What lies ahead of Indonesia, racked with conflicts a year after the attempted coup?

IT seemed so simple to many observers late last year. The Indonesian generals had taken over, destroyed the Communist Party in a frenzy of blood-letting, broken President Sukarno's grip on national politics and established a tight control of administration throughout the country. It was only a matter of time before they consolidated their rule, rounded out contours of a rightwing military regime, and with Western aid began to put the ramshackle economy in order.

The actuality today is far removed from this complacent prospect indulged in by Australian foreign affairs spokesmen and editorial writers. Beneath the fascination with the public acrimony and intrigue emanating from Djakarta there can be discerned a profound unease with the continuing instability and division exhibited by the Indonesian elite, and the growing signs of deepening tensions throughout the archipelago.

The terse fact is that the elimination for the time being of the Communist Party (PKI) as a coherent political force has only served to unleash all the conflicts that exist in Indonesian society, and not least within its ruling circles. All those who saw in the rise of communism the most palpable threat to their power positions and their wealth, or who jumped on the army bandwagon when it began to roll on its bloody course, drank deep of the heady wine of victory in those early months, only to awake to the realisation that the struggle for survival and supremacy was still on in dead earnest.

It is next to impossible to sort out the multifarious streams
of antagonism that are funnelled into the capital and there released again through the statements, the actions and the conspiracies of military commanders, politicians, bureaucrats, religious functionaries, speculators and student action commands. Certainly they can be reduced to no straight-forward set of political and ideological discords. The self interest of ambitious military officers and corrupt state officials intertwines with religious affiliations, regional and local loyalties, professional jealousies, departmental rivalries, ethnic attachments and personal cliquism to present a bewildering patchwork of motivation to the observer.

However, some of the more potent centres of political conflict can be isolated to an extent. Three main groupings can be found in the army leadership (alongside many lesser alliances founded on regional interests and the power of local commanders). Furthest to the right is the grouping around General Haris Nasution, the former army strongman and only survivor of the Untung movement's kidnappings last October 1. In the light of the army's disunity, Nasution has sought to revive the fortunes of the Moslem party Masjumi, which was outlawed as a result of its complicity in the regional rebellions of the late fifties. The main agitational arm of Nasution's thrust has been the extremist student body KAMI, which in the early part of this year rampaged through the capital on its anti-communist, anti-Sukarno missions. This grouping seems to have lost ground throughout the year, with the KAMI kept within certain bounds, Nasution manoeuvred out of the Cabinet, and Masjumi leader Hatta left standing in the wings offering his services to a wary establishment.

The second, and major, army grouping adheres to the Cabinet head, General Suharto, perhaps in large measure because he has emerged at the top. His ideological makeup is more complex. A strong anti-communist and advocate of the army's mission to hold the balance of power in the political arena, he is nevertheless drawn by his Javanese aristocratic background and his mysticism (he brought his soothsayer from the central Javanese city of Semarang to help guide his decision-making) towards a modified form of the Sukarno brand of nationalism. Despite his determination to cut Sukarno down to size, he shares the President's fear of a complete breakdown in national unity, and so finds himself trying to maintain a precarious balance among the competing political factions. He is under heavy
pressure from the Moslem Scholars' Party and the Nationalists to keep Nasution and the KAMI students on a leash, and appears to have made some concessions to their demands. He has stated his wish to confine the political process to two major parties representing rightwing Nationalists and a united Moslem party, with the army holding the ring and no doubt calling the tune. There is no sign at present that he can impose the necessary restraints on the factions to achieve his goal.

A third armed forces grouping, still strong in Central and East Java, and within the marines and the air force, maintains allegiance to Sukarno's aura, his strident nationalism and his vague ideology of social reform.

With the army thus splintered and incapable of asserting its naked will effectively, the door is left open to all the other elements in politics and the administration to lobby, scheme, bargain, obstruct and sabotage. The result is governmental paralysis, compromise, failure. The triumvirate of Suharto, Malik and the Sultan of Djogjakarta proclaimed a three-fold objective in March—to establish effective government, end the confrontation of Malaysia, and restore the economy. We have already seen how little progress has been made towards the first objective. The second—ending confrontation—seemed to be faring better under the assertive control of the pro-Western, cynical, opportunist, corrupt Foreign Minister, Malik. Then it too bogged down in division and compromise. Confrontation has formally ended, it is true, but it had ceased to be effective even prior to the coup, owing to Indonesia's inability to pursue it either economically or militarily. More significant is the fact of serious governmental dispute as to the meaning of the agreement and the future relations between Indonesia and Malaysia. The consummate political skill of Sukarno is operating here, as in other fields, in an endeavor to widen the breach between the opponents and re-assert his grandiose concepts of an Indonesia leading the world in its opposition to all forms of imperialism and neo-colonialism.

Too much has already been written on the continuing crisis in Indonesia's economy to require much elaboration here. It is sufficient to say that nothing the new rulers have done so far has arrested the catastrophic decline in the country's production, exports, financial reserves or communications. Prices are reported to have risen by more than ten times so far this year, manufac-
turing plants are operating at twenty per cent of capacity, and breakdown is endemic in every sphere of the economy other than staple food production. In view of the practical domination of economic affairs by the bureaucratic capitalists (the military and civilian officials who run the state enterprises and control directly or indirectly all other key productive activities), their close links with the political rulers, and the massive scale of their corruption, it is difficult to imagine any government formed from the elite bringing order out of this chaos.

Formerly, optimistic predictions were made about the availability of Western funds to put the rightwing government on its feet. But, despite a meeting in Tokyo, the imperialists seem less than anxious to throw good money after bad, in view of the enormous scale of the aid that would be required and the political uncertainty that obtains in Djakarta. In any case, without a reliable administration, foreign funds may be expected to disappear the way they have done for a decade or more in Indonesia.

So far we have concentrated on the view from the top. What of the Indonesian masses? Here information is even more difficult to come by, impossible to check, and easy to misinterpret. However, many reports speak of growing discontent, restlessness and rebelliousness in Central and East Java. It is important to remember that Indonesian politics has been predominantly Javanese politics, that these regions of Java contain almost half the country's population, and that they have been strongholds of Sukarnoism and the Communist Party. For months, disoriented by the demise of their political leaders, fear-struck by the army and Moslem slaughters, and confused by official accounts of the coup and counter-coup, the active groups among Java's workers and peasants suffered the tide of reaction to surge over them. A number of factors have combined to revitalise their political and social protest—economic distress, distrust of the army and the Moslem right, Sukarno's ebullient refusal to admit defeat, and the emergence of underground communist, union and other radical organisations.

Surreptitiously but persistently, the Government allegations that the Communists tried to take power in the Untung coup are being questioned and rejected. The manifest and incongruous contradictions in the official press accounts and "confessions", which have led many outside Indonesian specialists
to dismiss the whole “Communist conspiracy” story as a fake contrived to entrench in power the victors in an intra-army feud, are circulating through the word-of-mouth channels of disaffection spreading in Indonesia’s crucial provinces. Slowly, painfully but perceptibly, a mass movement is being reformed to challenge the power of the ruling centre.

It would take a bold man to predict Indonesia’s likely course from here on. In the absence of a stable elite or a cohesive mass opposition, the present uneasy, crumbling political facade could hold together indefinitely. But tensions are bound to increase bringing in their wake mounting disorders. No extreme, from secessionist revolts in the outer islands to civil war, can be entirely ruled out. Imperialist interference and manipulation will assuredly extend, and produce more ruptures and convulsions. The army is still the force to watch: the younger officer resentment at their leaders’ corruption, high living and lack of patriotism, which was a salient factor in the Untung movement, is still at work, and may well produce a purging revolt along the lines of Nasser’s coup in Egypt.

Only one thing can be said with certainty, and that is that if the country is to be lifted out of its torment, it will only be by a strong, disciplined and puritanical party or group, determined to deal ruthlessly with the decadent elites, purify the administration, put the state enterprises on their feet and begin the long-delayed social reform awaited by Indonesia’s million-fold poor.

It was the failure of the PKI to develop class-conscious policies and a disciplined party with an independent standpoint that contributed heavily to its debacle last year. Decisively influenced by the Chinese Communist Party line of subordinating struggles to solve internal problems to “first eliminating imperialism from the world”, it allowed Sukarno and his nationalist entourage to divert the Indonesian social revolution into sterile paths of anti-imperialist posturing, strident nationalism and prestige-building symbols, while the economy collapsed, the army and the bureaucrat capitalists built up their power, and social discontent became frustrated and disillusioned. The PKI followed in Sukarno’s wake, hoping that the President would make it unnecessary to wage a stern class struggle for basic social changes. As a consequence, the party lost its grassroots
vigour, its independent ideology and its disciplined toughness. As the time came when it desperately needed these attributes, it fell too easily into the army's trap.

But Indonesian communism has shown extraordinary resilience; in 1948 too the army fell upon the PKI at Madiun and all but exterminated it, yet within ten years it had re-emerged as the strongest political force in the country. This time its way will be harder still, despite the great mass following it built up in the halcyon decade 1955-65. It will have to rebuild underground, attach itself firmly to the demands of the workers and poor peasantry, and forsake the former dreams of an easy passage to socialism under the protective wing of an aristocratic elite.

Australia's establishment members and ideologues, who viewed the military takeover with such complacent satisfaction, are already finding their rejoicing tempered by misgiving. It is not the fact that the death toll in the army's savage reprisals are now estimated at one million that disturbs them, but the indications that the new rulers are loose in the saddle. Foreign Minister Hasluck finds consolation in the thought that relations between Australia and Indonesia show signs of improvement and indeed it would be surprising if anti-communist reactionaries in Djakarta and Canberra did not find something in common. It is less understandable that Labor's Whitlam and Cairns, after recent visits to Indonesia, should find discussions with Foreign Minister Malik reassuring and indicative of better things in store between the two countries. Events in Indonesia can be welcomed only if one considers that the bloody repression of a people's aspirations for social progress is firm ground on which to build a peaceful and friendly Asia. This is not the policy put forward by the A.L.P., nor is it realistic.

The violence that has occurred in Indonesia has made further counter-violence inescapable. When the bitter cups flow over, as they must, it will not be a pretty sight. Let our anti-communist zealots remember the genesis of violence, and how they applauded it.

Indonesian and international reactionaries have not stopped social change in Indonesia; they have only forced it into more elemental channels.