

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

Hotel Simpang  
Surabaja, East Java  
Indonesia  
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New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The Simpang Hotel--my headquarters this week--is in the middle of Surabaja. Directly north of the business district and on toward the noisy harbor is a section of kampongs (village-like city settlements) which are said to be strongly communist. To the west and south, a much larger section is solidly behind the Masjumi Party. On the eastern side of town are the larger Dutch-style houses of the high government officials, so many of whom have joined the Indonesian Nationalist Party in recent months.

Like all of Indonesia, Surabaja is witnessing the troubling, exhilarating growth of not just one or two, but many political forces. Neither Surabaja nor Indonesia are "going communist." Nor are they likely to "go" Masjumi or Nationalist. All the major political parties are growing in size and voice.

It is probably more true than ever that Indonesia's complex political structure cannot be explained by a formula or a set of rigid assumptions. Yet the assumption that Indonesia must inevitably become communist has wide circulation these days, both here and abroad.

The view is of course cherished by Indonesian communists who have found a way to rationalize their hopes. Oddly enough, it is also held by many Americans and Dutchmen I have met in Java who seem driven to simplify their despair.

In this letter, I want to argue that Indonesia has not stumbled to the edge of the communist precipice. The communist party here has made important gains, but it must still travel a long and hazardous road before it can dream of ruling. If we exaggerate its current strength, we lose our chance to evaluate its real potential.

My last letter described the size and general character of the Indonesian Communist Party. Under competent leadership, it has grown from an ineffective group of less than 10,000 to become a purposeful, well-heeled party of half a million. The party's successes and failures in utilizing this strength can be seen in the workings of the National Front policy, which has brought it into nebulous alliance with non-communist groups.

The Indonesian Communist Party, or PKI as it is generally known, is an orthodox and informed communist party; its National Front policy is clearly an aspect of world communist policy. The tactics and aims of "Co-existence," as propounded by Chou En-lai, are generally those of the National Front.

Fortunately for the PKI, the demands of orthodoxy are well suited to the current Indonesian political situation. Since May, 1952, when party leader Aidit first described the new policy in full, Indonesian communists have been able to enjoy the happy coincidence of their interests as a power group and those of Moscow-Peking foreign policy. They can now try to forget the disastrous events of 1948, when an ill-considered Moscow policy brought open rebellion against the nationalist groups which the party is now courting.

Like the Popular Front of pre-war France, the National Front in Indonesia is based on a recognition of weakness. In France, the threat was Nazism, and the field for communist activity was a demoralized group of liberal and socialist parties. In Indonesia, the threat is Islam and a probable Masjumi victory in the coming election.\* The field for communist activity is provided by the myriad nationalist, socialist, religious and regional political groups which fear the Masjumi and hope to gain or retain a foothold in government.

It was apparent from the first days of the National Front that the communists would have no trouble finding friends and allies. Following Aidit's statement came a period of reciprocal rapprochement and flirting. The initiative was by no means limited to the PKI. Now the result can be seen in the unusual alliance of extreme left and right which supports the Ali Sastroamidjojo (Indonesian Nationalist Party) cabinet. Each group in this strange circle evidently thinks that it is using the others:

- (1) Indonesian Nationalist Party. A top-heavy party of officials, revolutionaries, and "national" enterprisers. Controls the present cabinet. Program: a hazy "national-socialism." Inspired and possibly directed by President Sukarno, who is not a member. Without Sukarno's open backing, the party may attract less than twenty per cent of the total election vote.
- (2) Nahdatul Ulama. Conservative minor Muslim party. By supporting the Ali cabinet, the NU has won three cabinet seats, control of the Ministry of Religion, and an opportunity to spread its influence

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\*The Masjumi party now stands in opposition, together with the Indonesian Socialist Party (Sjahrir), the Democratic Faction, the Indonesian Protestant Party, the Indonesian Catholic Party, the larger segment of the Greater Indonesian Union and several smaller groups.

Strongly anti-communist, the NU has rationalized its cooperation with Marxism by quoting precedents in Muslim law which allow cooperation with "unbelievers" who are not openly at war with Islam.

- (3) Indonesian Federated Islamic Party (PSII). A small Muslim party with radical pretensions. Though less ardently anti-communist than the NU, the PSII cannot be considered pro-communist in any way. It has two cabinet seats.
- (4) Perti. A tiny Sumatran Muslim group. Perti displays the "progressive" attitude towards communism which has almost disappeared in Indonesian Muslim circles. One cabinet seat.
- (5) National People's Party (PRN). A splinter from the Indonesian Nationalist Party. With negligible mass support, it has one cabinet seat.
- (6) Greater Indonesian Union. Conservative, aristocratic party, which may attract some mass support through the prestige of its members. After the recent party split, the larger section withdrew its cabinet support. The remnant retains one cabinet seat.
- (7) Labor Party. Small semi-Marxist group with little labor support. One cabinet seat.
- (8) Progressive Faction. Marxist radicals, the most prominent being Minister of Defence Iwa Kusumasumantri.

The Indonesian Communist Party is not represented in the cabinet, but it must be considered a charter member of the government alliance. The communists cooperated closely with the Indonesian Nationalist Party in 1953 to bring down the Wilopo cabinet; their support has been nearly indispensable to the cabinet of Ali Sastroamidjojo, and communist opposition could quickly bring about Ali's fall.

Yet it is surprising how little the communists have gained in return for their support.

The communists occupy no cabinet seats. They have won no influence in the bureaucracy, outside of the Ministry of Labor. They have failed to gain a foothold in the army or powerful State Police. They have found no means of obtaining arms for their own organizations. They have not determined cabinet policy on any important issue. And they have supported the Ali cabinet unquestioningly, even at the risk of sacrificing their own

radicalism in every field but foreign affairs. It would seem that communist support has been bought cheaply.

Two examples illustrate the mildness and flexibility of communist policy during the National Front period:

The first concerns Public Law 16 (1951), a government regulation which provides for the compulsory arbitration of labor disputes. The PKI has opposed Public Law 16 from the start, yet when the Ali cabinet came into office the party became politely silent. Only when the cabinet itself was ready to announce a mild revision of the law did the PKI renew its attack. Although the cabinet plan for a new labor law still provides for compulsory arbitration, there is no evidence that the PKI will dare to oppose it. Meanwhile the anti-communist Indonesian Socialist Party has made a strong play for increased labor support by loudly condemning both Public Law 16 and the proposed revision. The socialists and their allied unions may continue to cut into communist labor support as long as the PKI is bound to support the cabinet openly or tacitly on every issue.

Another glimpse of the PKI as the staunch, sensible friend of the government was seen recently in the dispute about communist election signs. Each party has been obliged to submit an election emblem and an official party title to be used on the election ballot. The communists offered a black hammer and sickle as the emblem and "Indonesian Communist Party and Non-Party Men" as the title.

Several political groups objected heatedly to the implication of "non-party men" in the title, among them the government party, Nahdatul Ulama. Before the dispute had been settled, tens of thousands of communist signs had appeared throughout Indonesia bearing the hammer and sickle and the ambiguous words. A motion was finally submitted in Parliament to force a decision from the Indonesian Election Committee on the matter. Before the motion reached the floor, a three way conference was held by the Indonesian Communist Party, the Nahdatul Ulama, and the Indonesian Election Committee. The communists, who had protested righteously up to this time, backed down quietly and agreed to the deletion of the words.

But only a part of the dispute seemed settled, for the PKI maintained its right to keep the troublesome phrase on its election posters. Last week, the Indonesian Election Committee ordered the words removed from all signs, posters, and advertisements. Without a real protest, the communists bowed again.

The attitude of the Nahdatul Ulama is as interesting as that of the communists. The party leadership has experienced no little difficulty in keeping the lower echelons--and a few obstreperous high leaders--in line on the issue of cooperation with the communists, and it is generally known that a large segment of the party favors outlawing communism altogether in Indonesia. But the fruits of cooperation have been sweet, and the party's

Managing Committee has been able to keep the needed measure of control. With the victory over the communists on the "non-party" issue, the case for cooperation seems stronger than ever. It can be claimed that a firm and friendly attitude is sufficient to keep the PKI in its place. The becoming mildness of communist policy seems to support the opinion. Party leaders can add, with equal reasonableness, that the Nahdatul Ulama can check communism more effectively by remaining in a communist-supported cabinet than by going into opposition.

Indeed, concrete communist gains have been so minor that the government parties hardly need to rationalize their policy of cooperation. A fairly convincing argument can be made that the government parties have been the winners in the National Front and the communists the losers.

A counter-argument is also persuasive. Assuming that the PKI does not currently have the strength to win great influence in the organs of government--and this is obviously the case--it is reasonable to ask about the real nature of communist expectations during this period. Among their obvious goals, I think three are extremely important:

(a) Split the opposition. Indonesia's first cabinets (Sukiman, Natsir, Wilopo) were coalitions between the Masjumi and the Indonesian Nationalist Party. None were in any way friendly to the PKI. For obvious reasons, it is to the advantage of the Indonesian Nationalist Party to control a cabinet of its own before, and if possible during, the General Election. With communist assistance this has been accomplished. It now seems that a return to cooperation between the former partners is out of the question. Nationalist leaders are now accusing the Masjumi-led opposition of being "anti-national" and in the pay of foreign powers. The wider the split between the "big two," the better the chances for civil disorder which might nourish the PKI.

(b) Expand the Indonesian Communist Party. The present cabinet is in no sense dominated by the PKI, but it has given it a free hand in organization and propaganda. The success of the expansion program is seen not only in increased membership, but in the size of its mass meetings. Only the Masjumi and the PKI have been consistently successful in drawing crowds of more than 10,000. Although the PKI now seems to be little more than a retainer in the Indonesian Nationalist Party court, it may now possess a broader and more efficient organization than its more respectable ally.

(c) Improve the party's reputation. It has not been easy to live down the memory of the 1948 Madiun Rebellion. No matter how desperately the communists try to explain away their revolt as a "Masjumi provocation," suspicion remains.

It is therefore something of triumph for communist public

relations that Indonesian Nationalist Party leaders now speak openly of their cooperation with the communists. A Nahdatul Ulama leader said recently that he saw no evidence that the PKI was an "enemy of the state." If we are to believe the statements of government politicians, bygones are now bygones and the PKI has become proper once more.

Public acceptance does not mean that suspicion of the communists has vanished entirely. For political reasons, it has been buried. Cabinet supporters speak privately of their low regard for communism, but it is nearly impossible for them to admit it publicly. It is also of some importance that the PKI has recently cried out against the infiltration of police spies into its branches.

In matters of public relations, the PKI is in a position to practice a kind of ideological blackmail. Indirectly, it serves as a kind of conscience for groups such as the Indonesian Nationalist Party, which hold tightly onto their radical socialist platforms while they make the exciting, disturbing transition to positions of power and wealth. It would seem that the newly rich can sleep more easily if they consort with Marxists.

In weighing the gains and losses of the National Front period, it becomes obvious that the PKI is banking on success in the General Election. It is also clear that the communists expect to poll a maximum vote solely on the strength of mass support and not through control of government office or funds. If there is not a military coup d'etat or a great extension of Muslim rebellion before election time, communist chances for increased representation in parliament seem excellent. The most reliable observers place their expected vote at somewhere between ten and fifteen per cent.

#### National Front Committees

The testing ground for the communist National Front policy has been a system of National Front committees established under various names in Indonesian cities. In these committees, the PKI has had an unequalled opportunity to influence, guide and even infiltrate its allies. Here too, the basic friction between the communists and their ambitious friends has been seen most clearly.

The form and function of the committees is similar from city to city.

In one large city in Java, the committee is called the Contact Body of National Organizations. Its membership consists of the government parties, plus the PKI and several communist front organizations. The leader and spokesman for the Contact Body is a communist. Under his leadership, the organization has attempted to carry on several functions, among whom the mobilization of public sentiment in favor of the Ali cabinet

and the coordination of the election campaigns of its members. The informal agreement seems to be that member groups will not oppose one another in order that the Masjumi and Indonesian Socialist Party receive a minimum vote.

The Contact Body in this city has been a failure. According to one young Indonesian Nationalist Party official, the communists have been too blatant in their attempts to use and control the organization. As a result the Indonesian Nationalist Party has participated only in a limited number of its activities. There is now a strong rumor that the party may pull out altogether. Another official--a non-party man--assured me that local Indonesian Nationalist Party functionaries were generally anti-communist and saw little profit in working together with the PKI, no matter what the political justifications.

In Surabaya, the story has been similar. A joint committee was established to promote the common political interests of the government parties and the PKI. As in other cities, participation was forced on local party chiefs by their Djakarta headquarters. The committee was soon snowed under by the disputes among its members and disappeared.

There is still informal cooperation among the "National Front" organizations of Surabaya, but only on rare issues. This morning, I saw a manifesto signed by all the government parties, plus the PKI, condemning the Dutch position on West Irian (Western New Guinea) and demanding that an All-Indonesian Congress be held before the election to mobilize public sentiment in favor of a rupture of Indonesian-Dutch relations. The parties signed the manifesto individually; no mention was made of a cooperative committee or secretariat.

A solid National Front has therefore failed to materialize in Indonesia, partly because of the antagonism among the parties supporting the government and partly for the lack of a positive common interest. So far, the substance of the National Front has been flimsy: manifestoes, joint statements, and a few mass meetings.

There is a chance that the proposed All-Indonesian Congress will provide the PKI with a more useful field of activity. The idea of a people's congress was first announced by President Sukarno after the failure of Indonesia's Irian case in the United Nation's General Assembly. The Ali Sastroamidjojo cabinet--oversensitive on matters of face and international reputation--was badly hurt by the adverse vote. President Sukarno, the great champion of "Irian for Indonesia," was no less shaken. What is more, his call for a congress to unify and mobilize national opinion on the Irian issue has come at a time when his hold on public favor is weakening. For him, for the Indonesian Nationalist Party, and for the government alliance, and All-Indonesian Congress might provide an opportunity to regain the political

self-confidence so noticeably lacking in the recent conduct of government. If the opposition parties boycott the congress, it would have added value as an election maneuver.

At the present time, the aims and organization of the All-Indonesian Congress are ambiguous, and the PKI can hope for an emotion-charged but uncertain atmosphere during the congress sessions. It can also hope that the composition of the congress will be more favorably disposed toward its radical nationalist slogans than the present provisional parliament, for the Congress Planning Committee is dominated by radical elements from the government parties. There is no certainty, however, that the PKI will wrest any great advantage from its unpredictable allies at the congress. At every juncture, the PKI must face the fact that it does not have a monopoly on radicalism, anti-foreignism, and ambition in Indonesian politics.

#### What is Communist and What is Not?

Some of the confusion in foreign circles regarding the extent of communist influence in Indonesia comes from a failure to see that nationalism can be a very radical and disturbing force, even among non-communists.

I know many Indonesians who think of America as an "imperialist power," who believe that our prosperity depends on war production, and who condemn Chiang Kai-shek as an American puppet. Yet these Indonesians are not communists, nor are they communist-influenced.

To label all radical nationalism as communism is to eliminate any chance of understanding its nature. To consider all radical Indonesian Nationalists as easy prey for a Communist Party is foolishness in view of their success so far in limiting communism's gains; to condemn some of them for trying to use the Indonesian Communist Party politically is to assume a political morality which few leaders in a party democracy can maintain.

Take as an example the following editorial concerning the case of Tjong Hun-nji, a Kuomintang supporter who was recently deported from Indonesia for alleged political activities harmful to the state. The editor condemns a parliamentary motion by Tan Po Goan demanding that the case be investigated further:

We regard Tan Po Goan's motion as anti-national, for in advancing this motion, Mr. Po Goan is trying to defend his client, a citizen of the Kuomintang (the "South Moluccan Republic" of the Chinese Peoples Republic)\* who has carried on

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\*One of Indonesia's minor rebellions. The South Moluccan Republic was established in Ceram by separatists with apparent Dutch sympathies.



political activities which have done great harm to our nation.

Certainly, we should be juridical-minded in observing various problems and issues, but we must use 100% political thinking in deciding who is our friend and who is our enemy...

Juridical thinking (which we inherited from the Dutch, in some instances blindly) often delays our struggle, yes, and it often stands in conflict with our political ideals...

Are we going to allow the establishment of a Kuomintang group in our country which is in clear opposition to our good neighbor, the Chinese People's Republic, when we ourselves would not allow a country friendly to us to harbor and protect elements of the South Moluccan Republic or Westerling?

Such an editorial will disturb almost any westerner. Yet despite his good will toward the Peking government, the editorialist is not a communist. He is an ardent government supporter, deeply involved in the Tjong case because of his paper's ties with the present Minister of Justice. His party cooperates with the PKI in the nebulous National Front which I have described above, and it naturally supports the government in recognizing Peking and ignoring Taiwan. The paper can be accused of radicalism, emotionalism, or even prevarication, but not of communism. The communists themselves understand this fact very well, and they warn their followers repeatedly not to tie themselves too closely with the so-called "national bourgeoisie," for members of this group are said to have the "petit-bourgeois" capacity for erratic, emotional, unpredictable behavior.

Similarly, it is foolish to argue that the Ali cabinet's bid for friendship and trade with Peking is communist-inspired, or that its unfriendly attitude toward foreign business is due to communist pressure. The similarities between communist and nationalist thinking can be measured by these issues, but the mutual inter-influence of communist and nationalist political groups cannot.

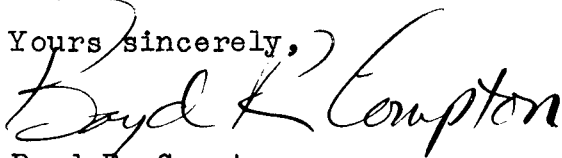
The existence of radical nationalism in Indonesian political parties is more of an obstacle than an advantage to the Indonesian Communist Party. It provides a basis for joint statements and manifestoes, but it does not eliminate the conflicting power interests of the groups involved. The stunted development of the National Front in Indonesia, and the atrophy of its committees, seems to highlight the differences among the groups rather than their points of agreement. It is of

some importance that Indonesians can vent radical views without flying into the arms of Aidit, Mao, and (at the present writing) Malenkov.

My argument in this letter has been that Indonesia is not tumbling headlong into communism. I have also tried to show that the parties now loosely allied with the communists have gained at least as much from the alliance, and perhaps more, than the communists themselves.

This does not mean that the Indonesian Communist Party has not risen from a position of great weakness to one of moderate strength in the last three years. Its organizational growth is an almost certain indication that its representation in parliament will be greater after the election than it is now. Unforeseen events in the coming year may throw even greater strength its way. But until Indonesian communists gain some measure of control over the immediate means of power in Indonesia--arms, influence in the bureaucracy and police, access to government funds--it cannot be considered a threat to the security and independence of the state.

During the ~~three~~ year National Front period, the Indonesian Communist Party has won acceptance and found the means to expand. It does not, however, have the means to power.

< Yours sincerely, >  
  
Boyd R. Compton

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