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Indonesian Communism: The Ranks Swell

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Dear Mr. Rogers:

The reports of communist influence on the Ali Sastroamidjojo cabinet have undoubtedly hurt Indonesia's case in the United Nations debates on Western New Guinea (Irian).

Communism is also a major topic of discussion in Djakarta. Just two weeks ago, the leader of a minor political group declared that his party would continue to support the present cabinet because Ali's fall might bring on a communist revolt.

An even stronger reaction to communist influence has come from the radical wing of the Masjumi Party, led by fiery Isa Anshary of Bandung. The Anti-Communist Front which he originated recently may become a potent factor in Indonesian politics.

Beyond the realm of legal political activities, observers can point to anti-communism as a basic driving force in the three extremist Moslem rebellions now raging in West Java, North Sumatra, and Sulawesi. I saw the strength of this sentiment in my conversations with Daud Beureueh before he initiated the Atjehnese rebellion last summer. I heard the same fear expressed by Mohammad Hassan Tiro a few weeks before he set himself up as New York representative of the illegal Darul Islam movement.

Enemies of the communists have good reason to be alarmed. The Indonesian Communist Party has made noteworthy progress since young D. N. Aidit became party leader in early 1951. Communist gains have been so substantial that the party must now be considered a major force in Indonesian political life, despite the limitations imposed by the great strength of the belligerent Masjumi Party and several weaknesses with the Communist Party itself.

Communist gains must be acknowledged, but they should not be exaggerated. Indonesian communists now have the capacity to influence government policy. If the world communist policy of co-existence were to change, the Indonesian communists could precipitate disorder in important areas of the archipelago. But they do not have sufficient strength to dream of seizing complete power and ruling the nation. Ambitious, hopeful, but aware of its limitations, the Indonesian Communist Party has embarked on a program of internal expansion and external alliance which is the subject of my next three letters.

Recovery from Madiun

The recently rejuvenated Indonesian Communist Party looks back on a long history of failure. The first disaster was in 1926, when a poorly coordinated rebellion against the Dutch was easily suppressed. The most recent failure was at Madiun, East Java, in late 1948, when a stronger Communist Party again misjudged its capabilities and revolted against the Republic of Indonesia. The Madiun Rebellion was crushed in a matter of weeks by the Siliwangi Division, which now garrisons West Java.

Six years after Madiun, the Communist Party is again a power in Indonesia. Outsiders wonder why the government has tolerated the resurgence of a party openly devoted to rebellion. The reasons are complex, but worth considering, for a tolerant nationalist attitude has been a basic condition for the communist recovery.

The first reason is a practical one. The Dutch initiated their Second Police Action on the Republic shortly after the Madiun revolt. Many of those communists who had survived the Madiun fighting were given amnesty during the emergency. When full independence came in 1949, there was no practical way to prosecute communists who had gone on from Madiun to fight the Dutch. Furthermore, it was difficult to draw the line between communists who had fought at Madiun and those in other areas who had not.

A second reason for tolerance is the general feeling that Indonesian communists are not basically different from other groups in their intentions, loyalties, or methods. "Revolutionary" has been and still is a highly esteemed adjective. All political groups of consequence want to be considered revolutionary, though the meaning of the word is a little difficult to peg down in present Indonesian circumstances. All major political groups are socialist in program if not in fact. Other groups have planned coup d'etats of one sort or another. The present Minister of Education was involved in such an affair in 1946, as was the current Minister of Defense, Iwa Kusumasumantri. Attempts to change government policy or composition by plot or force are foreign to the Indonesian scene. Many have tried, and many have been forgiven their excess zeal.

A third reason appeals to a different mentality. It is the argument that the communists are politically undesirable, but that they would flourish more underground than in the open. Tolerated, they can be observed and, if necessary, controlled. This argument appeals to optimists who believe quite literally in the theory of democracy.

A final complex of reasons is attractive to optimists of a different sort, who believe that orthodox, materialistic communism cannot spread far in the Indonesian national environment, with its unique combination of Islamic, Hindu-Buddhist, western, and indigenous cultural elements. This seems to be one assumption

underlying the syncretic social philosophy of President Sukarno. In keeping with this line of reasoning is the attitude of the Indonesian Nationalist Party, which seems to consider Moslem extremism a greater danger to Indonesia than communism.

So for one reason or another, the nationalists who now control the Indonesian government have advocated a free political role for the Indonesian Communist Party. Those who hate or fear communism enough to advocate suppression are simply not in a position of power.

Against this backdrop of tolerant attitudes, the Indonesian Communist Party has participated freely in the extraordinarily free struggle for power in Indonesia.

The Party Grows

D. N. Aidit returned to Indonesia in 1950 after more than a year in China and Indo-China. At a crucial National Conference of the Indonesian Communist Party in January, 1951, Aidit and his group wrested control of the politburo from the older group of Tan Ling Djie, Alimin, and Ngadiman, which had dominated the party since the dark days following Madiun.

The growth of the party since Aidit's take-over has apparently been patterned after that of the Chinese Communist Party from 1941 to 1945.

The first major move of the Aidit period was a controlled expansion of party membership, evidently based on a 1951 decision to change the character of the party from an "elite" to a "mass" organization. The formal Central Committee Resolution on "The Expansion of Party Membership" is dated March 8, 1952.

During the first year of the membership drive, the party grew from less than 8,000 members to more than 100,000. By the end of summer, 1953, the figure stood at 170,000. In November, 1954, Aidit claimed that the Indonesian Communist Party could count on "approximately 500,000 members and candidate-members."

The Communist Party expanded not only in size, but also in geographic coverage. In 1951, there were branches only on the important islands of Java and Sumatra. By 1954, there were organized members in all provinces.

There are no apparent grounds for doubting communist membership claims, though an expansion of more than 600% seems incredible, considering the rather stringent conditions for acceptance into the party. It would seem that any and all applicants were accepted as candidate-members, with the expectation that a rigorous training period (six to twenty-four months) would transform the majority

of applicants into militant, disciplined communists of the type described in "Red Star":

"...the man with real communist consciousness is tough and has no pity for the enemies of the Party and the People, but he is also of refined character. His joyful face always shows exhilaration. In his social relations, he is always encouraging and optimistic, certain of the advent of a new world, a happy world."

According to communist statements, the "communist consciousness" of the party was at a low level in 1953, and the organization was being infiltrated by "police spies," "enemies of the People," and "members whose honesty is extremely doubtful."

The communists' own method of class analysis shows that rapid party expansion inevitably encourages heterodoxy and erroneous thinking, for recruits are consciously drawn from all classes:

"Party members must not necessarily originate from the proletariat, though their class consciousness must be consistently proletarian. Members of other classes, after deserting and committing treason against their own class, can become loyal party members. But to achieve this they must go through a longer period of transition and 're-education'."

"The member of petty-bourgeois origin--and this includes most party leaders--is suspect from the beginning because of his class background. He enters the party in a state of error and sin. Any subsequent deviation in his thinking or conduct from the norms established by party leaders--in this case Aidit and his group--is viewed with alarm as a reversion to a bourgeois outlook.

Cries of alarm and suspicion are as much an integral part of communist organizational life as are the confessional or adoration of the leader. During the membership campaign, these cries were loud and frequent. The party answered by launching a concurrent campaign to screen and test all members, old and new. All party members not included in the hierarchy of party committees were lowered to the status of candidate members and obliged to pass through the standard probationary tests for orthodox learning and loyalty. Following this drastic step, the party initiated a full-scale study movement with the aim of exterminating a number of the evils which were said to be seeping into the party.

The study movement initiated in 1952 must continue in the future if the Indonesian Communist Party is to consider itself

orthodox, for the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union or the Chinese Communist Party reveals the "study movement" as an indispensable organizing and disciplining technique in party life. It is significant that only during the Aidit period has the Indonesian Communist Party made a party-wide effort to master this technique, with its paraphernalia of assigned readings in the Russian and Chinese communist classics, regular group discussions, recitation of dogma, examinations, autobiographical confessions of error, criticism and self-criticism sessions, and missionary-like organizational work among the masses.

The study movement forces party members to accept a multitude of dogmas and rules which criticize every possible attitude toward party work: leftism, rightism, and centrism; legalism and adventurism; subjectivism and empiricism; sectarianism and liquidationism. Any act which displeases party leaders can be resoundingly blasted by reference to an appropriate text.

Recently, attention has centered for two months on Lenin's "Left-wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder," in keeping with the moderate co-existence policy now being followed by Communist Parties from Hungary to Indonesia. Yet concurrently, Indonesian communists have been studying Aidit's report on "Tan Ling Djie-ism," a right-wing error. Once the disciplined party member understands and accepts these texts, he finds himself bracketed by standards of conduct which put him at the mercy of those higher-ups who interpret the dogma.

Since Aidit's rise in 1951, the party has undergone two periods of intensive study. The first was in 1953, immediately following the 1952 campaign to expand party membership. By the summer of 1953, party study groups were reported to be working diligently on the following works:

Stalin	The National Question
Stalin	Dielectical and Historical Materialism
Marx, Engels	Communist Manifesto
....	Introduction to Marxist Political- Economy
Mao Tse-tung	New Democracy
Mao Tse-tung	People's Democratic Dictatorship
Liu Shao-chi	The Mass Line
Liu Shao-chi	Nationalism and Internationalism
Kian Ling	Thought, Work, Criticism and Self- Criticism
....	On Theory
....	The Nature of the Party
Aidit	The People's Road
Aidit	Duties of the United Labor Front
Musso	The New Road
....	Constitution of the Indonesian Commun- ist Party
....	Origin and Development of the Indonesian Communist Party

.... Agrarian Policy of the Indonesian
Communist Party

The second phase of the membership campaign seems to have begun with the plenary session of the Central Committee in October, 1953, and had brought party membership to 500,000 by October, 1954. During this period of expansion, the organizational machinery set up for the first study movement continued to train candidate members in the elementary classics cited above, while more advanced members went on to other assignments. A visit to any communist bookstore will show that most of the advanced study assignments are in works by Chinese authors, especially Mao Tse-tung, whose Compiled Works (in Indonesian) have been arriving from Peking in great quantity.

Another facet of the current study movement is the attack on the rightist deviation of Tan Ling Djie. Tan was deposed from the Central Committee for advocating two specific policies opposed by the Aidit group: (1) the establishment of a separate People's Democracy in Western New Guinea before a communist victory in Indonesia, and (2) the re-establishment of a friendly Socialist Party as an alternative to the expansion of the Communist Party itself. Aidit won out over Tan Ling Djie in 1951, but it was nearly two years before the new leadership attacked Tan's errors publicly. Aidit's booklet on "Tan Ling Djie-ism" is now required reading for party members. The Indonesian Communist Party now has an "ism" of its own to study, suspect, and condemn in unison. The attack on Tan Ling Djie-ism promises to become as useful an organizational device for Indonesian communists as Trotskyism has been for the Russians or Chen Tu-hsiu-ism for the Chinese.

The communist leaders take their own study movements very seriously, and they should be taken seriously by outsiders. The aim of the recent movements in the Indonesian Communist Party has been the "bolshevization" of the party, which indicates that state of organizational grace in which a sufficiently large party can depend on the discipline and training of its members. A "bolshevized" party is ready to seize power when the time seems ripe. The Communist Party's own view of its degree of "bolshevization" is therefore of more than passing interest to those who wish to know something about the party's capabilities and approximate time-table for revolutionary action.

The expansion of the Indonesian Communist Party has now come to a halt, and Aidit has said, "We are now forced to carry on with the strength we already possess." The great majority of the members taken in during the last year are said to be workers and farmers, who must pass through a six month period of training and study before they become regular members. A minimal level of "bolshevization" should therefore be achieved by May 1 of next year. Barring unforeseen events, the Indonesian Communist Party will then consider itself

in a position to make its first serious bid for power since Madiun. After that time, party policy will depend on a multitude of factors, particularly the line of international policy as determined in Moscow and Peking. The Indonesian Communist Party itself, however, will have completed the momentous 1952-1955 period of expansion and preparation.

Despite its tremendous increase in membership, the Indonesian Communist Party has maintained a reputation as the most tightly disciplined and organized political group in Indonesia. Even the most bitter enemies of the Communists--the Sjahrir socialists and the Masjumi Party Moslems--freely admit the great skill of the communists in organizing inner party life and exerting political influence on outside groups.

Communist Front Organizations

Indonesians, like almost everyone else, like to call their organizations by their initials. The three important front organizations for the communists are,

in labor	SOBSI	All-Indonesian Central of Labor Organizations
in agriculture	BTI	Indonesian Peasant Rank
in military matters	PERBEPSI	All-Indonesian Veterans Association

The communist family of front organizations is something like the 'three bears' in size and temperament---SOBSI, big and militant, the BTI, medium-sized and quite adjustable, and PERBEPSI, a fledgling with great expectations.

SOBSI is by far the largest Indonesian labor federation. Its top leadership is communist, its second-echelon leaders are communist or communist-dominated, and its rank and file are generally communist-directed.

SOBSI currently claims 2,500,000 members, an obvious exaggeration. In 1952, Harry Goldberg, an American labor expert with good sources of information, estimated that SOBSI's then claim of 1,500,000 members was an exaggeration of about 80%. What the ratio is now is a matter of speculation.

Through SOBSI, the Indonesian Communist Party is able to exert influence on the most strategic sectors of Indonesia's economy. The largest SOBSI union, SARBUPRI, dominates the labor scene in the great rubber area of North Sumatra and has branches on plantations in all parts of Java. BERPUM, a SOBSI member, has control of more than half of the labor force in the important Sumatran oil fields. Plantations and oil account for more than 50% of the total value of Indonesian exports. In the same strategic export sector of the economy, SOBSI unions are power-

ful among harbor and railroad workers.

It appears, on paper at least, that a coordinated strike by SOBSI could quickly bring the country to the verge of bankruptcy.

The degree of danger, however, depends on the type of control SOBSI's central leadership exerts over its affiliates and branches. At times in the past, central control has been far from complete, especially on purely political issues.

At the time of the Madiun Rebellion (1948), many SOBSI branches declared their allegiance to the central government. In 1951, when the Sukiman government carried out large-scale arrests of communist politicians and labor organizers, most of SOBSI's branches reacted passively. It was apparent that communist political control had not been rooted deeply enough. The Indonesian Communist Party itself decried the lack of organized support by the "masses": "It is clear that the People did not take sufficiently strong steps to oppose the action of the Sukiman-Wibisono government and to defend the Indonesian Communist Party."

The 1951 crack-down was undoubtedly a jarring blow for the Indonesian Communist Party, especially in its labor activities. Immediately after the excitement of the arrests had died down, the party began its program of rapid expansion. A major aim of the expansion program seems to have been to bring a greater number of SOBSI's lower-level activists under party discipline.

Non-SOBSI labor leaders have told me that SOBSI's numerical strength is now decreasing. The Islamic Federation of Labor Unions, a bitter SOBSI foe, claims that a good share of its membership of nearly 200,000 was originally affiliated with SOBSI. In East Java, several SOBSI sub-branches have gone over en masse to opposition labor organizations. And in Tandjung Priok, the important port of Djakarta, it is claimed that SOBSI's power has been decisively decreased.

My own reaction is to discount the stories of SOBSI's decreasing power. Rival unions have undoubtedly succeeded in paring off several important SOBSI affiliates, and this fact speaks well for the increasing political skill of SOBSI's opponents. But the Indonesian Communist Party can afford to lose a small portion of SOBSI's membership, if at the same time it increases its organizational control over the bulk of the federation. The 1952-54 program of expansion, education, and training in the party has been initiated with precisely that aim.

If the government were to lower the boom again on SOBSI--an inconceivable thing under the present cabinet--it would have to ferret out and arrest thousands of communists instead of the hundreds who were apprehended by the Sukiman government in 1951.

In agrarian organization, the Indonesian Communist Party has made fair progress, but party leaders are not yet satisfied with their gains. Last March, Aidit said,

"A serious weakness of the Party at the present time is the lack of true understanding among party members and cadres concerning agrarian relations and the claims and living conditions of the peasants. Because of this, the Party has not yet been able to attract appreciable numbers of peasants into the National Front and few peasants have become party members."

More recently, Aidit has spoken of the party's rapid progress in rural areas. Early this month, he claimed that between four and five million peasants have been "organized" by the party. This is truly a fantastic figure, even if we divide it by eight or nine to account for the families of pro-communist farmers. I have no means of verifying the claim, except the opinion of several observers that the communists claim to have "organized" an entire village if theirs is the only peasant organization present.

The communist vehicle in rural organization, the BTI, has been stymied by the lack of an important and clear-cut issue. Poverty is general in the Indonesian countryside, and disease is rampant. But food is generally sufficient for village needs, as they are defined by tradition, and landlordism is not a problem of consequence. The very real and pressing problems of overpopulation and larcenous rural interest rates cannot be exploited by the communists. The first because orthodox communism does not sponsor birth-control. The second because Indonesian communism does not at present attack the money-lending Chinese business class as a group. Money-lenders in general are damned, but the implication of communist writings on the subject is that the important rural money-lenders are Moslem leaders.

Communist organizing work has gone on nonetheless, with a patchwork of slogans directed against landlords, government land taxes, and foreign plantations.

In many villages, the communists have taken advantage of the traditional feud between the strongly Moslem group and the nominal Moslems, offering to the latter an identity and an organization. In such villages, the organizational line between Green (Moslem) and Red may have nothing at all to do with the economic position of the antagonistic groups. The development of such a situation is most likely in areas of East and Central Java which have been only partially Moslemized.

Communism faces much greater obstacles among the strongly Moslem peasantry which is found along the northern coast of East and Central Java, throughout most of West Java, in almost all areas of Sumatra, and in the populated southern portion of Sulawesi.

The communists have spent a great deal of time and money, both of which they seem to have in abundance, to exploit two useful issues in West Java and North Sumatra.

In the mountainous region surrounding Bandung in West Java, the communists have worked carefully and resourcefully to establish themselves as the champions of the peasantry against the depredations of the Darul Islam rebels. I attended a mass meeting in Bogor not long ago at which the Communist Party doled out clothes and rice to peasants who had been robbed or burned out by the fanatic Moslem insurgents. To such peasants, the party leaders carefully explain that the party is not in the least anti-Islam. To cinch the argument a pamphlet is distributed which shows that all good Moslems and Communists have the same aim, "World Peace." The pamphlet, written by a Moslem religious leader, is probably a less effective weapon in winning over the illiterate peasants than the sorely needed food and clothing. The Communist Party has gained considerable publicity and many friends through the movement against Darul Islam, an apparent verification of the opinion held by Moslem moderates such as Mohammad Natsir that extremist measures by Moslem groups only play into communist hands.

In North Sumatra, the communists have found an even more useful issue in the complicated land squabble between Indonesian squatters and the managers of foreign plantations.

In 1949, the Indonesian government guaranteed that all foreign land concessions would remain intact. In keeping with this promise, the government began to clear large sections of North Sumatran tobacco land of the settlers who had streamed in and set up farms during the disturbed days of the Japanese occupation and the revolution. The squatters were to be moved to reasonably adequate plots of land outside the concession areas. As might have been expected, many of the squatters offered vigorous resistance. The issue was made to order for the Indonesian Communist Party.

Communists were joined by non-communists in protesting what seemed to be an alliance between the Indonesian government and foreign capitalists. A communist-guided joint secretariat of farmers organizations was set up to articulate the squatters' resentment. Demonstrations were organized in Medan, manifestoes were issued, and the story moved onto the front pages of newspapers throughout Indonesia. Within a few months, the Wilopo cabinet fell on the issue of agrarian policy in North Sumatra. When the smoke had cleared, the communists had succeeded in building the basis of single strong peasant association in the Medan area through the fusion of most of the smaller peasant groups involved.

Communist opponents who wish to worry about the North Sumatran land dispute should begin by worrying about two uncomfortable facts: (1) Government policy was carried out in a heavy-handed manner. (2) In the beginning stages of the dispute, only the communists fought vigorously to support the squatters involved.

The communist gains in North Sumatra at that time were not so much the result of machination and slippery technique as they were the product of timely and effective policy.

Communist work among conservative peasants has been greatly accelerated since the party scrapped the plank in its agrarian policy calling for the confiscation and collectivization of land. In recent writings, party leaders have called for the confiscation of land of two sorts: (1) that owned by the wealthiest Indonesian landlords, and (2) foreign-held plantation land not in cultivation. The land confiscated is then to be divided among farmer laborers and poor peasants. Collectivization is maintained as the long-term goal, but the peasants only hear the current slogan, "land to the tillers."

Indonesian communists can be pleased with their support in organized labor. They can be fairly optimistic about their chances in rural organization. Yet they still lack the one weapon possessed by all successful communist movements: a Red Army.

The potential nucleus of a Red Army in Indonesia is called PERBEPSI, a semi-military association organized and led by Indonesian Communist Party members. The history of PERBEPSI--and it is not yet a success story--is mysteriously intertwined with that of the present Minister of Defence, Iwa Kusumasumantri.

PERBEPSI emerged in 1953 as an ordinary veterans organization, exceptional only in that it was clearly sponsored by the Communist Party. The budding organization gained prominence when it offered to supply men to fight the Darul Islam rebels, providing the government would supply arms. The offer surprised no one familiar with the communist policy of that period which spared no effort to publicize the danger of the Darul Islam rebellion.

The first real surprise connected with PERBEPSI's rise came in the fall of 1953, when the newly appointed Minister of Defence, Iwa Kusumasumantri, proposed that the government arm private organizations interested in suppressing the Darul Islam insurgents. PERBEPSI's chances looked very bright until the cabinet authoritatively denied that arms would be given to private organizations for any purpose. Iwa was silenced.

PERBEPSI continued to organize and expand through the first part of 1954. In late spring, talk began to circulate in Djakarta that armed militia would be needed to police the coming election. The source of the suggestion later proved to be PERBEPSI's leadership. Verification came quickly when plans for a People's Security Congress were announced through a committee dominated by PERBEPSI and like-minded "progressives." Minister of Defence Iwa was listed as an advisor to the congress.

Once again the cabinet blocked PERBEPSI, this time through

the efforts of the conservative Moslem party, Nahdatul Ulama, which unambiguously opposed the idea of a People's Security Congress. The government publically proclaimed its ability to cope with election security problems without the aid of militia. Talk of a People's Security Congress died down.

Two defeats have not lessened PERBEPSI's energy or purpose. The organization now claims to have 200,000 members. Their militancy can be attested by a casual Sunday morning stroll through Djakarta, which will reveal PERBEPSI formations marching and drilling to the beat of drums.

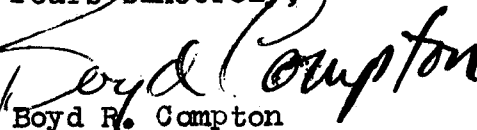
An important reaction to PERBEPSI's growth has been the reactivation of the Moslem guerilla bands (hizbullah) which fought during the revolution. Slowly but steadily these bands have been reformed during the past eighteen months in the form of Moslem veterans' organizations. In the near future, they will be united into a single Moslem veterans' association for all of Indonesia.

The formation of semi-military organizations by Moslem and communist groups is the most ominous aspect of the development toward extremism in Indonesian politics.

A communist victory in Indonesia is neither inevitable nor probable. We can say that the Indonesian Communist Party and its militant front organizations have experienced a period of steady growth since 1951. They have benefited from increasingly capable and orthodox leadership in a situation that has encouraged the growth of extremism. The trend could be altered by a marked improvement in economic conditions or by a change in heart of those radical nationalists who have given the communists support and encouragement.

In my next letter, I want to discuss the National Front policy which Indonesian communists have executed with such skill and effect among nationalistic groups.

Yours sincerely,


Boyd R. Compton