

The Bloodbath



Between October 1, 1965, and April or May of the following year, the right-wing military regime of Generals Nasution and Suharto seized power and consolidated its strength in Indonesia. In that scant seven months as many as a million people were slaughtered. The rising toll of victims appeared occasionally in the press here, recorded with little more passion than a sports score.

Some accounts of the appalling massacres did in time find their way into the papers of London and New York. Their tone was fatalistic, implying that the unbelievable carnage described was the product of a bloodlust and disregard for human life inconceivable to "civilized" Westerners. There was no sense of urgency about these reports, as though nothing could be done to stem the gory tide.

No member of Parliament or Congress rose to condemn the butchery. No relief or rescue agencies attempted to intervene on behalf of the political prisoners. Only a few isolated voices in the West tried to raise an outcry in the face of such awful silence.

Over four years later [in 1970], several hundred thousand political prisoners still rot in jail. There have been repeated purges of the armed forces and the civil service. The fascist military regime is debating whether or not to carry out mass executions, claiming it no longer can afford to feed the mass of prisoners.

American capital is moving into Indonesia once again to explore offshore areas for oil, reactivate existing wells, and mine copper in West Irian. Properties nationalized under President Sukarno have been returned to their U.S. and European former owners.

Indonesia seems to be right back where it was before World War II, before the rising nationalist movement swept out the Dutch and the 3,000 separate islands of the Netherlands East Indies united in the new and militant Republic of Indonesia. How did it happen? And what really happened?

There is a standard phrase that appears in all the Western news accounts. It is "the attempted Communist coup." The massacre of hundreds of thousands of civilians was justified, so this official account goes, as a reaction to an attempted coup by the Communists on September 30, when six right-wing army generals were killed.

THE STRANGE "ATTEMPTED COMMUNIST COUP"

The dictionary defines the words "coup d'etat" as the sudden, forceful overthrow of the government; literally it means a blow against the state. Since the events of September-October 1965, every person who was a member of the Cabinet on the night of September 30 has been accused of participating in the coup; three were sentenced to death and all arrested. Foreign Minister Subandrio is probably dead. Former President Sukarno himself has been placed under house arrest for interrogation about his part in the alleged coup attempt.

These facts in and of themselves invalidate the "Communist coup" story, since a government can hardly be accused of plotting its own overthrow.

To this it must be added that Indonesia had the largest

Communist party outside of the socialist countries. Its membership was over three million, and there were estimated to be between 15 and 20 million active supporters. Yet there was no call to action, no strikes or massive popular demonstrations at the time of the coup, or even in the bloody months of massacre that followed. Only a person most gullible and ignorant of Indonesian politics could be made to believe that this mass party was preparing to seize power without using its popular resources.

No one denies the fact that individual members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) did participate in the September 30th Movement, which was not a coup attempt but an effort to block the right-wing generals. However, the party itself seems if anything to have been unprepared for the task of taking state power, and had a history of leaning on President Sukarno in its bouts with the reactionaries.

The story of a Communist coup has persisted in the Western press up to the present time only because there is so much ignorance about Asia in general and because anti-Communism is used to justify and minimize mass murder.

However, it is not ignorance on the part of the mass media that dictates their handling of the events of October 1965. It can only be a deliberate policy to bury the truth. There was a coup d'etat that took place. It was organized and carried out by a clique of right-wing generals with the closest collaboration of high U.S. officials. And the American press had all this information readily available to it but did not choose to let the American people know what was taking place.

SEPTEMBER 30TH MOVEMENT VS. THE COUNCIL OF GENERALS

The September 30th Movement, which did indeed assassinate six right-wing generals before it was quickly crushed on the morning of October 1, 1965, was headed by Lieutenant Colonel Untung, a trusted member of Sukarno's palace guard. He had the support of Air Marshal Omar Dhani, Commandant of the Indonesian Air Force. But the Movement was not an attempt to overthrow the government, all of whose members were later accused of being part of the "attempted coup." It was an attempt to save that government.

The Indonesian military ever since independence has been composed of contradictory elements. Untung, Dhani and others like them were strongly nationalist and anti-imperialist. But there were many other officers who owed their existence to a feudal origin and collaboration with the foreign exploiters. General Haris Nasution, one of the Army chiefs who helped crush the September 30th Movement and is today a member of Indonesia's ruling triumvirate, has a long history of open treason against the Republic. In 1952, he attempted a coup d'etat but failed. This did not prevent him from becoming Army Chief of Staff in the years that followed and by the late 1950s he had created his own political party.

Nasution, Suharto and other officers, many of whom had been trained in the U.S., formed a secret "Council of Generals." On September 21, 1965, they met in Djakarta with the entire armed forces chiefs of staff. At this secret meeting, which was tape-recorded by agents of Foreign

Minister Subandrio, a plan was drawn up to overthrow the government on October 5, Armed Forces Day, when all the crack regiments under their command would be assembled in the capital.

When Sukarno learned of this plot, he called in Untung. The September 30th Movement was hastily formed to preempt the move by the Council of Generals. It was hoped that by destroying the leaders of the Council, the coup would be thwarted.

The right-wing generals had intended to justify their takeover with Sukarno's "ill health," the pretext being that should anything happen to the President, the country would fall into the hands of the Communists. However, their intended move could only have had the sympathy of a small minority of the population, and they were no doubt anxious about what the response of the millions of progressive Indonesians would be.

The failure of Untung's movement gave the generals an excuse to openly begin a massive hunt of left-wingers, and they found the people and their organizations confused and unsure about what was happening.

Having crushed the September 30th Movement, the Council of Generals went on to implement their coup plan, setting up a new government controlled by the military and physically wiping out the opposition.

The Western press dwelt mournfully on the death of the six generals, but it was many months before the extent of the slaughter that followed was reported anywhere. It was even longer before the story of what happened on September 30 finally made it into the New York Times, even if only by the back door.

THE TESTIMONY OF GENERAL SUPARDJO

On March 1, 1967, the Times reported on the trial of Brigadier General Supardjo, an officer charged with being in on the "coup attempt" of September 30. In his testimony, Supardjo denied that he had participated in the Movement, remarking wryly that it was poorly organized. However, he made it clear that he was not playing along with his captors.

According to the defendant's (former Army Brigadier General Supardjo) testimony, Indonesian political history since September 30, 1965, has been completely distorted. The attempted coup that night, he said, was not a Communist plot and it certainly was not aimed at ousting the legal government. Instead, he has repeatedly told his five uniformed judges that the "September 30th Movement" came into being to forestall a coup by the "Council of Generals".... Mr. Supardjo noted with irony that in the aftermath of the coup the "Council of Generals got what it aimed for." After all, he added, "the ministers of the legal government are now in jail" -- three of them, including former Foreign Minister Subandrio, have already been sentenced to death -- and, he said, only Mr. Sukarno is left. (New York Times, March 1, 1967]

General Supardjo could have had no selfish motive for this

testimony. Indeed, it brought him a death sentence.

While the Council of Generals has not been mentioned elsewhere in the Establishment press other than in these direct quotes from General Supardjo's testimony, its existence was widely recognized. On July 4, 1966, the Indonesian Ambassador to Cuba, Mr. A.M. Hanafi, announced his resignation. In a statement explaining why he was leaving the post, he talked of the right-wing military group that had taken over in his country:

Since the outbreak of this 30th of September Movement affair, the development of events has brought to light the existence of a "Council of Generals," a gang of the most reactionary high-ranking Army officers, whose ringleader is Gen. A. H. Nasution. Everything that is happening in Indonesia now was carefully plotted by this Council, working hand in glove with the CIA, and was what Col. Untung and the other patriotic officers tried to avert with their 30th of September Movement. Opposition to this Council has now become the order of the day for every Indonesian patriot.

THE SILENT SLAUGHTER

October, November, and half of December passed before any story of the mass slaughter taking place in Indonesia broke in the American press. That was in *Time* magazine. It was another month before the New York Times reported it.

Was this because the U.S. press didn't have the story earlier? That is inconceivable. An event of earth-shaking importance had taken place with the right-wing coup. Even a cub reporter would understand how significant such a political turn was for the fortunes of the U.S. in Asia. The Viet Nam War was going on just across the South China Sea. Hundreds of reporters were stationed there from every major news agency.

Did the new regime exclude foreign reporters? If so, there was never a word about it printed in any newspaper. It can only be assumed that the U.S. press, as well as Washington, were intimately aware of the reign of terror, but were keeping mum.

When, after three months, the awful toll was finally brought out, it was with an air of a fait accompli. Hundreds of thousands had already been killed. It was too late to stop it.

Time magazine, which usually judges the virtue of governments by the number of communist scalps dangling from their belts, nevertheless objectively reported on December 17, 1965, that:

Communists, red sympathizers and their families are being massacred by the thousands. Backlands army units are reported to have executed thousands of Communists after interrogation in remote jails. Armed with wide-bladed knives called "parangs," Moslem bands crept at night into the homes of Communists, killing entire families and burying the bodies in shallow graves. The murder campaign became so brazen in parts

of rural East Java, that Moslem bands placed the heads of victims on poles and paraded them through villages. The killings have been on such a scale that the disposal of the corpses has created a serious sanitation problem in East Java and Northern Sumatra where the humid air bears the reek of decaying flesh. Travelers from these areas tell of small rivers and streams that have been literally clogged with bodies. River transportation has at places been seriously impeded.

Spotty accounts appeared now and again in the months that followed. Again, their tone was fatalistic. There was no indignation or sense of urgency. Instead, the mounting dead were portrayed almost as victims of destiny, the doomed figures of a Greek tragedy.

The Guardian of Britain on April 7, 1966, carried this account from Djakarta by Nicholas Turner:

Estimates of the total number of Indonesians killed in political massacres after the attempted coup of September 30 are being revised as fuller information comes in from outer regions. One Western ambassador considers 300,000 to be a conservative estimate, and other compilations run far higher.

A traveller who knows the island of Bali well, and speaks the language . . . describes mass executions and the annihilation of village after village in some areas. A consular official in Surabaya accepts a figure of 200,000 for Bali, which has a population of two million.

Estimates of the dead in Sumatra also range around 200,000, and a similar figure for Java is generally regarded as on the low side. When the death tolls for other islands such as Borneo and Sulawesi are added, the total may well be upwards of 600,000. Just how many of these are Communists is another question.

It appears certain that the great majority of the dead were innocent victims of political hysteria....

In some areas, Communist suspects were shot or poisoned, but usually the Moslem youth beheaded its victims with the parang. . . . The heads were often impaled on fences and gateposts . . .

Rivers in many parts of the country were clogged with corpses for weeks. A European resident of Surabaya describes finding bodies washed up by the river on to his back garden.

Carnage on such a scale can scarcely be imagined, and the first effect after reading of such events is to feel stunned, incapable of comprehension. But after the first shock wears off and the awful truth sinks in, it is necessary to ask some questions. How was it possible? More people died in these few months than in the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. By the end of 1965, more Indonesians had been killed than the number of Vietnamese fallen after 15 years of war.

Were these merely the victims of some local vengeance, as the papers tried to imply? James Reston of the Times found it significant in one of his columns that the term "run amok" is of Malay origin. How convenient for Mr. Reston are the anti-Asian prejudices and chauvinism of Western society! How easy it is for the newspapers to explain away a million deaths in Indonesia, where, as every good American schoolchild knows, "life is cheap."

All the lies that allowed the comfortable Christians of Holland and England to believe they were morally right in robbing Indonesia for three centuries are now invoked by Mr. Reston and the editors of other great American newspapers to explain away the massacres.

Mr. Reston's "insights" into the Indonesian character notwithstanding, the real explanation of the massacres lies not in bloodlust or hysteria, or in people wildly "running amok." As in all cases of genocide throughout the world, there was organization, planning, efficiency and **anarmed force** responsible for the executions.

ARMY CARRIES OUT A "SPONTANEOUS" MASSACRE

In one of the few isolated instances of press coverage given the slaughter in Indonesia, the New York Times May 8, 1966, Sunday Magazine ran an article by Seth S. King, its Southeast Asia correspondent. King quotes a schoolteacher in a village near Jogjakarta:

My students went right out with the army. They pointed out P.K.I. members. The army shot them on the spot along with their whole family: women, children. It was horrible....

Indonesia is made up of 3,000 separate islands, strung out for 3,000 miles along the equator. Yet the massacres were coordinated, and as the earlier quote from the Manchester Guardian showed, almost evenly spread across all the greater islands of the archipelago.

No mass hysteria could leap hundreds of miles, across the intervening seas, to strike on island after island. Only a strong central power could have directed the executions.

It was Nasution and Suharto's army that systematically went from village to village, rooted out the peasant leaders, the communists and nationalists, the workers who had led seizures of Dutch and American property or feudal plantations. They hauled before the firing squad thousands of teachers, infected with ideas of "liberation." They didn't bother with trials, lawyers or laws themselves. It was the ultimate pacification program that U.S. experts in Viet Nam had dreamed of and this time it worked.

How was it that a reactionary group of generals dared to embark on such a grisly course, one that could only earn them the undying hatred of millions? These corrupt military men, powerful as they may have been, based their internal support on a thin crust of Indonesian society composed of feudal reactionaries, merchants tied to Western commerce and a portion of the civil servants. But the great mass of the people were their enemies, struggling to end once and for all the landed aristocracy and to break the bonds to the West that had exploited them for over three hundred years

How then could the Council of Generals have expected to win against such a large and organized adversary? What

gave them the courage to put aside their own personal deals and manipulations in order to launch a full-scale political offensive against the Sukarno government and the Indonesian people?

"WASHINGTON CAREFUL NOT TO CLAIM CREDIT FOR IT"

We could easily venture a guess, but it is not necessary. The answer has already been given, and by no less an authority than the New York Times.

In a more scientific frame of mind than was evident in his previously quoted remarks, James Reston spoke quite candidly about the coup and the massacres on June 19, 1966:

One of the most persistent complaints among officials in Washington is that our political troubles in Vietnam are not balanced adequately by reports in the press of the more hopeful political developments elsewhere in Asia.

The savage transformation of Indonesia from a pro-Chinese policy under Sukarno to a defiantly anti-Communist policy under General Suharto is, of course, the most important of these developments. Washington is careful not to claim any credit for this change in the sixth most populous and one of the richest nations in the world, but this does not mean that Washington had nothing to do with it.

There was a great deal more contact between the anti-communist forces in that country and at least one very high official in Washington before and during the Indonesian massacre than is generally realized. General Suharto's forces, at times severely short of food and munitions, have been getting aid from here through various third countries, and it is doubtful if the coup would ever have been attempted without the American show of strength in Vietnam or been sustained without the clandestine aid it has received indirectly from here.

This column of Reston's was entitled "A Gleam of Light in Asia." In the low-key tone that has characterized similar admissions about the U.S. role in Indonesia's brutal return to a semi-colonial status, the massacres are brushed aside as a deplorable but necessary means to obtaining Washington's end.

The air of glee about the right-wing victory is even less restrained in other reports. Max Frankel, long an observer of the Washington scene, captured the mood of exhilaration in the nation's capital in a Times article on March 12, 1966, entitled "Elated U.S. Officials Looking to New Aid to Jakarta's Economy."

The Johnson Administration found it difficult today to hide its delight with the news from Indonesia, pointing to the political demise of President Sukarno and the Communists. After a long period of patient diplomacy, designed to help the army triumph over the Communists, officials were elated to find their

expectations being realized.

Both Reston and Frankel are very cautious when it comes to spelling out the details of how the U.S. helped put Nasution and Suharto in power. Overthrowing governments is not anything that can be openly bragged of, especially when the result is a genocidal bloodbath of the opposition. Yet there should be enough in these reporters' remarks alone to bring the U.S. government up on charges before any reputable world body. (However, instead of launching an investigation of the coup and genocide carried out in Indonesia, the United Nations under U.S. pressure readmitted Indonesia to membership without debate.)

One of the methods which the U.S. used to ensure the success of the coup was reported by Bertrand Russell in his introduction to *The Silent Slaughter*.

During October 1965 two representatives of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, close associates of mine, were in Djakarta on my behalf attending a conference. In Djakarta few had any doubt about what was taking place around them. The United States Seventh Fleet was in Javanese waters. The largest base in the area, feverishly constructed by the United States but a few months earlier on the southernmost point of the southernmost island of the Philippines, was ordered "on alert." General Nasution had a mission in Washington. The United States was directly involved in the day to day events.

It is doubtful whether the full story of the CIA involvement in Indonesia will ever be told in even one-quarter the detail leaked about U.S.-backed coup d'etats in other countries. The crime was so horrible that even the half-hearted supporters of imperialism would be turned away if they knew the truth about U.S. complicity. William Worthy, one of the speakers at the Public Inquest on Indonesia, told how Sukarno himself indicted the CIA a few months before the bloody coup.

One of the several, and I emphasize several, Achilles' heels of the CIA is its assumption that everyone, everywhere, especially if not Anglo-Saxon, is for sale. As Eric Norden told you, the United States in 1963 tried to bribe the Sukarno government with a huge offer of American economic aid if only he would abandon his policy of confrontation with Malaysia. In other words, the taxpayers of the United States were to pay out of their hides in order to save this obviously contrived new nation of Malaysia, which the Times of London itself admitted was first formulated in the British Colonial Office. Sukarno also told his people last spring that a direct offer to bribe him personally had been made by American agents.

But the CIA did not stop at merely trying to bribe Sukarno, the President of the Indonesian Republic. They also approached the right-wing generals (where they had not already **created** them with U.S. training and support) and worked out their takeover plot with them.

According to Suara Pemuda Indonesia, in an early 1966

article, this had been going on for several years and was far advanced by 1965:

The U.S. imperialists highly appreciate the right-wing military figure of Nasution and call him the "strongest" and a "courageous figure." To strengthen the position of the right-wing military clique, the U.S. imperialists had given "aid" which up to 1963 amounted to 60.9 million U.S. dollars. Before the end of 1960, the United States had equipped 43 battalions of the army. Every year the United States trained officers of the right-wing military clique. Between 1956 and 1959 more than 200 high-ranking officers were trained in the United States, while low-ranking officers are trained by the hundreds every year. Once the head of the Agency for International Development in America said that U.S. aid, of course, was not intended to support Sukarno and that the U.S. had trained a great number of officers and ordinary people who would form a unit to make Indonesia a free country. By a free country, he meant a country like Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand and other American satellites.

The cooperation as well as the aid of the United States have greatly strengthened the position of the right-wing military clique in Indonesia. Finally in the middle of last year the U.S. imperialists suggested that the right-wing military clique take over state power. For this purpose the U.S. imperialists provided many facilities, among others a fund of 225 billion Indonesian rupiahs. Cooperation between the imperialists and the Council of Generals is channeled through the CIA....

The Council of Generals is an organization of the right-wing military clique within the Indonesian Army, which was founded to seize power from the hands of the legal Indonesian government. The founding of this Council of Generals was directly supported and planned together with the U.S. intelligence service, the CIA. Its members consist of 40 right-wing generals, among whom the important figures are General Nasution, General A. Sukendro, General Suharto and the right-wing generals who were killed on October 1 last year. They were: General A. Yani, General Suparman, General M.T. Harjono, General Suprpto, General Sutojo and General Pandjaitan.

Although the Council of Generals has just been founded, the right-wing military clique within the army has existed for a long time. The founding of the Council of Generals was merely an inauguration of the power of the right-wing clique within the Army.

This was hardly a mere piece of speculation on the part of Suara Pemuda. It was common knowledge in political circles in Indonesia as well, of course, as in the very highest circles in the United States. Max Frankel of the New York Times wrote on March 13, 1966, that "The

United States continued to retain excellent contacts with the top military leaders, even after Mr. Sukarno had renounced American aid (in December 1964) and had begun to move against American information libraries, the Peace Corps, and news correspondents."

And on February 12, 1965, eight months before the counter-revolution began, the New York Times put its editorial finger on what it considered the turning point in U.S. determination to overthrow Sukarno. It said at that time:

When President Sukarno threatened the Federation of Malaysia, he placed himself firmly in the path of U.S. and British efforts to contain Communist China. Washington has left active defense of Malaysia to the British Commonwealth nations and seeks to retain some influence in Indonesia primarily in the hope of some day helping her army against the expected Communist bid for power.

The plan could hardly have been spelled out more clearly, although of course the news of it was played down and other newspapers in the United States didn't make even back-page stories of this sensational item. The story not only revealed the plan for "helping her army" but coolly revealed that the U.S. used Britain as a mere pawn for its campaign to "contain Communist China"!

The importance of Malaysia should be kept in mind, too, when reading in later parts of this pamphlet how intensely both nationalists and Communists felt about defeating the puppet state of Malaysia, which was the **external** threat to the independence of Indonesia, just as the right-wing generals were the **internal** threat.

Finally, with reference to the CIA, it should be even more clearly understood now than in 1965-66 just how universal its activities are and how axiomatic it must have been for it to concern itself so deeply with Indonesia. The revelations a year and a half ago about the CIA's penetration into the U.S. student movement, about whole "foundations" being conduits for CIA money and whole book publishing companies being started by the agency should have convinced any skeptic that the well-based charges against the CIA in the case of Indonesia were absolutely true and that the U.S. did not merely "aid" the fascist generals, but used them to reintroduce U.S. big business and U.S. imperialism, generally, into Indonesia.

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