

# BOOK REVIEWS

*Ten Years of Military Terror in Indonesia*, Spokesman Books, 298 pp., \$6.

Published by the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation in 1975, this book was "written and compiled to remind the world of the tenth anniversary of the coming to power on a sea of blood of the present Indonesian fascist military regime". It consists of 14 articles by 13 writers who examine the coup, the Suharto regime and its role in imperialist strategy.

Since the book was published, the Indonesian generals have invaded East Timor and are committing a second genocide to incorporate that people into their "empire". This gives the book a special topicality and relevance for Australia, since ruling class foreign policy gives a special place to 'friendship' with Suharto's Indonesia - whether Whitlam or Fraser is Prime Minister.

This book should be read by everyone who wants to know what sort of a regime it is, what its policies are, who rules the country and the consequences for the people of Indonesia and the region. Reading this book stirred memories of several visits to Indonesia, with special reference to the events of September 1965, the results of which this book examines. Two experiences stand out with the stark clarity of hindsight.

One was in 1954, when I attended the Fifth Congress of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), its first Congress under legal conditions. Even this legality was conditional; the real congress had already been held and the one I attended was only a public occasion!

After the Congress was over, the comrades asked me to stay and do a tour with some of their leaders, 'to strengthen internationalism'. That took me to Palembang and Medan in Sumatra, to Central and East Java as well as Jakarta, speaking at huge mass meetings (altogether the audiences exceeded a million). The leaders were D.N. Aidit and Njoto, both murdered in 1965, and Jusuf Adjitrup who survived.

At Malang in Central Java, we spoke at a meeting in a huge park, with about 100,000 people present. As in other such meetings, it was held in the afternoon. The speakers and leading figures of the party and mass organisations were seated on a big platform made of bamboo. One was a haji (a Muslim who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca and other holy places of Islam, and therefore a person of standing in the Muslim community).

The meeting began with enormous enthusiasm, but with organised opposition from a group of students from the Arab Muslim University in the city. This group infiltrated the crowd and surrounded the platform, armed with spears and led by a young man armed with a revolver. They were shouting and screaming with rage, brandishing their spears and shouting slogans. Turning to the comrade who was my interpreter (Bintang Suwanti, a fine comrade who later drowned), I asked what it was all about. They are calling out 'Kill the haji', he said. I laughed, probably to appear nonchalant. Bintang said urgently 'Don't laugh, it will only enrage them'. I quickly stopped.

The local comrades were inexperienced in security. The Arab students were only a small minority, perhaps 200, but they made such a row that the meeting was disrupted. After half an hour or so, the military police suddenly acted (there were hundreds present at that and all other meetings we held). They moved in through the crowd from its outskirts with weapons at the ready. As they did, the people scattered like autumn leaves before a gale. The officer in charge ordered us into a military jeep, PKI general secretary Aidit, Bintang, Gandi, security guard travelling with us, and myself. We were taken to a military police post about 20 kilometres away. We were held for a couple of hours. I didn't know what was happening, since we didn't talk much. They finally released us. We caught a train to Surabaya and 'went into smoke' in the house of a middle rank government employee, spending the hottest night I've ever experienced, sleeping two to a bed in a room with the windows shut.

We resumed our tour the next day - the PKI was very strong in Surabaya, home of the biggest concentration of industrial workers in Indonesia. In our later journeying, Aidit casually said to me 'Can you drive, comrade Aarons?' When I answered yes, he said, 'We thought so. While we were travelling in that jeep, we discussed whether we'd overpower the driver and make a break for it, but none of us could drive.'

Even then, I didn't fully understand how serious it had been. At a farewell function just before I left Indonesia, Aidit spoke and referred to the Malang incident, saying 'Comrade Aarons and I faced death together in Malang'. I thought then that this was a piece of Javanese exaggeration, although I knew that Aidit had in fact narrowly escaped death six years before, in the 1948 Madiun incident (when rightwing army officers had massacred thousands



of communists). He had been captured and escaped only with the help of friendly soldiers.

Eleven years later, it no longer seemed so exaggerated. The Malang incident showed the fanaticism of Muslim extremists who were to kill so many communists and their supporters - how the ordinary people feared the army and how unpredictable it was.

The second experience was in 1962, when I visited Indonesia for another Congress (the Seventh). Sukarno had nationalised most foreign enterprises and plantations, putting them under mainly military control. The generals and colonels were plundering these companies in the most brazen fashion, accumulating huge fortunes in a few months and living in flagrant luxury, sporting big American cars and flash houses.

The PKI paper, **Harian Rakjat** (People's Daily), had launched an attack on what it called 'bureaucrat capitalists', hinting broadly at military corruption. The Jakarta army commander had sent a squad to seize the edition and had closed down the paper. Aidit spoke at a public meeting just after I arrived, rebutting the bureaucratic capitalist charge and demanding lifting of the paper's closure. It was lifted later, but the Army was to take a dreadful revenge three years later, slaughtering countless thousands encouraging and protecting the Muslim fanatics in brutal murders of whole communities. The total dead is still not known; possibly a million, certainly not less than 500,000. I remember visiting a village near Den Pasar, in Bali, the home of a world-famous Hindu dance group. The whole village took part in a magnificent performance for us; they were all PKI members or supporters. That whole village was put to death in 1965. The Solo River at Surakarta, a beautiful river which I'd visited, was filled with corpses for days after the massacre. The city was a PKI stronghold.

In one of the most interesting articles in this book, Peter Dale Scott traces the United States involvement in the military seizure of power. He begins by setting its historical significance:

"The bloody suppression of the Indonesian Left in 1965 marks a new phase in the history of modern counter-revolution: the resort to mass extermination in an attempt to consolidate authoritarian power ....creating a gruesome precedent for the slaughter that accompanied the Cambodian coup of 1970, and the Chilean coup of 1973."

Scott shows that the United States developed a "new strategic concept of military-economic development". Its thesis was that "the officer corps of under-developed countries in general, and Indonesia in particular, constituted a naturally selected and morally superior elite, the only viable alternative to communist takeover, who should

therefore be given 'constructive assistance' in preparation for direct responsibility over the economic development of their nation."

Ernst Utrecht and other writers dissect this 'morally superior elite', showing its incredible corruption and misuse of Indonesia's rich resources to enrich the 'bureaucratic capitalists'. Utrecht points out that Pertamina was the only state-owned oil industry in the world that almost went bankrupt - at a time when oil prices had shot up to unheard of levels! An exiled Indonesian journalist, G.W. Satyajit, quotes from the Indonesian paper **Kompas**:

"Corruption has become more rampant than ever. Approximately 30 per cent of the GNP, or 3,000 million of its 9,375 million dollar total, is corrupted."

The role of oil in Indonesia is immense, and Michael Morrow examines this in 'The Politics of Southeast Asian Oil'. Other essays deal with repression and political prisoners, agriculture, Islam, the Chinese as scapegoats for the regime, and other questions.

Of special interest is Ingrid Palmer's piece on the economy, which shows the tremendous hold of foreign capital in the economy. In 1974, Japan was ahead of the United States (\$1,038.9 million compared with \$851 million). It is particularly interesting to note that Australian companies are second to the United States in mining investment with \$96 million (Japan is third with \$76 million). This gives Australian capital a material as well as ideological interest in maintaining the Suharto regime.

What of the future? Ernst Utrecht, in his second piece in the book, examines the PKI since 1966. He reports continuing PKI activity in Java, South Sumatra, Sulawesi and Kalimantan, including guerrilla actions in the countryside and even occasionally in Jakarta. Although these "are still comparatively weak and do not as yet form an immediate threat .... There is no doubt that the roots of the PKI are too tenaciously embedded in Indonesian history and society ever to yield ..."

The day of reckoning may be closer than Utrecht foresaw a year ago. The generals' aggression in Timor, thought to be easy, is still meeting heroic and effective resistance. This could well sharpen all the contradictions in an essentially unstable regime which could quickly disintegrate when the Indonesian people act.

This gives a special dimension to the importance of solidarity with East Timor, second only to the duty to assist a small people in their struggle against brutal oppression. In aiding Timor, we also help the oppressed people of Indonesia against Suharto and his imperialist backers.

- Laurie Aarons.