

release

the problems

In 1971, amid considerable international pressure and concern, the Indonesian Government undertook to release 22,000 'C' category prisoners and since then, some thousands have been freed though no reliable figures are available. But in a society so gripped by the fear of 'communism' release is by no means the end of the problem for the ex-detainee.



According to official information, these prisoners of the 'C' category in Tangerang were recently released from prison.

Let us take the case of prisoners who return to their home towns or villages to rejoin their families. After six years or more without contact, a released prisoner may return home to find that his wife has remarried or that all his relatives have left without trace.

The majority, coming back after such a long absence, find a community afraid to welcome them back; alienation from friends, neighbours and even close relatives is the result. They may find that their home is now occupied by military personnel. Here is one example of the caprice with which the military authorities treat the homes of political detainees. In 1970, the Jakarta military command wrote a letter notifying the occupant of a large house in the city that they planned to expropriate it because it

was large and in a 'VIP area'. His assent would be assumed unless they received his refusal in writing. The man was then - and is now - in Salemba Prison. The house was appropriated. As a political prisoner is unable to receive or send letters, he had, of course, been unable even to read the original letter, let alone to object.

READJUSTMENT TO BE DIFFICULT

Then comes the problem of readjusting to society. There are no state schemes to facilitate this difficult process and no private associations dare to take the initiative, except occasional Christian organisations. Even where accommodation can be found, it will not be easy to find a job in a country with such a high rate of unemployment. Few people want to take the risk of employing a man or woman with a 'communist'

past, and many jobs are firmly closed to applicants without political clearance papers.

On paper, those released that are of certain professional groups have specific rights; released prisoners who were once civil servants or in the armed forces are classified into three sub-categories: C1, C2 and C3. Those in the first category are entitled to apply for pensions but may not regain their former post. Those in the second category are allowed, in principle, to return to their former office but are excluded from senior positions. Those in the third category are entitled to full rehabilitation. Impressive in theory, the practice is less secure as hardly anyone knows what category he or she belongs to and the former place of work may be quite unaware of, or unwilling to recognise, the ex-detainee's rights. In some cases, it takes time before the authorities decide upon a person's release category and meanwhile he is bound to remain idle, trying to keep alive by doing odd jobs.

Furthermore, there is no form of legal redress if a former prisoner's rights are not acknowledged, or his house has been requisitioned. He finds himself in many cases a second-class citizen and cannot hope to take legal action because of the expense. A few legal aid institutes have recently been established on private initiative, but they dare not provide unpaid legal services to ex-detainees because of the stigma that would attach to their work.

Added to all this, the spectre of rearrest is very real. Released prisoners are the first to come under suspicion if a fire breaks out or a train is derailed. Such events are immediately interpreted by the Army as 'subversive sabotage' or the work of 'communist agents'.

For all these reasons, life for the released detainee is replete with difficulties.