

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WWU - 18  
 INDONESIA: Bandung, 1959

Tjikini Raya, 95 (pav.)  
 Djakarta  
 June 5, 1959

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 Institute of Current World Affairs.  
 366 Madison Ave., New York 17, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Rogers:



BANDUNG, 1959: SOEKARNO AND FOLLOWERS

I arrived here in Djakarta almost two months ago to find another historical event was about to be associated with Java's old Dutch hill station of Bandung. Bandung, 1955, was the scene of the Afro-Asian Conference in which a group of 29 non-white nations, most of them newly liberated from European colonial masters, decided they had aspirations in common. Bandung, 1959, has become the stage for internal history: President Soekarno and the Army's attempt to reorient the entire governmental structure of Indonesia on the plea that the present pretense of Parliamentary Democracy just doesn't work here.

Essentially, the President and the Army want to do two things:

1. Return to the Revolutionary Constitution of 1945, a Constitution which establishes a President for a five-year term and makes him a strong Executive in the American sense. Yet there are a series of buffer councils and committees which stand between what the people vote for and the actual selection of the President. The President rules more or less by decree. And there is neither Parliamentary responsibility, in the British sense, nor a check and balance between Legislative, Executive and Judiciary, in the American sense.

2. Institute what President Soekarno terms "Guided Democracy," an idea he picked up during his Peking visit in 1956 for a government where the populace will be represented as much through "functional groupings" of livelihood, age, religion and joining ability as through the traditional political parties. The biggest functional bloc of representatives already has been set aside for the military and the Army, by far the most powerful and political armed service branch here in Indonesia, has made it plain that it will have the biggest share of that biggest bloc.

To achieve this change, the Army, the President and the Cabinet decided it would be necessary to disband the Constituent Assembly. This is a group of 514 leading politicians, popularly elected, who have been conferring in Bandung for the past 2½ years (at the request of the President) to write a new Constitution, one adjusted to the needs of a now nine-year-old Nation, one which would improve upon the haste and projection involved in the writing of a 1945 Constitution. The 1945 Constitution, you see, preceded the actual establishment of the Indonesian Government in late 1949. And if you now are yelling "Whoa!" and wondering why the move to go back to 1945 if the 1945 Constitution has yet to be superceded, let me hasten to add that Indonesia has been operating under a "Provisional Constitution" since 1950. And actually, under the current State of "War and siege," Indonesia has been operating under martial law. To further complicate the picture, the Rebels in the outlying Islands of Sumatra and Sulawesi (Celebes) contend the Soekarno Government for the past two years has been operating "un-Constitutionally" and under no law at all.

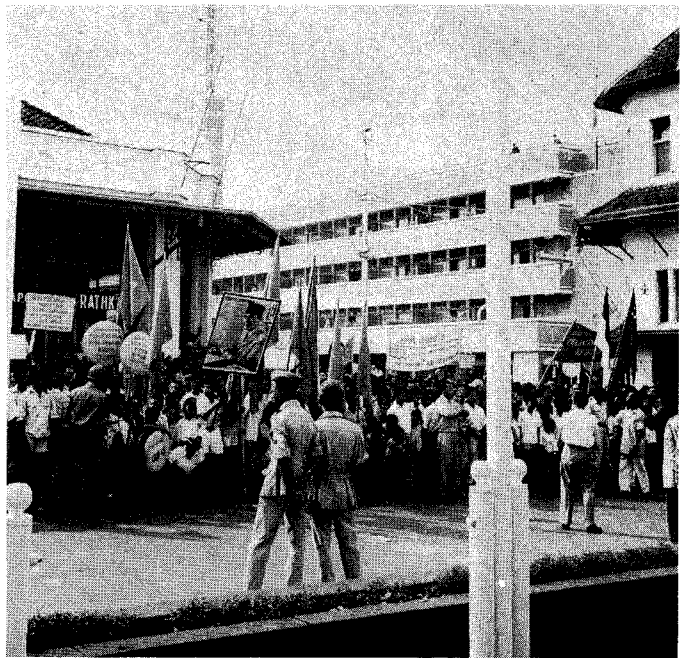
Well, enough of these undigested dialectics. I arrived in Djakarta April 10 and immediately became aware of Great Moment. President Soekarno was to go before the Constituent Assembly in Bandung April 22 and ask the delegates to drop their task, vote themselves out of business and join in the spirit of "Back to 1945 and Guided Democracy." On April 23, the President announced, he would leave Indonesia for a two-month world tour. When he returned, he hoped he would find the delegates had concluded their voting and reestablished themselves in their home communities. For there were a good many mechanical arrangements to be gotten out of the way before the President could re-proclaim the 1945 Constitution on Independence Day, August 17.

The Indonesians pride themselves on what they call "Musjawarah," a term reaching back to Arabic philosophy which roughly means, "talk it out first so that when the issue comes to a vote the opposition has caved in, everybody's happy and it's unanimous." Both Soekarno and the Army evidently dilute their Mohammedan faith with a dash of realism for there has been decided "mush" -- via parades, the radio, newspaper editorials, street posters and testaments from anybody who is anybody -- to be patriotic, Return to 1945, and be quick about it!

As a matter of fact, the moment I stepped off my Garuda Indonesian Airways plane in Bandung on April 21 - the day before The Event I was greeted by a parade of grammar school youngsters going down the road shouting enthusiasm and brandishing banners declaring: "We want to go back to what we had in 1945." Then as I drove into Bandung itself, bunting and pictures of President Soekarno were everywhere, a two-day school holiday had been proclaimed, stores were closed a day ahead and, all in all, the cheering section was ready. From the papers, I noticed that similar demonstrations (organized by the Army) were taking place all over Java. (A friend of mine at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs later said to me: "Well, what is so strange about organized demonstrations? I understand in New York you set your ticker-

tape receptions for visiting dignitaries at noon so that you can be sure of a street crowd during the lunch hour.")

On April 22, the actual morning of The Event, I found that the throngs were lined up all right, but only a few deep and only in the immediate vicinity of the "Gendung Konstituant," and old Dutch club later commandeered by Japanese officers which now has been rebuilt into an impressive auditorium and office hall by the Indonesians. I also noticed that the flag most frequently found fluttering on either side of the upheld portraits of Soekarno was not the red and white stripe of Indonesia, but the red background with yellow hammer-and-sickle of the PKI, Partai Komunis Indonesia, which has been militantly in the political vanguard of the "Back to 1945" cries.



Crowds and Commie flags, a few deep

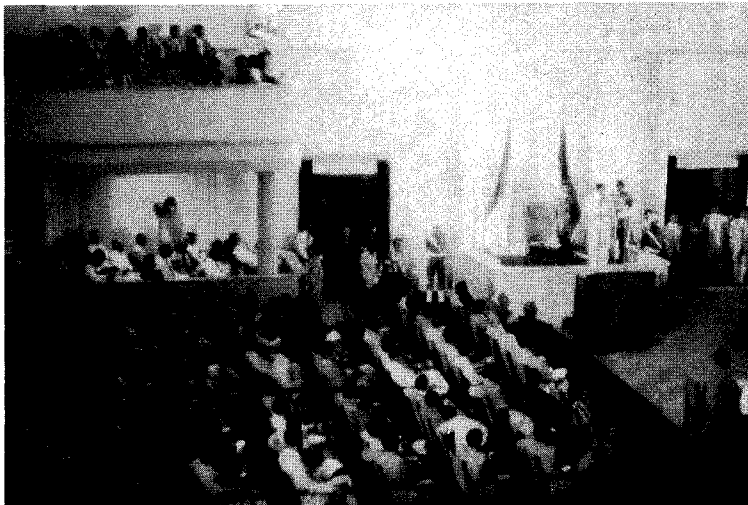
We crowded into the Assembly Hall, the public, the press and the diplomatic corps. U.S. Ambassador Howard Jones had to break off his vacation in the Philippines because of a personal request from Soekarno for his attendance. (The New York Times' Bernie Kalb told me "The Bung" -- short for "Bung Karno," or Comrade Soekarno, uses the props of a full diplomatic turnout to give himself added "zest.") Also there were newsreel cameramen, and I was grateful for this last since their klieg lights substituted for my lack of flash equipment. But despite the crowdedness of the sideline accommodations for the guests, there were a good many empty chairs in the pit. Maybe the delegates were suffering from a flu epidemic.



A few seats still vacant downstairs

Anyway, Soekarno arrived in an immaculate fitted white uniform topped by his traditional black Moslem cap. He stood upon a platform in front of two Army aides (one with the sheets of his speech to be read, the other to receive those he had finished reading). For the next 2½ hours, he proceeded to read a 58-page text (the original Indonesian version was even longer). Through specific orders, the audience was not permitted to follow his words with their own copies. (Having watched Congressional hearings where everybody noisily

flips at once as the witness punctuates each page of his text with a glass of water, I can appreciate the Bung's request.) During those 2½ hours I noticed that coats began to be peeled off, ladies' fans started swinging, and not a few eyes began to close. As a stranger to the Indonesian language, I was grateful for such surprising Soekarno interjections in English as, "Guided Democracy," "Free enterprise and equal opportunity for everybody." There also were some French and German references. I was told that the Indonesian language is insufficient to cover many technical expressions and, anyway, the Bung likes to toss around his learning. (The speech itself was entitled, "Res Publica! Once more Res Publica!")



"Ceremony...with grandeur..."

In translation, what did Soekarno really say to the assemblage? "Western Parliamentary Democracy with its multi-party system, which we have been practicing till now has caused this dualism between the leadership of the Revolution and the leadership of Government. The result was that we weakened and vacillated in our Revolution...In all fields we are deteriorating and deteriorating continuously...Let us discard the principal of liberal democracy and liberal economy...It is not natural under the system of guided democracy to have an opposition in the sense that a group continuously and indiscriminately opposes the Government, in Parliament as well as outside." The President pleaded for a Government of "consultation led by wise guidance (that) must not give priority to debates and maneuvers which may lead to the dissolution of an entire Cabinet -- things which are not possible under the 1945 Constitution." He then referred to "Government with majesty," "Declaration with majesty," "Ceremony...with grandeur," "Proclamation (with) nobility," and the fact that "The vibrations of the revolutionary spirit are tangibly perceptible. Don'tt you feel those vibrations?" Soekarno also declared that the "Government is of the opinion that... at this time I should still continue to hold the post of President." After the transitional period is over and the 1945 Constitution is re-proclaimed, a "People's Consultative Body," named by the elected Council of People's Representatives (Parliament) and the functional groupings will (at an unspecified time) elect a President and Vice President of Indonesia.

The applause when Soekarno concluded was a mere pitter-patter. But since the applause for some magnificent dances I saw in Bali was also a mere pitter-patter, I was willing to concede that applause meters might be a mere opiate for Western egotism. However last weekend and the beginning of this week the Constituent Assembly, in three successive votes, turned down Soekarno and the Army's request and refused to disband. Maybe empty seats and pitter-patter are universal hints after all.

Cordially,