

# political prisoners' families

## the fight for survival

Indonesian society has always been known for its sense of social cohesion, its ability to care for those stranded by misfortune or left without a breadwinner. There is no social security system, but the traditional social cohesion has in the past managed to deal with problems which, in a welfare state, would become the responsibility of the State. Since 1965, this fine tradition has been shattered; large numbers of people have found themselves without communal sympathy and protection because of the pervading anti-communist atmosphere. They are the families of political prisoners, the wives and children of prisoners, and children deprived of parents since 1965 through imprisonment or death.

### SOCIAL OSTRACISM

This is not simply a matter of coping with economic problems and educating children; it extends to a kind of social ostracism that has destroyed friendships, broken fraternal blood relationships and made good-neighbourliness a rare exception rather than an accepted mode of behaviour towards those related to political prisoners. It is almost as though these families suffer from a contagious disease and no one who can possibly avoid it wants to become contaminated.

How then do the wives and children of political prisoners survive? Some

wives have cut their relations with their imprisoned husbands altogether. They have been unable to bear the strain of prolonged separation with no prospects of reunion. Life is not easy for a woman without her husband in Indonesian society, and many prisoners' wives have fallen prey to pressures exerted upon them by military officers. Their fear for their children's security has made them particularly vulnerable.

The vast majority of wives, however, have not succumbed to this type of pressure, and a very large number of them live on the brink of starvation. Few of them can find regular jobs, not

only because of a lack of skill or qualifications, but also because most employers demand a "declaration of non-involvement in the 1965 coup" which detainees' wives are not able to get, unless they have money to bribe local officials. Some people have been able to purchase these declarations for prices varying from two to several hundred dollars, a thing that is not uncommon in a society where corruption has become almost a way of life.

### NON-INVOLVEMENT DECLARATIONS

Neither is it an easy matter for the children of detainees to continue their education. A major difficulty is finance; school fees are high, even for primary schools, and transportation to and from school may require even more money than the fees. Moreover, children require 'non-involvement declarations' to take examinations or enter university; this applies even to children who were little more than infants at the time of the coup. In 1971, the press reported that children entering secondary school at the age of 14 had to produce one of these declarations, yet they were only eight years old at the time of the coup!

Many wives try to make a living from dressmaking or baking cakes which

*Mrs. Pramudya Ananta Tur and four of her eight children in her home in Jakarta. Her husband - the famous writer - is detained in Buru.*

