi victory. Whether the observers are correct or not, there is reason to believe that PNI leaders share their view. Such a victory would threaten the PNI position in both the civil service and Parliament, a grave threat indeed in view of the large number of PNI officials. Moreover, the possibility of an Islamic State is viewed with distress by modern young nationalists who see Islam as a reactionary and retrogressive force.

To fight the Masjumi, the PNI has been forced to search for allies and find issues which would create popular support for future PNI candidates. The PKI is one ally, but other allies come from the extreme right-wing. By virtue of its superior organization and clear program, the PKI has been able to play a more important role in this loose alliance of frightened parties than its numbers warrant. The PNI is nevertheless the leader.

Because of the great diversity of political opinions that are collected within the PNI under the banner of nationalism, the party is capable of conservatism or radicalism as the political situation demands. Just as the Wilopo wing of the PNI has been gradually overpowered and silenced during the last fifteen months, so the most nationalistic "Javanist" wing (Sidik, Sartono) and the party's radicals (Saleh Umar, Mangunsarkoro) may lose their temporary advantage if a PNI cabinet is formed.

Many PNI enemies hope for a PNI cabinet, with the expectation that the experience of governing will stabilize the PNI Central Committee. This may be wishful thinking, for the PNI is already committed to a number of extreme policies, among them nationalization of Dutch Shell (B.P.M) oil properties in North Sumatra. Even if the responsibility of governing does soften the PNI attitude on specific issues, it cannot remove the Masjumi threat which has driven the PNI to desperation.

The well-tailored figure of President Sukarno hovers behind this scene of maneuvering political parties. It is still the most impressive figure in Indonesian politics, despite the widespread rumours about his political machinations and none-too-spotless private life. The PNI is his party, although he is technically above party politics in his position as President. His speeches against an Islamic State and his tacit approval of the peaceful coups engineered by Colonels Warouw and Sudirman in East Indonesia and East Java at the end of 1952 indicate that Sukarno fears organized Islam more than he does internal disorder. To a great degree, future PNI policy will depend on the wishes and fears of Bung 'Karno.

The fifty-six days of the cabinet crisis have shown how great is the rift between the PNI and the Masjumi. The first effort at cabinet formation undertaken jointly by the PNI and Masjumi failed completely. Subsequent attempts by the two parties proved conclusively that cooperation is out of the question at present.

With the present composition of Parliament, it seems likely that a cabinet will eventually be formed by the PNI without Masjumi participation. Such a cabinet would either swing back to the right and gain the support of moderates or maintain the present working arrangement with the Indonesian Communist Party. Communist cooperation comes at a high price. The responsibilities of the Indonesian nationalists are great indeed at the present time. We shall soon see just how radical they have become.

Sincerely yours,

*Boyd R. Compton*

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