

AMNESTY INTERNATIONALINTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON TORTURE, INHUMAN AND DEGRADING TREATMENTSTOCKHOLM - AUGUST, 1968The Condition of Political Prisoners in IndonesiaIntroduction

There may be as many as 80,000 political prisoners in Indonesia at the present time. Most of them have been detained without trial for more than two and a half years. They are former members and supporters of the communist party and the communist-led mass organisations, who were arrested in the months following the abortive pro-communist coup of October 1965.

In this report an attempt is made to summarize the information available to Amnesty in relation to

- their legal status and the prospects of their release
- the physical conditions in which they are detained
- the psychological pressures to which they are subjected
- and the situation of their dependants and relatives.

There are also brief statements about the treatment of the Chinese and the situation in West New Guinea.

In order to set the main body of the report in context, some account must first be given of the October coup and the massive reprisals which followed.

Background to the coup

In the early 1960's there was an increasing polarisation in Indonesian politics of pro- and anti-communists. By 1965 the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) had a membership of 3 million. It controlled the largest of the trade union groups (SOBSI), the Peasants' Front and the mass based women's and youth organisations, together involving a further 16 million people. (In a total Indonesian population of about 110 million.)

Since the defeat of an ill-timed communist revolt at Madiun in 1948, the PKI had moved away from the idea of armed struggle and had sought to extend its influence by co-operating with the nationalists and supporting the policies of President Sukarno. But with the army, which tended to act as a second arm of government, there could be no co-operation. The army represented the forces of reaction and stood for alliance with western imperialist powers: it remained the principal obstacle to the growth of communism. President Sukarno welcomed the rise of the PKI, partly for ideological reasons and partly as a curb on the political ambitions of his generals.

Sukarno's policies had brought Indonesia to the brink of economic collapse. There was a sense throughout the nation and at all levels of society that something had gone wrong with the 'Revolution'. The army and Muslim parties were only too ready to blame the communists, and the October coup provided them with an opportunity to take revenge. The influence of the PKI had risen at the expense of one of the Muslim parties which had been suppressed; and many of the Muslims, branding all communists as atheists, regarded them with a fanatical religious hatred.

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The coup

In the early hours of the morning of October 1st 1965, a coup was staged in Djakarta by rebel elements of the army and air force, led by Lt. Col. Untung, calling themselves the 'September the 30th Movement' (since known by the acronym 'Gestapu'). Six of Indonesia's key generals were taken from their homes and brutally murdered by the rebels. But the seventh, and the most important, General Nasution, Minister of Defence, escaped. By morning the rebels had captured the radio station and other strategic posts in Djakarta. But they reckoned without the prompt and decisive reaction of Major General (now General) Suharto, who, acting on his own initiative, rallied the loyalist forces, and in little more than twenty-four hours defeated the rebels and restored order in the capital.

Many things about the coup remain obscure, but it is fairly clear that while the leaders of the communist party knew in advance of Untung's plan and had given their approval, it was not an attempt at a communist revolutionary coup d'etat. Probably it was not aimed against the state at all but was 'solely within the army' as Untung said in his first radio statement on October 1st. The alleged pretext for the murder of the generals was that they had been planning to overthrow Sukarno. Whether or not there is any truth in this allegation, Sukarno did stand to gain from a change in the army leadership and it has been alleged that he, also, had advance knowledge of the coup.

The reprisals

In the days following the coup there were abortive revolts in other parts of Java, but the loyalist forces never really lost control. Sukarno wanted to protect the communists, but the generals were determined to fix the blame on them. They were encouraged by a joint declaration by Muslim and Catholic parties accusing the PKI of 'masterminding' the coup and calling on the president to ban the party and its mass organisations. General Nasution ordered the army to eliminate all communist party officials down to the level of local committee members. In the next few months something of the order of half a million people lost their lives. (no accurate figure is available and estimates vary from 100,000 to 1 million). The massacre spread to almost all parts of Indonesia but the toll was heaviest in Central and East Java, the most densely populated area and the stronghold of the Communist party.

In principle, suspects were arrested and screened; those found to be communists were either shot or imprisoned. But the army enlisted the help of Muslim youth groups, who were given two or three days training and sent out to kill. These gangs would go to a village late at night, round up all those thought to be communists or to have communist sympathies, lead them outside the village and there decapitate them with heavy knives or sickles, often forcing them to dig their own graves first. In some places no prompting from the army was needed; villages spontaneously carried out their own purges. There were areas where the population was reduced by a third or a half, and reports of entire villages wiped out. The worst of the killing was over ^{by} the end of 1965; but by then there were about 250,000 prisoners.

The prisoners

The figure of 80,000 is only a rough indication of the number of Gestapu-PKI prisoners remaining today. In July 1967 the Indonesian Attorney-General gave their number as 55,000 but officials of the Indonesian Government as well as outside observers have been of the opinion that this figure was far too low, their alternative estimates rising as high as 150,000. Clearly more than half of those originally arrested are now free but it appears that the rate at which they are being released has dropped considerably during the past twelve months. There have also been many new arrests and reports of released prisoners being rearrested.

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The prisoners are classified according to the seriousness of their case. Group A is the smallest group, comprising 4,700 'heavy cases'. They include the hard core of the communist party, those accused of direct involvement in the coup, together with former cabinet ministers and other politicians of the Sukarno era. Officially they are all scheduled to be tried but so far only about 60 of the most important have appeared in court. About twenty of these have been sentenced to death but in only four cases so far has the sentence been carried out. It is unlikely that more than a small proportion of the Group A prisoners will be tried in the near future.

Group B consists of a further 6,000 serious cases, but they are not even scheduled for trial. They are local leaders of communist and communist affiliated groups, regarded as dangerous and kept in 'political quarantine'. No law has ever been passed providing for such a status and no time limit is set on this 'quarantine'. Most of them, together with some of Group A, are in the five 'camps of exile' in central Java.

The majority of the prisoners are classified Group C. These are the light cases held on the notorious charge that 'there are sufficient indications to assume that they were directly or indirectly involved in the September 30th Movement'. In practice 'sufficient indication' meant membership of one of the communist organisations, which, although they have since been banned, were legal at the time. Prisoners in this group are all scheduled to be released 'after reindoctrination' and 'as local conditions permit'. The attitude of the authorities towards Group C prisoners is that although they have done no wrong, they have been misled by their leaders (i.e. the communists) and have to be re-educated before they can resume their place in society. Usually reindoctrination takes the form of religious instruction, which is undertaken voluntarily by Catholics and Protestants as well as Muslims. The prisoners have the freedom to refuse religious instruction but they are no doubt made aware that in doing so they jeopardise their chances of release.

Prison administration

Unfortunately there is no single government department responsible for the fate of the political prisoners. Most of the officials concerned in Djakarta are in favour of the early release of nearly all the Group C prisoners. But local military commanders, who have almost unlimited authority over the prisoners in their area, are mostly very reluctant to implement releases even when the decision has been taken in Djakarta. Some of them have a vested interest in prison labour; but they are also afraid of the reactions of militant Muslim groups. The increasing activity of communist guerillas in Java and Borneo can only serve to strengthen the case against a general amnesty.

The prisons

About 80 per cent of the prisoners are on the island of Java and 50 per cent of them in the single province of Central Java. There are probably several hundred different places of detention: the regular gaols, military and police barracks, specially constructed prison camps, and disused factories and schools. Most of the gaols are over-crowded (often 6-8 men in cells designed for 2 or 3) and in the camps prisoners are often housed in large, unpartitioned wooden sheds where there may be as many as 150 of them sharing the same living space, so that privacy is almost non-existent. Very few of the prisoners are confined to their cells. Many of the Group C prisoners do road work and building construction outside the camps. Where there are men and women in the same prison, the living quarters are entirely separate. A few women have their children with them in prison.

Murder and brutality

Throughout 1966 and the early months of 1967, there were frequent reports of prisoners being shot. In March 1967 it was reported that in Jogjakarta

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alone about 60 prisoners had been shot each week during the previous six months. Ngadjuk and Wonosobo were known as places to which prisoners were taken to be executed. These executions were extra-judicial: none of the victims had been tried.

Outside observers have not been allowed to visit some of the more notorious places of detention but there are rumours: 'when someone is sent to Pekalongan Gaol those who know what this means give up all hope of his coming out alive' - it is thought that some prisoners there are starved to death and others killed outright; on the island of Pulau Kemarau cruelty by the camp head and warders is said to be particularly harsh - women prisoners attractive to them survive, others die. One observer who visited a gaol in Central Java during 1967 gives the following report of his meeting with a local military officer: "I was sickened by the way in which this psychopathic individual boasted about the prisoners he had killed and proposed to kill, and by the way he interrogated a woman prisoner in our presence - 'before we do away with her,' he said. In this town we heard unhappy reports about military men availing themselves of women prisoners." There have been many reports of physical torture and psychological coercion used on prisoners in the course of interrogation. Prisoners are said to have been beaten with rubber truncheons, iron rods, bamboo sticks and even the sharp tails of sharks, to have been subjected to electric shocks and forced to eat the pages of Marxist books. Even the Indonesian Assistant Attorney-General has recently admitted (in a statement quoted in the Djakarta Times of May 22nd 1968) that "the treatment of suspects is still opposed to the basic human rights. A suspect only confesses after being beaten." Most Group C prisoners have never been interrogated; most of the torture has probably involved prisoners in Groups A and B, and among them the lower class rather than the upper class or better educated prisoners.

Shortage of food and medicine

The government allocation for food is 2.5 Rupiahs per prisoner per day. (One U.S. dollar for 80 prisoners). But the distribution of even this meagre sum is uneven; some prisoners receive less; some none at all. Prisoners' families are allowed to supply food but many of them do not even have enough for their own needs. Those Group C prisoners who are allowed to work outside their camps are generally better fed than others. Some are paid for their work, but more often the local commander is profiting by hiring out prison labour and he provides extra food to keep the prisoners fit enough to work.

The government supplies only the most minimal medical care. The monthly allowance for drugs is 0.3 Rupiah per prisoner (3 dollars for 2,000 prisoners). In some places a doctor from the local public hospital pays an occasional visit. In others a doctor among the inmates is allowed to examine fellow prisoners. But drugs are almost completely unavailable. Tuberculosis, dysentery and a variety of skin and eye disease are common.

The following extracts from first-hand reports give some idea of the conditions. The quantities of food quoted may be taken as typical; that is to say most of the prisoners receive less than 200 grammes of carbohydrate daily and very little else. In some prisons water is short; and one cup of boiled water is the ration.

1. A prison in Central Java, 1967

"As it happened we were there as people were queueing up for their mid-day meal. It consisted of a very small ladle full of rice and some watery soup. 'This is what we get', one woman prisoner called out to me, 'this and nothing else'. The prison director said that he was receiving no more than 0.7 Rupiah per prisoner per day from the government, which enabled him to get a daily 100 grammes (8 spoonful) of corn for each prisoner. In addition to that he was getting rice from some of the prisoners' families ... The gaol's head told me that seven people had died per day before he became head of the establishment. He had stopped this by getting the prison hospital established and getting some prisoners taken to hospitals in the city. But I found the prison hospital intensely depressing, no sheets and two prisoners to a bed in most cases".

2. A prison in West Java, 1967

"Things have been very much worse at Salemba since the end of 1966 when a new commander took over; and they are evidently getting worse all the time. Food: what the government supplies is rice twice a day (which is certainly better than in most camps in Central Java) but only 8 spoonsful at a time, with watery soup (made from bajem plants grown by the prisoners). The amount of food received from outside is diminishing steadily as the prisoners' families are poorer and more and more leave Djakarta to go to their places of origin. There are 1,700 prisoners in the whole prison (dying at the rate of one a week in 1966, apparently not so rapidly this year) and there is usually food from outside for 700 on Saturdays, 400 on Tuesdays and 200 on Thursdays, the days on which the families are permitted to bring it to the prison gates."

3. A prison camp in Central Java, 1967

"The camp obtained 2.5 Rupiahs per prisoner per day, and from that the prisoners could be fed once a day. The usual thing was 150 grammes of bulgur wheat and 0.15 Rupiah vegetables (i.e. a minute quantity). Recently however, it had become possible for a lot of the prisoners to work both inside the camp and outside. This made the food situation much better."

In one reported instance, political prisoners were being given less food than criminals in the same prisons; reduction of the food ration is sometimes used as a means of punishing prisoners: many of the prison staff are, however, genuinely concerned about the shortage of food and the very real danger of prisoners starving to death.

Note: Many of the well known prisoners in Group A have been comfortably housed and well fed: the conditions reported here are typical of those in which the majority of prisoners live.

Dependants

The widows and orphans of the massacre and the families of political prisoners are still treated as social outcasts. In rural areas where kinship ties are strong, many have been taken into the homes of relatives. But in the towns no one wants to be associated with anyone involved in the communist movement. Orphanages have refused to take orphans of the massacre. It is often impossible for relatives of prisoners to find regular employment and many men and women have been forced to become pedlars and street vendors doing a pitiful trade in cigarettes, old clothes and second-hand household articles. Many children have had to leave school to help their mothers earn a living. For released prisoners there is little chance of employment and one group even requested readmission to their prison camp.

Often a prisoner's wife does not know where her husband is. And even when she does know it is unlikely that she will be informed even if he is seriously ill. If he dies, a message may reach her, perhaps months later, that she need no longer send food.

Treatment of the Chinese

There are about three million Chinese in Indonesia, of whom about a third are Indonesian citizens. Their commercial success, though important in the economy, has long been resented by the people. The Chinese community as a whole was blamed, along with the communist party, for the 1965 coup, and there were outbreaks of mob violence directed specifically against the Chinese. One of the worst was at Medan in Sumatra in December 1965, where thousands of Chinese were driven from their homes. After months of persecution they were eventually herded into refugee camps outside Medan, in the hope that arrangements could be made for their repatriation to Communist China (whether they were Chinese citizens or not). About 4,000 have been taken to China, but several thousand remain in conditions which are said to be appalling; not even the religious organisations are allowed into the camps.

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The Dayak raids. Throughout 1967 communist guerillas (many of them from Sarawak) harrassed villages in West Borneo. In November the Indonesian government authorized the Dayaks, primitive tribesmen living near the border with Sarawak, to take action against the guerillas, 80 per cent of whom (so the government stated) were Chinese. But the Dayaks went beserk and launched a campaign against the entire Chinese community. They descended on Chinese villages looting and setting fire to their houses. Most of the Chinese fled and those that remained or tried to return were killed. More than 50,000 of them fled to the coastal area around Pontianak and Singkawang, where they remain today in some 30 refugee camps. The food provided by the government is barely enough to sustain life and doctors in the area are mostly unwilling to work in the camps for fear of being branded pro-communist or pro-Chinese. The refugees are reported to be dying at the rate of more than a hundred per week and the death rate is particularly high among pregnant women and young children.

West Irian (West Papua)

Next year the United Nations will hold a referendum in West Irian to enable the native population to determine whether or not their country is to remain a part of Indonesia. (The Papuans are Melanesians and racially distinct from the Malay population of the rest of Indonesia.) Meanwhile the Indonesian government is taking violent measures to suppress the movement for Free Papua. It is estimated that there are 12,000 government troops deployed there at the moment. There is virtually no freedom of opinion and more than a thousand people are in prison for advocating independence. Many prisoners have died as a result of torture and starvation. A 1966 police order speaks of 'indoctrination' being forcibly introduced to compel the people to give their votes to Indonesia' (i.e. in the 1969 referendum). The same order 'ordains' that 'those who still keep up contact with the population should be shot in such a way that the matter is kept secret and does not leak through to other parts of Indonesia or the local population get acquainted with it.'

Clearly the government is trying to sabotage the coming referendum. Whatever methods the United Nations team may use, the Papuans are so intimidated by the army and the police that they are in no position to make an 'act of free choice'. West New Guinea receives almost no attention in the International Press and a thorough investigation of the situation there is urgently required.

Conclusions

Attempts to persuade the Indonesian government to release all or most of its political prisoners are unlikely to meet with much response. Perhaps large numbers of them could be released, but in some areas a general amnesty might well lead to a renewal of communal violence. The government should be urged to reform the prison administration by setting up a central authority to take responsibility for all the political prisoners, and drastically reducing the powers of the local military commanders; and to fulfil its responsibility to provide for the basic food and health needs of the prisoners. (It must be remembered in this context that the Indonesian government is still facing enormous economic difficulties.) Some relief work is being undertaken by Muslim and Christian organisations among both the prisoners and their families, but in the view of the extent of the suffering they can achieve very little. Clearly there is a desperate need for material aid from overseas: food and clothes, and medical supplies and personnel. This could best be provided by or channelled through secular organisations such as Oxfam and the International Red Cross, working in conjunction with Muslim rather than Christian bodies in Indonesia. (The Muslims, who are the majority, strongly resent the work being done by Christians.)

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The information available for the compilation of this report was fragmentary and very little of it of more recent date than December 1967. If possible, an observer should therefore be sent to Indonesia immediately to undertake an extensive and detailed investigation of the conditions in the gaols, prison camps and Chinese refugee camps, and of the needs of the families of prisoners and massacre victims. With more comprehensive and up-to-date information it would be easier to arouse international concern for the hundreds of thousands still suffering the consequences of the 1965 coup.