

POLITICAL DETENTION IN INDONESIA

There are now about 70,000 men and women detained for political reasons in Indonesia. The majority were arrested after the failure of a coup d'etat, directed by left-wing Army officers, and intended to bring to power a communist government. All are held without charge or trial on the basis of administrative orders issued by the military authorities, and on the broad charge of supporting the Indonesian communist movement.

Precise official statistics are not available nor have lists been published giving the names of detainees. The first detailed statement of official policy was made in October 1969. This laid down as a basic principle that the future of each detainee depended not on legal considerations but on his security classification. The total number of men and women in prison, detention camps or under house arrest was given as 116,000. As a result of military screening, those in custody had been placed in four categories: 'A' contained about 5,000 detainees, who would be brought to trial; the 15,000 in Category 'B' would be neither tried nor - since they were regarded as committed marxists - released, but detained indefinitely, either in camps or at the 'resettlement project' on the Moluccan island of Buru; Category 'C' - about 30,000 - eventually to be released; Category 'X' contained another 30,000 plus detainees, who have not yet been classified. During 1970, more than 10,000 'C' Category prisoners were released.

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, led by Colonel Untung, murdered six prominent generals; although many members of the group had communist links, 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, or at least permitted, a wave of mass killing which rapidly spread through Java, Sumatra and Bali. Perhaps 300,000, perhaps 500,000 and perhaps even more alleged communists died, and well over 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; reaction to the inflationary spiral, land hunger and general economic disruption, all combined together with an acute fear of communist domination. Although it has never been conclusively 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, the PKI 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 five years some thousands of 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. In addition there have been many new arrests. By the end of 1970 about 200 people had been brought to court and tried; they were charged with 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 has been brought before a court.

Classification and Categories

Detention policy is based on the assumption that the PKI planned the coup attempt, using Untung as its instrument; individual responsibility therefore falls not only on

the leadership but on Party officials and even down through the organisation to ordinary PKI members. Someone who held office in the PKI or SOBSI (the communist-controlled Trade Union Federation) or GERWANI (the PKI womens' organisation) is therefore said to have been 'involved' in Untung's attempt to take power, sometimes called the 30th September (1965) Movement. The prisoners have therefore been classified into one of the three categories according to the believed degree of their commitment to the communist movement - and thus their 'involvement' in the 1965 coup plan. The classification process is carried out by military screening teams - usually referred to by the acronym TEPERPU - who investigate a detainee's past political activities and affiliations and allocate him to Category 'A', 'B', or 'C'. There is no review or appeal mechanism; the procedure is wholly non-judicial; at no point may a detainee seek legal advice or representation; much reliance has in the past been placed on unchecked allegations from neighbours or acquaintances. The future of each detainee depends on the category into which he is placed. This arbitrary process is made the more dubious by the fact that in the late 1960s, and possibly today, denunciation of 'communists' was seen as an effective means of demonstrating loyalty to the Government.

Since the authorities do not normally make public the category into which a detainee has been placed, we do not know the precise composition of the three groupings. Those 'A' detainees so far brought to trial have been the men who took a direct part in the kidnapping of the generals and in the coup announcements on 30th September and 1st October 1965, military men said to be connected with the Untung group and prominent PKI leaders arrested either in 1965 or in 1968, when a PKI 'resistance' group was uncovered by the army in Blitar, East Java. The trials have taken place before military courts; there have been no acquittals.

Category 'B' contains at least 15,000 people, regarded officially as communists, but for whom the Government admits to having no evidence on which they could be tried. In practice this group seems to contain a very wide spectrum ranging from Central Committee members of the PKI to rank and file members of left-wing student and cultural groups; there is a substantial number of teachers, doctors, lawyers and technologists. The able-bodied men - and possibly women - in this category are being sent to a permanent 'resettlement' area on the Moluccan island of Buru, where a colony of about 50,000 is being planned, initially as an agriculturally-self-supporting community, and later as a focal point for the economic development of East Indonesia. The colony will be made up of detainees, who are permanently restricted to the island, and their families. The first wives are scheduled to go to Buru in 1972, but this depends on their willingness to leave their homes and families (at present only one child may accompany its mother), and on the 'mental attitude' (in other words, renunciation of left-wing political beliefs) of the detainee. There are at present 7,500 detainees on Buru, but this figure will rise to 10,000 by the end of 1971. The island is 1,000 miles from Java, the home of 75% of the prisoners, under-populated and under-developed without schools, hospitals or any of the cultural or economic facilities regarded as normal by all Javanese. The Buru project is dealt with in more detail in another paper.

Category 'C' - at least 30,000 - contains those detainees whose connection with the PKI is regarded as peripheral, perhaps ordinary membership of the Party or an affiliate, or even such a remote connection as participation in a PKI-run choir or sports team.

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 when he was arrested, probably because he had been a member of the Indonesian Scholars Association (HSI), a communist-affiliated academic 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 thinks 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, but since then visits have been allowed only on major religious festivals. 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 five years. His wife's greatest fear is that he will be re-categorised and placed on the list of prisoners to go to Buru island.

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 illness and 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. In rural areas, where families are unable or unwilling to send weekly rations, the situation is worse than in cities where detainees can depend on the food from outside; one recent unofficial estimate from Central Java, where distance and bureaucracy make family visits almost impossible, was a malnutrition rate of 60% but that is probably exceptionally high. 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 general practice. 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 many parts of the military administration. 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. Many 'C' prisoners are now able to work which results in better health and diet, but opinions differ as to how far some of the public works enterprises - road building or plantation work - extend even after nominal release, particularly in Sumatra, and can become a form of compulsory and unpaid - i.e. forced - labour.

In June 1970 the first visits by International Red Cross officials were allowed and in 1971 an ICRC mission was able to visit the Buru settlement as well as selected camps on Java and Bali. This should lead to an improvement in material conditions.

Release Policy

Although screening of Government employees, and arrests of suspected communists appear to continue, especially in East and Central Java, and although military leaders remain opposed to measures of liberalisation, the Indonesian Government's decision to release Category 'C' has now been made. 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 was seen as political sympathy for the Communist Party, and few Indonesians were willing to take the political risk of arguing for basic legal and material provisions for the detainees. This climate has to some extent softened. For advocates of a general amnesty the essential problem is how more than 70,000 people, most of whom have been held in strict detention in often appalling conditions over five years, can be reabsorbed into a society many sections of which participated in the massacre of their political colleagues, in 1965, so benefitting from the appropriation of

their jobs and property, a society which has been consistently encouraged by religious leaders, by the Army and by the Government to regard all prisoners as communists and all communists as natural enemies. It is in this context that the Buru 'settlement' scheme must be seen.

The arguments advanced against the release or trial of prisoners have stressed the risks of a communist revival which could undermine the country's tenuous political stability; the administrative difficulties inherent in trying prisoners for an over-worked judiciary already unable to deal with its normal legal work (only 51% of Indonesian judges are fully trained); the need for national 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. But with the 1970 releases - which resulted neither in security incidents nor in a revival of violence - these arguments have lost weight.

Until recently official attitudes actively discouraged any rehabilitation of released prisoners. But in the last eighteen months serious efforts have been made from Djakarta to change popular attitudes. This is an uphill task in view of two vital factors: the national unemployment rate is high - in Central Java it rose by 50% in 1968/9, with an official figure of 25% under-employment for the population as a whole; most official transactions, whether employment, moving house, enrolling in university, etc., demand a 'certificate of non involvement' (in coup attempt) for anyone over 15 years old, testifying that the individual has had no connection with the political left. An employer who takes a man on without such a certificate fears that he may later be held guilty of 'harbouring a communist'. The procedure for obtaining a certificate is a complex one liable to lend itself to corruption since at least four different civil and police signatures must be obtained. 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 disassociated itself from this practice, it seems to be very general throughout most of the country. Not only does this encourage local prejudice against ex-prisoners, but it creates a situation in which a released prisoner, economically destitute, and possibly rejected by his family, may naturally gravitate towards clandestine political circles where he believes he will be treated as an individual and not as an outcast.

The release of the 'C' category was announced for the end of 1969; in fact, about 10,000 were freed during 1970, but releases stopped with the advent of the 1971 election campaign, and have not yet been resumed. Officials in Djakarta stress that the release of Category 'C' is a priority, and explain the delays as due partly to the reluctance of regional military or civil officials actually to let detainees out of the jails, perhaps through fears of seeming 'soft on communism' in the eyes of local right-wing Islamic groups.

Amnesty Policy

Two Amnesty missions have visited Indonesia. In 1969, Julius Stone, Challis Professor of International Law in the University of Sydney, went from Australia; in 1970 Sean MacBride, International Chairman of Amnesty and Secretary General of the International Commission of Jurists, spent a week in Djakarta. Amnesty's attitude on Indonesian official policy was spelt out in a Memorandum sent by Sean MacBride to President Suharto in February 1971, and published in August 1971.

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