

BRC--30
Dr. Halim's Open Letter

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

Modjokerto, East Java
Indonesia
June 30, 1955

Mr. W. S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

For many weeks, I have been wanting to write a letter on the general deterioration of economic and political conditions in Indonesia. I have resisted the temptation because I do not have the complete factual information to say that corruption has become general, economic conditions have definitely become catastrophic, or that political ruptures are beyond healing. Hidden and unexpected strengths may continue to give Indonesia a margin of survival during a formative period which has to be somewhat chaotic. I'll say frankly that I hope this to be the case, though I try to keep this prejudicial feeling apart from my observations.

This letter, however, is not based on my own observations, but on those of a respected and influential Indonesian, Dr. A. Halim, former Prime Minister of the Republic of Indonesia. I am reprinting the body of his open letter to President Sukarno because of my feeling that, as important as they are, the objective facts of corruption, economic dislocation, or political disunity are less important than the attitudes of Indonesians towards them.

Dr. Halim's views are very close to those held by the parties opposed to the Ali Sastroamidjojo cabinet. His prestige and lack of political ambition, however, ensure him of a wide audience in government circles.

May 27, 1955

TO PAPA PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA, DR. ENGINEER SUKARNO:
MERDEKA!. (Freedom!)

Because our relations during these past three or four years have been limited to one or two meetings a year..., I feel obliged to adopt this form of an "open letter" to request your attention to the current situation, which I believe to be not only extraordinarily complex but on the verge of becoming explosive.

Perhaps you already know of the things I am going to mention here or have had them brought to your attention. Still, I feel it necessary to refer to them again because I have observed no steps being taken to improve the situation. On the contrary, the terrible conditions prevailing in our country are daily becoming worse.

(1) Daily life of the common people.

In general, the wages of state officials are only sufficient for subsistence for two weeks or, at the most, twenty days. Several consequences of the imbalance between wages and the cost of daily living have already made themselves apparent. The capacity for work has decreased, and officials and workers who have been unwilling to watch their families go hungry have naturally looked for sources of livelihood outside their jobs, though very few of them actually succeed in raising their income.

The majority fail in their efforts and eventually fall into the chasm of dishonor and start to indulge in minor corruption.

A great number also receive assistance from their families or from generous friends, so that they are able to pull through.

Brother Karno, I have been for many years the director of the largest hospital in Indonesia, which employs approximately 1800 officials. I know their suffering. There has been a clear and general trend among them toward petty theft--once or twice a week--to increase their incomes.

But what steps can I take against them, when they frankly state that they have been forced to engage in this dishonesty to keep their children from hunger?

And what can I say to them when they ask why the big corruptors go scott free and retain their respected positions, while steps are only taken against the petty corruptors?

As you know, there was recently a major strike in England to improve the living conditions of workers who were already able to exist on their wages. In Indonesia, last month, workers carried on a strike to bring wages more in line with the minimum cost of living.* Such a strike must be considered proper in a democratic state which recognizes the right to strike, but if we are to believe what was printed in several newspapers, the strikers were intimidated by the government or government agencies.

* In May, 1955, a general "demonstration" strike was conducted by the All-Indonesian Labor Congress to demand higher wages and force government attention to the deteriorating economic situation. The action was not outlawed by the government, but strike leaders have been investigated by the police. The large communist labor federation (S.O.B.S.I.) opposed the strike and "supported" the government by general strike-breaking activities.

Moreover, it can no longer be denied that many officials live in fear that they may lose their jobs at any time. It is depressing and tragic that this feeling of fear should prevail in a democratic, independent nation.**

Brother Karno, when I look around me and see the daily increase in the number of Indonesians who have become beggars, I am forced to remember the comments of the Japanese officials every time I approached them with a request for hospital supplies: "Indonesians are no good; they're just a bunch of beggars."

At that time, I smiled to myself and thought, "Just wait until we're free."

But now we have been free for ten years, and aside from a few individuals who are rolling in riches, we see the number of beggars increasing every day. Was that Japanese right?

(2) Security.

Although it has been more than a year since the government valiantly roared out its "final command" to eliminate all disorder and rebellion, and although the government claims that the situation is improving steadily, I have no reservations about saying that the very opposite is true. From information I have gathered, it is clear that the people of several regions are afraid to sleep in their own houses and the number of refugees has been steadily increasing.

Brother Karno, it was no surprise for me, during a recent trip to East Priangan (West Java) to hear an old man come right out and say, "Tuan, we've had about enough of this kind of freedom." I don't think comment is necessary.

(3) Political passions.

Tolerance towards those who hold different views on problems has decreased noticeably, if it hasn't disappeared altogether. Slanders, accusations, and any means at all seem to be permissible, so long as they have their effect. The desire to win the election has become so immense that politicians forget the basic principles of the State; the desire to remain in power has apparently passed beyond all limits of political propriety and democratic values. For example, Radio Republik Indonesia*** is only permitted to

** Almost all leading positions in the Indonesian government have been taken over by the Indonesian Nationalist Party or its allies. The generally low caliber of the present cabinet ministers is a reflection of the current "spoils system" of political appointments. The able Minister of Economics, Rooseno, is a heartening exception.

*** The state-controlled radio

broadcast press commentary favorable to the government; commentary from the opposition press is included occasionally, but only when it is in harmony with government views.

Brother Karno, if this situation continues the people of this Republic of Indonesia, which is based on the Panchasila, will eventually hear only the views and opinions of the group that happens to be in power at a certain time. I am forced to recall the propaganda broadcasts of the Japanese period, which only contained news of Japanese military victories. Shouldn't the broadcasting of conflicting opinions by Radio Republik Indonesia be considered a lesson in democracy which teaches the people to choose the best of many opinions?...

There is a Dutch proverb which goes, "Als men veel doet om geld dan eindigt men met alles te doen om gold", which means in our language, "If you value money too much, there is nothing you won't do for money."

This applies not only to money, but to attitudes too. At the present time, it applies particularly to the will to power and the desire to retain power. For the sake of the interests of particular groups and individuals, many of the fundamental principles of the Republic of Indonesia have been forgotten or made a mockery of...

Brother Karno, perhaps you remember how the desire for power, the desire for prestige, and the desire for influence, in combination with a general feeling of fear on the part of the people, brought about a situation, during the Japanese period, in which nothing was sacred and we were all but obliged to say our prayers to Tokyo instead of Mecca. In the present situation there is an apparent trend toward making permissible things that are forbidden, whenever the self-interest of the group or individual is involved.

We must work in unison against poverty, disintegration, debilitation, fear, and corruption.

Perhaps you will say that I speak only of our faults. What about the AA Conference (sans "hospitality committee")? Wasn't that a glorious thing? Didn't it indicate progress? Yes, I'm far from blind to the excellent results achieved, but speaking realistically I believe that disintegration is outpacing construction during the present period. And doesn't this mean we are heading for ruin? As you have said yourself, a stabilization in our position is the same as defeat. If that is so, what about the present situation?

There are many who put the blame for all our sicknesses on Dutch influence, or western imperialism (in my mind, "eastern imperialism" is the same thing as western imperialism)

Yet I believe that we must look within ourselves to find the principal blame. Because of hatreds, jealousies, suspicions, and mud-slinging, we are not now able to select sufficiently honest and intelligent men to govern our country, men who would place the interests of the state above their own interests.

What is important now, Brother Karno, is to find a way out... I propose that you, as President of the Republic of Indonesia take the initiative in forming a presidential cabinet, consisting of men chosen for their honesty rather than their party affiliation.

It is quite possible that this proposal is in conflict with the Provisional Constitution, but, believe me, it is a step which the great majority of our people would approve. (Pardon me if I also assume the right to speak in the name of "the people".)

In conclusion, I want to say that I am gratified when I hear you proclaim that the return of West Irian to Indonesia is an "obsession" for you, but I would be even more gratified if I heard you proclaim that the people's livelihood has also become your obsession.

I pray that you read this letter with a spirit of impartiality.

Wassalam.

(signed) A. Halim
Former Prime Minister of the
Republic of Indonesia

Shortly after Dr. Halim's open letter appeared in the newspapers, President Sukarno let it be known that the suggestion of a presidential cabinet was "unconstitutional" and unacceptable.

Disillusionment and uncertainty in Indonesia are not limited to those who agree with Dr. Halim's analysis or proposal. He sees the reasons for Indonesia's decline in such internal problems as corruption, inflation, rebellion, and intolerance, but there are many others who place the blame not so much on Indonesia as on the Dutch. The latter group includes the conglomerate of nationalists who are now organizing the All-Indonesia Congress.

The aim of the All-Indonesia Congress--first stated by its sponsor, President Sukarno--was to rediscover the spirit, purpose, and--above all--the unity which marked Indonesia's independence struggle. In December, 1954, he proposed that a congress be held by representatives from all regions, groups, and classes who would meet to mobilize the spirit needed to "complete the revolution." The concrete aims of the congress were somewhat vague in December, and they have remained so. Congress preparations have given the impression that the "completion" of the revolution is synonymous with victory against the Dutch in the struggle for Irian.

Some illumination was cast on the spirit of the All-Indonesia

Congress by a recent statement from the information section of its preparatory committee:

"The National Revolution broke out on August 17, 1945, when our President Bung Karno issued a proclamation expressing the wish and desire of the Indonesian people to be free. Since the day of the proclamation, we have seen the lessening of the people's rights in the political, economic, and social fields.

The Dutch colonialists and their friends have succeeded in bringing about the failure of our national revolution by disturbances in the fields of politics, economics, and security.

Western Irian has not yet been returned to us.

The economy is being purposely disturbed by dishonest elements from the ranks of the foreign capitalists.

Security is still chaotic due to elements directly or indirectly aided by the Dutch colonialists and their friends.

This situation has influenced and deteriorated the living and livelihood of the Indonesian people. The spirit and goals of the revolution have not been fulfilled. We must complete our national revolution. We must take West Irian from the Dutch colonialists. This is our slogan.

The only means of achieving this is to recover the spirit of August 17 by (1) mobilizing the will and mind of the people and (2) unifying constructive forces.

To implement this program, committees for the All-Indonesia Congress have been established from ^Djakarta down to the most far-flung villages of Indonesia. The All-Indonesia Congress will be held from August 10 to August 17 in ^Djakarta, national capital and city of the proclamation.

Bearing in mind the noble and sacred spirit of our service to the motherland and the nation, let us support the All-Indonesia Congress! Contribute what you can, whether the contribution be spiritual or material."

Dr. Halim's open letter and the call to the All-Indonesia Congress are merely two of the voices commenting on the present situation, but they are representative and important voices. Allowing for their differences in tone and intention, both voices admit the deterioration in national conditions during the sixth year of Indonesian independence.

Despite the proposals of government critics and friends, events in Indonesia will certainly continue to follow their own course. There is little chance that a non-political presidential cabinet will replace the Ali Sastroamidjojo government, and it is almost certain

that the All-Indonesia Congress will fail to recapture the semi-mythical spirit of bygone days.

Paradoxically, the dramatic change in Indonesian conditions, which so many leaders seem to expect or fear, may be provided by the very event which has contributed so much to 'political passions', uncertainty and disunity: the General Election.

Preparations for the General Election have finally been accelerated, and election day has been set for September 29. Registration was completed many months ago, candidates have been selected, millions of ballots and thousands of ballot boxes are ready, and the complicated election procedure has been somewhat clarified to the village and city people. It seems quite possible that the election for members of Parliament will be held on the scheduled day and that approximately thirty million Indonesians will cast votes.

How they will vote is a mystery. Most observers agree that four parties will garner most of the votes: the Masjumi, the Indonesian Nationalist Party, the Indonesian Communist Party, and the conservative Nahdlatul Ulama. And most observers consider this listing to be in the order of their strength, though no one really knows yet what constitutes political power and vote appeal in Indonesia.

The election campaign so far has been remarkably orderly, although peace and quiet has been upset in some localities by minor incidents, usually involving Muslim and communist protagonists.

A sense of waiting and suspended fear prevails in Indonesia as the election draws near. The economic and political deterioration mentioned in Dr. Halim's open letter are facts which most political groups admit or excuse. The election cannot remove the basic causes of Indonesia's present decline, which must be sought in the nature of her unbalanced, low-productivity economy, her absolute lack of trained technicians and administrators, and her incomplete success in winning and keeping the allegiance of regional and dissident groups.

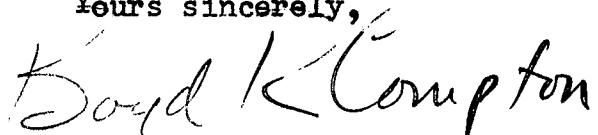
It is characteristic of Indonesia in June, 1955, that political action is based on the assumption that a democratic election must be held to determine the way out of the current dilemma. This assumption may change before election time, or it may be discarded afterwards if important groups refuse to accept the election results. I personally believe that a large part of the nation would welcome an end to the troubling democratic struggle now being waged, but it is very instructive that the approximate balance of power among leading interest groups--parties, army, bureaucracy--may insure a continuation of the present free political competition.

Several months ago, I suggested in a letter that some new crystallization of political power might emerge from the growing snarl of conflict and fear. This has not happened. The situation in the army is now much as it was then, troubled but not immediately threatening. Muslim rebellion has not spread significantly. The communists have gained--dramatically in some areas--but they are not riding a tide of

revolution.

It appears that no single group can hope to monopolize power in Indonesia, either through the election or other means. The possible exception may be provided by the increasingly unified group of army territorial commanders. But it is certain that no one--strong man or democratic coalition--can quickly improve the situation which Dr. Halim describes in his letter. The remaking of Indonesia's economy and the creation of a capable state administration will take many years.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Boyd R. Compton". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Boyd R. Compton

Received New York 7/12/55.