

# the island of buru

new means of living together with their families, because it will only risk their own safety if they are to be returned to their original community now".\*

The impression created by this statement is that the prisoners are being held there for their own protection. But, as we read on, the contrary becomes apparent. In the very next sentence, the Attorney-General goes on to say that the men being sent to Buru are those strongly believed to have played "an important role planning, supervising and carrying out..... the 30th September/PKI Movement either before, during or after it took place; however, we have not ample evidence to prosecute them further. We consider it still dangerous for our security if we return them to the community; they are still like a thorn for the community."

So, after all, it is the community that, in the Government's view, needs protection and from men who cannot be prosecuted because of lack of evidence. Then, the Attorney-General, the man who heads the Indonesian judiciary, goes on to express the hope that "with this brochure, prejudices and wrong impressions such as, notably, that the Government does not uphold human rights, will be avoided". It is for the reader to decide whether the Attorney-General has made a convincing case in support of his assertion that the Indonesian Government is upholding human rights.

## FORCED LABOUR?

The essence of the Buru project is that men who are to be held in permanent detention must work for their own sustenance and cease to be a burden upon the Government that holds them captive. Provision for prisoners on Buru is the responsibility of the authorities only for the first eight months after their arrival; from then on, they must live from their own labour.

Official declarations about Buru always stress that the project is not a concentration camp but an agricultural re-settlement scheme where political prisoners will be "given the opportunity" to become self-sufficient. There is, we are told, no forced labour on Buru. The Attorney-General, in the Preface already quoted above, makes the point in the following words "... re-settlement on Buru island is dissimilar to any old-fashioned or recent concentration camps abroad, because in Buru Island there is no forced labour".

The Bapreru brochure is at great pains to justify its system of labour on humanitarian grounds. It quotes a Dutch colonial regulation stipulating that detainees should "wherever possible, be given the opportunity to work". It then states that, according to the Pantja Sila principles "everyone should work to the best of their ability", and then shifts ground to make the bold assertion that "everyone whether a member of a free society or undergoing punishment ... is obliged to work."

This circuitous argument is then crowned by a paragraph that proclaims the following: "Procuring work to detainees of the 30th September Movement/PKI, therefore, is one of the Government's efforts in respecting them as human beings who, in the interest of the development of their physical and social life, have to work to the best of their ability."

## A MATTER OF SURVIVAL

It is one matter for the laws of any state to uphold the right of its free citizens to work; it is quite another matter for a government to assume the right to impose upon its untried captives the obligation to work for their very survival.

For, indeed, to the political prisoners on Buru, survival depends on a twelve-hour day of arduous labour under the strict supervision of armed guards. It is a programme that applies to all alike, young and old, sick and healthy, to writers, scientists and artists who have been deprived of any opportunity to devote even part of their energies to creative work of their own choosing. One foreign journalist who visited the

island in December 1971 and published his impressions in Newsweek on 14th February, 1972, described it in these words: "For those with no previous farming experience, and for the older men and the intellectuals, the gruelling manual labour is sheer physical punishment".

## "RETURN TO SOCIETY"

According to a statement made by Deputy Attorney-General Sutrisno Hamidjojo, in December 1971, then in charge of the Buru project, the final stage for Buru prisoners is the stage when they are "returned to society", the stage of 'socialisation'.

"Returning to society" sounds very much like rehabilitation or release; in other words the end of detention. But the Indonesian authorities have something very different in mind. At this final stage, said the Deputy Attorney-General, "political prisoners would remain on the island, but would no longer be bound by discipline, such as, for example, attending roll-call." They would be allowed to have their families with them, but as we shall see later, this had not meant freedom for the men prisoners but rather semi-captivity for the families.

Furthermore, before a political prisoner is allowed to advance to the final stage of his life on Buru, he must change his ideology from communism to the Pantja Sila, and agree to contribute his energies to constructive effort. It is not clear how the authorities intend to verify the ideological leanings of their captives who are, anyhow, being held in Buru because they are believed to be "dedicated communists" and "traitors".

## CONDITIONS

A fair amount is known about conditions on Buru. The Government

*Prisoner resting during hard labour out in the field.*

