

the roots of the problem political imprisonment

A major problem haunting Indonesia today is that of the political prisoners. The speeches of President Suharto and his Government make frequent reference to it while, at a deeper level, its importance is reflected in the fact that since 1965, a new word has been added to the language - *Tapol* - (*tahanan politik*: political prisoner).

In the first years after Independence, Indonesia was virtually free from political imprisonment. Then, in the late nineteen fifties, after regional rebellions had taken place in several parts of the Republic, several thousand political arrests were made; by the early 1960's, most were released under a general amnesty and fully rehabilitated. Some few political leaders remained in prison and were joined by occasional journalists and critics of the Sukarno Government.

During the nineteen sixties, Indonesian politics underwent an increasing polarisation between left and right; in October 1965, this came to a head with the defeat of a left-wing coup attempt by the army, the gradual replacement of Sukarno's Cabinet by a military administration and the onset of a massive and violent anti-communist purge in which more than three hundred thousand died and two hundred and fifty thousand were arrested. The *tapol* problem has now become a permanent feature of Indonesian society.

THE SUKARNO ERA

Its roots date back to several years before September 1965, when martial law was promulgated in 1957 and Guided Democracy was introduced in 1959 by President Sukarno. To the outside world this period is associated with Sukarno's flamboyant character and with his spectacular foreign policy of struggle for the re-incorporation of West Irian into the Republic, confrontation with the newly-established Malaysia, withdrawal from the United Nations and close alliance with Peking. Internally, however, the Army succeeded in expanding its powers, not only militarily but also in political and economic affairs.

After the promulgation of martial law in 1957, many army officers became government administrators and in some places

ruled like 'warlords' who were almost unassailable by the central Government. With the nationalisation of Dutch enterprises in 1958, many sectors of the economy were placed under army control.

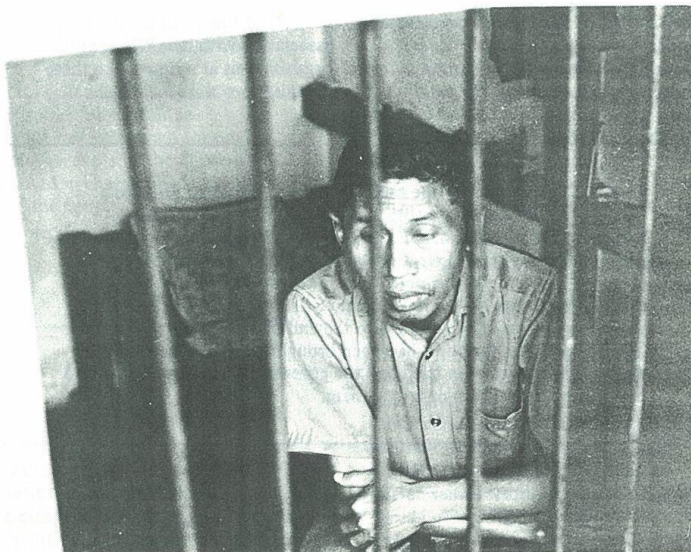
There was only one serious contender for power rivalling the Army leadership during this period: the Communist Party (PKI) which claimed a rapidly expanding membership, reaching more than three million in 1965. In addition, mass organisations under communist leadership had a combined membership of well over ten million.

At the Centre, the Army and the PKI worked in a shaky alliance with President Sukarno, but bitter conflicts arose be-

tween the two forces in the regions. In some places, Party committees were outlawed and their leaders placed in detention.

But time and again, the President, who used the PKI as a counterweight to the growing power of the Army, protected the party and countermanded Army decisions.

PKI attacks on military management of the economy were stepped up and antagonisms grew as the pro-Chinese stand of the PKI became more apparent. Tensions sharpened during 1964 and 1965 when the PKI openly supported unilateral actions by peasants to expropriate landowners in an attempt to enforce implementation of the Land Reform Law. Things reached breaking point when the PKI advocated the creation of a 'Fifth Force' of armed peasants and workers to fight Malaysia side by side with the Army, the Air Force, the Navy and the Police Force. But before this



Indonesian political prisoner in West Kalimantan.