

SITUATION OF INDONESIAN PRISONERS

NOV 1969

Amnesty views with grave concern the Indonesian Government's continued restriction of political opponents, many of whom are now in their fifth year of detention without trial in conditions far below any subsistence level for long term imprisonment. In October 1969 the official figure was given as 116,000 under restriction; unofficial estimates in Djakarta are higher and arrests of "communists" are still regularly reported in Java. The Government has now announced proposals for the release of some detainees, but even when these have been implemented 90,000 will remain in indefinite restriction.*

Background to Detentions

The prisoners are said to have taken part in the attempted coup of the 30th September 1965 when a group of Army officers murdered six prominent generals; although the members of the group were communists, its exact relationship with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) remains obscure. The Army broke the coup attempt, assumed power, ordered a purge of PKI officials, and initiated a wave of mass killing which rapidly spread through Java, Sumatra and Bali. Half a million alleged communists died, and perhaps 200,000 were arrested. The motives behind this massacre appear to have been a combination of traditional prejudices - Islamic hostility to communism; anti-Chinese feeling heightened by PKI links with Peking - and reaction to current inflation, price increases and general economic disruption.

Although it has never been proved that the coup attempt was organised by the PKI, this assumption has been the official justification for the elimination of the Party; until its proscription in 1966, it had been a major influence in the Sukarno Government, claiming a membership of three million and additional support of seventeen million through youth, trade union and cultural organisations. Indonesia's population is estimated at 120,000,000.

In the last four years some few prisoners have been released, often on espousal of a religious faith, some have died, but the majority have remained in detention in camps and prisons throughout Java and Sumatra. About 100 people have been tried on charges of attempting to overthrow the Government, and sentenced to death - as in the case of Dr. Subandrio, the former Foreign Minister - or to long prison terms. Apart from these none of the prisoners have been charged or brought before a court. Legal access is never allowed.

Classification of Prisoners

The prisoners have been divided into three Categories on the wholly arbitrary basis of their alleged "involvement" in the coup attempt: this division equates with the believed degree of their Communist activities or affiliation. In practical terms this procedure was often a random division carried out by the Army at a time when denunciation of communists was seen as a means of demonstrating loyalty to the Government. Category 'A', some 5,000 prisoners, is for those said to have had knowledge of the coup plan; in practice they are the more prominent PKI officials; these prisoners will be detained until they are brought to trial at some future and indefinite date. Category 'B' contains at least 10,000 detainees, said to be "less implicated" in the coup attempt; they will be indefinitely detained. Category 'C', the largest group, officially comprises at least 26,000 prisoners (the actual figure is almost certainly much greater) for whom there is no evidence to connect them with the coup attempt, and who were only peripherally connected with the PKI; they will be released without facing judicial proceedings. An additional group of 27,000 awaits classification, while another 47,000 are under a looser form of restriction described officially as house arrest. No release date has been set for either. Although the fate of a prisoner depends on his Category, neither prisoners nor families are told into which Category a prisoner has been placed. The figures are approximate since Government statistics are frequently in contradiction with figures from regional authorities.

A Typical Case

The case of Mr. S. is typical of many and will illustrate the position of prisoners and their families. He was a university lecturer until October 1965

* See note on figures on page 4.

when he was arrested, probably because he had been a member of the Indonesian Scholars Association, a left-wing organisation which had received occasional subsidies from the Sukarno Government; he also sympathised with Lekra, the Communist-affiliated cultural organisation. He was not a member of Lekra or of the PKI. He is a Muslim. His wife has now lost her job partly because her husband is a prisoner and partly because she herself had applied for - but not yet been given - membership of Lekra in September 1965. There are two children. Mrs. S. knows which prison her husband is in, and that he is in Category 'C'; this means she is in a more fortunate position than most wives. Until February 1969 she could see him for 15 minutes each month, since then she has heard nothing of him. She knows that his food is inadequate, and that he needs extra food which she is permitted to deliver, but the prison is 25 kilometres from Djakarta, transport is bad and she has not the money to buy food. No letters are allowed. Prisoners are forbidden pencil and paper and can receive specifically religious books only. Mr. S. has presumably been interrogated, he has not been charged, he has no lawyer because there is nothing a lawyer could do, and he has now been detained for more than four years.

Prison Conditions

Little is known about conditions of imprisonment; officials acknowledge they are bad, and in the context of the Indonesian economy reports of a total absence of adequate facilities, of disease and of lack of doctors or drugs are easy to believe. Food has been scarce at all times; in 1966 prison Commanders in some regions were reported to have shot prisoners whom they could not feed. In May 1969, the Prison Department announced heavy debts, and cut the per capita allowance for food by half; rations in some camps seem in any case often to have been nominal. Little is known of medical arrangements, of the incidence of serious disease, or of the death rate among prisoners. Whether from inefficiency or policy, families may not know of a prisoner's death for months or years. Conditions and treatment vary from place to place, and brutality seems to depend on the character of the local commandant rather than on any common practice. General rules governing the conduct of camps do not exist. The detainees are the responsibility of the Attorney-General's Department and the camps are run by the Army; corruption is said to be endemic in some parts of the military administration. Access by recognised international organisations such as the Red Cross has at no time been allowed. Aid to prisoners can find very limited access through Christian church workers, but these are an alien element in a Muslim country, and can visit only a small number of camps.

Government Policy on Release

Although screening of Government employees, arrests of suspected communists and occasional killings appear to continue, especially in East and Central Java, and although military leaders remain opposed to measures of liberalisation, the Indonesian Government has decided in principle that a section of the "PKI Gestapu" prisoners (those arrested in 1965/6) will be released. Concern felt in many countries about the prisoners has in the past been publicly dismissed as Communist agitation, but there is now a growing realisation that some policy must be evolved acceptable both to the Army in terms of security and to the outside world in terms of humanity. Until recently concern for prisoners has been seen as political sympathy for the Communist Party, and few Indonesians have been willing to take the political risk of arguing for basic legal and material provisions for the detainees. This climate has to some extent softened and the liberal press now feels able to initiate public discussion of the prisoners' situation. For advocates of a general amnesty the essential problem is how more than 100,000 people, most of whom have been held in strict detention in/appalling/often conditions over four years, can be reabsorbed into a society which actively participated in the massacre of their political colleagues in 1965, which has benefited from the appropriation of their jobs and property and which has been consistently encouraged by religious leaders, by the Army and by the Government to regard all prisoners as Communists and all the Communists as natural enemies.

The arguments advanced against general release of the prisoners stress the risks of a Communist revival which could undermine the country's tenuous political stability, the administrative difficulties inherent in screening prisoners for release for an overworked judiciary already unable to deal with its normal legal work (only 51% of Indonesian judges are legally trained), the need for national

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effort to be spent on essential economic development rather than on political prisoners, and the physical risk to the prisoners of returning to hostile communities.

Official attitudes have up to now actively discouraged any rehabilitation of prisoners. One prominent feature of the way in which released prisoners have been ostracised has been the semi-official practice whereby applicants for regular or skilled jobs must show a police certificate that they were not 'involved' in the 1965 coup attempt. These certificates are automatically refused in the cases of ex-prisoners, the widows and children of those killed in 1965, and, frequently, the near relatives of those in detention at the present time. Although the Government has on occasion disassociated itself from this practice, it seems to be universal throughout most of the country. Not only does this lend encouragement to local prejudice against ex-prisoners, but it creates a situation in which a released prisoner, rejected by family and neighbours, may naturally gravitate towards clandestine political circles where he believes he will be treated as an individual and not as an outcaste. The abolition of 'certificates of non-involvement', as they are called, would reduce both fears for released prisoners' safety and also Government fears that ex-prisoners will only swell the ranks of the underground PKI. This is therefore an essential prerequisite for any general amnesty.

The release and rehabilitation of prisoners thus presents the Government with the need to make effective at a local level a total change in attitude towards the prisoners, hitherto regarded as pariahs. This presents substantial administrative difficulties. Indonesia is an extremely underdeveloped country, despite its considerable natural resources. The traditionally haphazard administration was further weakened by the economic catastrophe which marked the end of Sukarno's Presidency. This, combined with spiralling inflation, has meant that at both local and national levels the civil service and the legal system are marked by inefficiency and corruption, effective power has moved from the civilian authorities to the Army, and no reliable chain of command has existed from the centre to the regions.

The policy announced by the Attorney-General on the 2nd October has three heads. Category 'A' prisoners will still be detained for eventual trial; Category 'B' prisoners will be resettled as agricultural labourers in economically backward areas of the Republic; Category 'C' prisoners will in principle be released on signature of a written statement of loyalty to the present political system; religious instruction will be provided. The Attorney-General stated that the first 26,000 would be released before the end of 1969. Prisoners remaining in detention will, it seems, be used as a cheap labour pool for government projects.

Buru Resettlement Scheme

The resettlement of 'B' Category detainees has already begun, and in August 1969 the first 2,500 were taken to Buru, an underpopulated island in the Moluccas, a thousand miles from Java. Further groups of 2,500 will be transported over the next three years until a total of 10,000 is reached.

This scheme is open to question on several counts. The detainees have been chosen simply according to their Category; there has been no provision for any legal review or appeal. Thus settlement on Buru is for those detainees who will not be brought to trial because there is no evidence that they are guilty of any crime, but who, at some time in the last four years, were thought by the army to be PKI supporters. Many detainees have no experience as farmers; Pramudya Ananta Tur, one of Indonesia's foremost writers, was among those sent to the island in August. It is known that even senior officials in the Attorney-General's Department opposed the choice of Buru on the grounds of its topographical and climatic unsuitability. No mention has been made of provision for medicines or clinics. Government spokesmen have themselves been divided on whether and when families can join the men on Euru, and certainly families were not told that detainees would be moved, or given any opportunity to communicate with them before they left.

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Certain facts about the scheme are known. Each detainee has been allocated a theoretical half acre of land, and given subsistence rations for an initial eight months, after which he must fend for himself. Flooding meant that not all the land could be cleared before the detainees arrived. According to the Attorney-General, the first detainees have not been given hoes or parangs (basic agricultural implements) 'to prevent any bloodshed'. They may not leave the island and are restricted to a limited area in the midst of what is officially described as 'dense forest'.

The majority of these detainees are Javanese; resettlement on Buru in these conditions is in effect permanent penal exile.

Amnesty Proposals

Amnesty has followed the Indonesian situation closely since 1964, when detained critics of the Sukarno Government were adopted as prisoners of conscience. Our first delegate visited Djakarta in 1966 but this was a time when constructive action from abroad had little chance of being effective. In July 1969 Professor Julius Stone visited Djakarta as an Amnesty delegate to discuss the situation of the prisoners with the Government. Amnesty recognises the immense problems of national reconstruction faced by the Indonesian Government in the last three years following the events of 1965, and also the genuine concern felt by some senior officials to evolve a just and humane policy on the release of detainees. Amnesty regards as essential three steps to ensure that promises of release which have now been made are adequately implemented and are extended to cover all untried detainees, with a minimum delay.

1. The establishment of review commissions to consider all those detained without trial, in all three categories, and including those detainees who have already been moved to Buru. The commissions should be authorised to order immediate release or trial by civilian court within a given period. Financial aid to cover the necessary expenses of the commissions might be forthcoming from the United Nations and interested non governmental organisations.
2. Application should be made to the United Nations for assistance in an international rehabilitation programme
 - (a) to provide re-training for detainees awaiting release, and assist their full re-integration into home or chosen localities on release
 - (b) for the welfare and training of children deprived of one or both parents since 1965
 - (c) for the development of existing government schemes to rehabilitate those widowed in 1965.
3. Immediately, and until such time as the commissions have ruled on release or trial, prisons, detention camps and resettlement areas should be open to visits by the International Committee of the Red Cross, who should be responsible for the provision and distribution of medicines and essential foodstuffs.

Footnote

All figures for prisoner numbers are those given by the Attorney-General, Major General Sugih Arto, on 2 October 1969. They cannot be regarded as the final official statistics as differing figures have been given by other departments. One example: Major General Hartono, also an official spokesman and also on 2 October, gave the total for 'B' Category as 15,999 - a 50% increase on the Attorney-General's figure.

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