

Revolution and counter-revolution in Indonesia (1965)

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Confused reports of Officers' plots, coups and countercoups which filtered through to the Western press a week ago were the first indication of a major revolutionary upheaval in Indonesia. The recent events unfolded against a now familiar background of social and economic crisis in a backward country. The regime of Sukarno - despite the superficial appearance of stability - has been exposed as rotten to the core

The analysis of the Indonesian events provides us with an object lesson in the fate of Bonapartism - bourgeois and proletarian.

Bonapartism and bankruptcy Since the end of the war, all the countries of the so-called "third world" have passed through a period of uninterrupted social convulsions, as the result of the growing gap in the terms of trade with the advanced capitalist countries. The Indonesian economy is a model of bankruptcy.

At one time, Indonesia was a rice-surplus area; now it has to import 150,000 tons of rice every year. The once flourishing tin and rubber export industries have dwindled away. Only oil remains as an-imported earner of dollars.

The Indonesian economy is heavily in debt to the world banking community, especially to US bankers. Each year, the budget deficit doubles. The expected figures for this year is around 1,000 billion rupiahs. The value of the rupiah has sunk to a hundredth of its legal value, as the result of the chronic inflation which in the past six years has caused the cost of living to increase by 2,000 %.

In spite of this catastrophic economic collapse, the State spends 1,000 million US dollars a year on arms. i.e. 75% of the budget. The Bonapartist regime is riddled with corruption. In the midst of mass privation, low wages and a huge housing problem, Sukarno and his elite live like kings. Sukarno occupies a white mansion - formally the residence of the Dutch governor - surrounded by sumptuous furniture and expensive works of art. "Its three splendid state-rooms are museum-like in scope and feeling. Each is lavishly draped, carpeted and furnished. Each is hung with a fragment of Sukarno's extensive collection of heroic canvasses." Under his direction, huge sums have been lavished on prestige buildings like the Hotel Indonesia in Djakarta where, to quote the Sunday Times, "Three million people, mostly poor, live . . . in low buildings . . . mostly falling apart."

Indonesia boasts one of the most inept and useless of all parasitic ruling cliques. "We are not facing economic difficulties" Sukarno blithely protests. "The Indonesian people are faring well, reasonably well. Just compare us with India or some other countries. We have a new variety of rice that will give twice as much production as normal rice. It is quite an achievement for our own research centre. I wrote a poem about it, I was so happy. But it is untranslatable."

Unfortunately, Sukarno's creditors do not seem to have developed a taste for untranslatable poetry as a substitute for economic progress. They expected the economy to improve after the transfer of West New Guinea to Indonesia in 1963. To no avail. The World Bank attempted to lure Sukarno into deflation by an offer of additional loans to the tune of 142 million pounds. Instead of taking up the offer, Sukarno proceeded to burn the British Embassy in Djakarta and declare war on Malaysia - a move which cut off a further 200 million dollars worth of foreign trade. The US. was concerned. In reply to repeated American demands to shore up the economy, Sukarno announced to the world; "Economics bores me." To the very last, he maintained that in twenty years, Indonesia would be "the richest country in the world".

Faith may be able to move mountains but it had no effect in moving the Indonesian economy out of the red. The poverty and hardships of the masses led to an extraordinarily rapid growth of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). With the economy sliding downhill fast, Sukarno was forced to nationalise increasing numbrs of foreign enterprises. To do this, he was obliged to lean on the support of the PKI - a process which did not go unnoticed in Washington..

Menshevik policy of the PKI The whole lesson of the post-war period is that the elementary tasks of the bourgeois (democratic) revolution in backward countries cannot be solved on the basis of capitalist property relations. The weak bourgeoisies of the ex-colonial countries are too inextricably bound up with international finance capital to carry the nationalist revolution through to the end. Nor can they compete with their advanced industrial competitors for world markets. As a result, there is a constant deterioration of their economic status vis-a-vis the advanced capitalist countries.

The ruining of the economies of backward countries creates conditions of acute and permanent social crisis. On the one hand the old self-contained peasant society is steadily under-mined, on the other, the capitalist class is unable to put across its forms on the whole of society. The rise of military police states all over the "third world" is merely a surface expression of the inability of the colonial bourgeoisie to solve the problems of their own revolution. Only by the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat, in alliance with the poor peasants, can the backward countries begin to solve their economic and. social problems.

Nowhere in the "Third World" has the workers' movement made such rapid strides in the last decade as in Indonesia. The PKI, which had virtually ceased to exist after the abortive coup of 1948, has grown into the third largest Communist Party in the world -only the Chinese and Russian Parties being larger. Its total paid up membership is three million, It commands the support of ten million trade unionists and organised peasants. Most important of all, it claims the allegiance of 40% of the Indonesian army. Politically, it is aligned with Peking in the Sino-Soviet dispute, and maintains close contact with the Chinese Stalinists. A revolutionary combination, one might think. But one would be wrong, . The policy of the PKI is one of blatant class collaboration. Since the

1948 fiasco, the PKI leadership has attempted to prove its own impotence by ingratiating itself with Sukarno. All traces of revolutionary ideology have been systematically deleted from the Party Programme. Thus the 1962 Programme and Constitution of the PKI outlined the Party's task as the establishment of a "people's democratic state". And what might this queer specimen be? Socialism? Capitalism? Workers' State? The Programme goes on to clarify the class content of this "peoples' democratic state". It would be a "democracy of a new type", based, not upon the working class, but on a bloc of workers and peasants with a strange and motley collection of "Allies" . This latter-day popular front would include "the urban petty bourgeoisie, the intellectuals, the national bourgeoisie (!), the advanced aristocratic elements (!!), and patriotic elements in general (!!!).

From such confusion, it, is difficult to extract any positive conclusion concerning the class nature of the "people democratic state" since the above is simply a list of all classes and strata of present day bourgeois Indonesia. One might therefore justly conclude that the "revolutionary" Peking -oriented Programme of the PKI is the maintenance of the status quo !

In all its documents, the PKI goes out of its way to avoid all mention of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Instead, the PKI refers to the "authority" of the "people" - a formula which offends no one. The class collaboration of the PKI attained its most bare faced expression in 1955 when it openly advocated a national coalition, and offered to water down its already insipid programme to a list of entirely non communist aims.

The unutterably philistine mentality of the PKI leadership is revealed in all the pronouncements of its chief "theoretician", Aidit. As always with Stalinism, the "theory" is merely a crude apology for the betrayals of the leadership. Thus, using the sophist argument of "stages" Aidit puts off the question of the socialist revolution to the far distant future, "When we complete the first stage of our revolution which is now in progress, we can enter into friendly consultation with other progressive elements in our society and, without an armed struggle' lead the country towards socialist revolution. After all, the national capitalists in our country are both weak and disorganised. At present, in our national democratic revolution, we are siding with them and fighting a common battle of expelling foreign economic domination from this soil' .

Aidit ' s argument condemns itself. If the national bourgeoisie is so weak and disorganised, all the more reason to sweep them aside and set up a workers and peasants ' government. As a matter of fact, as Lenin pointed out a hundred times, it is precisely the weakness of the national bourgeoisie that makes them a reactionary stumbling block in the path of the democratic revolution in backward countries. They doubt their ability to control the forces unleashed by a civil war, they equivocate, and finally they are driven into the arms of reaction out of fear of their own working class. For this reason it is entirely reactionary to attempt to separate mechanically the democratic and socialist phases of the revolution in backward countries. Either the democratic revolution "grows over" into the

dictatorship of the proletariat, or it succumbs to the hammer blows of reaction.

The "Leninist" position of Aidit and co. is in fact identical to that of the Mensheviks against whom Lenin waged a relentless struggle right up to 1917. The Mensheviks argued that the socialist revolution was out of the Question in Russia, because the bourgeois democratic revolution had yet to take place. Thus, the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat was relegated by them to a distant (and therefore safe) future - fifty, a hundred, or even three hundred years hence, First we complete the "first stage" then, when this is "completely attained" , we "enter into friendly agreements" with those who might be interested in the "second stage". A very pretty schema.

Events were posed altogether differently by history, which, alas , does not deem it at all necessary to follow the dictates of a Plekhanov or an Aidit. In 1905, the Mensheviks were forced with a clear choice: proletarian revolution, or reaction? While the workers struggled with reaction in the streets, Plekhanov gave his reply: "They should not have taken to arms". Aidit today faces his 1905.

Palace Revolution Bonapartist Government arises out of a social crisis, where no one class, group or party is capable of achieving stable government. The bonapartist dictator directly or indirectly basing himself upon the army, achieves political equilibrium by "balancing" the antagonistic interests - playing off one class against another. This is what imparts to the bonapartist dictator his peculiar aura of isolation and individualism; because he represents no particular interest, (other than his own) the illusion is created of a power standing above society and regulating it "in the national interest". In reality bonapartism always represents defence of the status quo and therefore in the last analysis always comes down on the side of the ruling class.

The delicate balance of forces which is the precondition for bonapartism is bound to be temporary and precarious. Sooner or later equilibrium is destroyed and illusory stability gives way to civil war. Thus, a Bonapartist regime must be considered, monolithic or paternalistic facade notwithstanding , as a regime of transition which is the prelude to the victory of revolution or reaction.

At six am on Thursday 30th September, Radio Djakarta broadcast an announcement that an obscure officer of the palace guard - Lt-Col Untung had President Sukarno under protective guard, and that loyalist forces had crushed a CIA take-over plot. Within hours, Radio Djakarta issued another statement that President Sukarno was safe and well and that a Communist coup had been crushed by Gen Nasution. The bonapartist illusion was shattered.

Initial reactions in the West were that this was just another power struggle caused by the illness or death of Sukarno. The Times - ever tasteful - thought that he had "ceased to be a factor on the Indonesian political scene". As it happened, Sukarno was alive, but the Times had grasped the correlation of forces admirably. In the whole course of the struggle Sukarno and his Cabinet

were pitifully isolated. The government was suspended in mid-air. The real political struggle had passed into the streets.

Little by little the Picture became clearer. We may accept the accusation of a CIA plot and an attempt by the Stalinist middle stream of the officer caste to liquidate the generals and forestall a right wing coup planned for October 5th as an accurate outline of the initial upheaval. Sukarno's illness, his moves against foreign enterprises and his increasing dependence on the PKI, on top of the general bankruptcy of the Indonesian economy would be more than enough to interest the State Department in secret negotiations with the reactionary upper stratum of the officer caste (Gen Nasution is virulently anti-Communist). On the other hand, the army generals would need little persuading to liquidate the hated influence of the PKI and establish open military rule.

As a matter of fact, we have certain proof of at least one previous attempt of the CIA to oust Sukarno. In the late 50s, an anti-Sukarno guerrilla movement developed in Sumatra. The pilot of a rebel plane shot down after bombarding an air-field was a CIA agent called Allen Lawrence Pope. He was sentenced to death, but later reprieved on Sukarno's personal order, "because I did not want to spoil the good relationship between Indonesia and America'".

That a rightist plot existed need not be seriously doubted. The PKI, as we have seen, was quite satisfied with the status quo. On the other hand, it is clear that the so-called "Revolutionary Council" of Untung was a Stalinist front organisation composed of prominent Stalinists, fellow travellers and political non-entities. The "respectable" members of the Council disowned it immediately Nasution looked like gaining the upper hand. There can be no doubt that the PKI leadership was behind this preventative coup. It has emerged, however, that Sukarno himself knew all about it at least 24 hours in advance, having been informed of the generals' plot by the pro-PKI Air Chief, Dhani. Sukarno was in his palace in Djakarta protected by the palace guard on the night of the coup, but fled to Bogor with the help of Dhani when the fighting got out of hand.

The treachery of the PKI now stands revealed. With three million members, ten million supporters and 40% of the army under its control, its sole concern was to keep the masses out of the struggle - to confine it to a palace revolution.

Instead of publishing full details of the right wing plot, instead of mobilising the masses in a general strike and appealing to its supporters in the army to disarm their officers and join hands with the workers for the overthrow of the whole rotten regime, they made a secret pact with Sukarno to murder the offending generals. Unfortunately for them Nasution escaped and called out his troops. The palace revolution crumbled at a touch.

The gathering reaction It is an elementary rule of revolutionary strategy that it is always an advantage if the other side is seen to strike the first blow, thus justifying one's own actions as self-defence. The PKI by its criminal policy, far from keeping the generals out, handed them power on a plate.

The provocative actions of the wretched "Revolutionary Council" proved an excellent weapon in the hands of Nasution. Moslem reaction was incited. The PKI headquarters in Djakarta was stormed and burned by a mob of several thousand youths, shouting "Kill Aidit". Mobs roamed the streets, sticking up posters reading "Crush the Communists". A mob outside the American Embassy chanted "Long Live America". A mass rally of 500,000 demanded action against all who participated in the "September 30th Movement". The murder of the six generals and the senseless killing of Nasution's six year old daughter were used to fan the flames of reaction. The demands forwarded by this demonstration to the government (i.e. to Nasution) showed that the programme of reaction has already crystallised.

Dismissal of all Communists and other ministers involved in the
September 30th Movement.

Action against the murderers of the six officers.

Banning of all Communist information media and organisations
sympathetic to the PKI and the coup Movement.

Banning of the PKI itself.

It will not be long before the reactionary generals - with great reluctance of course - submit to the pressing demands of the mob. The above programme will be implemented.

And what of the PKI? Instead of pursuing a vigorous offensive against reaction which even now, at the 11th hour' could save the party, the leadership remains prostrate before Sukarno. While Communists struggle with the mobs of reaction, the PKI continues to be represented in Sukarno's cabinet, supporting his demagogic appeals for "national unity", a return to the old stability, etc. Ominously, however, Aidit has gone into hiding.

Aidit may hide, but there is no hiding place for the three million Communist workers and peasants who are placed at the mercy of a bloody reaction. In the teeth of all the cowardly appeals of the leadership, the mighty PKI masses are clearly moving into action. The revolt in Central Java has spread to Sumatra, and is still growing. Indonesia has been split asunder. The Daily Telegraph, with some insight, analysed the situation in an editorial of October 12th, entitled

"The civil war in Indonesia" "It is plain from the events of the past ten days in Indonesia that it is not another palace coup that has rocked Dr Sukarno's Republic, but a spreading civil war. The land of confrontation is confronting itself, The three heads of this dragon, Moslem, nationalist, Communist' are biting at each other, and fighting has spread from Java to Sumatra The long smouldering rivalry of forces over which Dr Sukarno presided for so long has burst into flame. If the army suspected a Communist coup, it was clearly surprised by its sudden ruthlessness and disorganised by the loss of its six murdered generals. Now it is clear that Dr Sukarno is in Army protection' that he has countenanced its campaigns against the Communist guerrillas and finally abandoned the pretence that his Nassakom or United Front still exists.' "

The behaviour of the PKI leadership was craven to the last. To the very last moment before Sukarno switched sides, they identified themselves with him and his demagogic appeals to national unity. More than likely they still do. They behave like a cur that licks its master's hand as he kicks it in the belly.

Where the state power is openly challenged in a civil war, all possibilities of "moderation", of a "middle way" vanish in thin air. If Sukarno emerges, at the end of the civil war, as the man in charge it cannot be on the same basis as before. He will no longer be a one Man dictator, keeping himself on top by balancing the classes, but as a puppet of the generals. The old order is irrevocably lost. It was both stupid and reactionary of the PKI leaders to appeal for its restoration.

It is by no means certain, however, that the revolt will be crushed. True, the PKI leaders have still not called an insurrection. But the PKI masses are reacting spontaneously to the threat of reaction. Their great numerical strength, and the complete rottenness of Indonesian society may yet bring victory. It is not impossible that the PKI leadership, or a section of that leadership, will realise the futility of attempts to restore the status quo, and support the development of a mass insurrection. If so, then this would certainly take the form of a protracted guerrilla war, the classical weapon of Stalinism in the Colonial Revolution.

More likely, however, the PKI leadership will carry their work of disruption to the bitter and bloody end. Either they will actively discourage their members from fighting, in a craven and quite utopian effort to conciliate the forces of reaction, or they may temporarily lend their support to a guerrilla war, or even a general strike, not with a view to seizing power, but simply in order to obtain a stronger hand in secret negotiations with Nasution and/or Sukarno.

Whatever the outcome, the disastrous policies of the Stalinist leadership in Indonesia, will certainly have the initial result of causing widespread disillusionment of the masses in that country. A series of defeats of the present revolutionary movement would usher in a whole period of militarist reaction resting on the apathy and bitterness of the PKI masses. Such a defeat would also have a crippling effect on the morale of the workers and peasants of Malaysia. Not for nothing did the Daily Telegraph editorial express evident satisfaction at the chaos in Indonesia. The defeat of the Indonesian proletariat would be the best possible buttress to the crumbling edifice of Malaysia.

Coming at the same time as Peking's treacherous support of reactionary feudal Pakistan in its war with India, the Indonesian experience must serve as a warning to those workers who have been deceived by the "revolutionary" phrase mongering of Chinese Stalinism. It is significant that the only reaction of the Chinese bureaucracy to the upheavals in Indonesia was a message of "cordial greetings" to Sukarno when he finally emerged from hiding.

All theories, programmes and policies sooner or later find expression in practice. The question of the correctness or otherwise of the Stalinist-Menshevik theory of the Colonial Revolution is not academic but practical. The experience of Stalinist policies in a whole series of revolutions irrefutably proves their counter-

revolutionary nature. The programme of revolutionary Marxism is itself no abstract thing but the crystallisation of the experiences of a hundred years of proletarian class struggle. To Marxists the lessons of a defeat are if anything more important than those of victory. The workers can learn by their mistakes, but only if these experiences are patiently analysed and explained by the revolutionary vanguard. The exposure of Stalinism in practice can only be a positive step in the long term revolutionary education of the workers of all countries. It is up to the revolutionary Marxists in this country painstakingly to explain the lessons of Indonesia to the British labour movement.