

Indonesia's political prisoners

by George Van Lunen

It has been eleven years since Indonesia changed direction, when army leaders replaced President Sukarno's cabinet by a military administration. Sukarno had directed Indonesian politics for quite a while. During World War II, Indonesia—formerly known as the Dutch East Indies—was occupied by Japan. Toward the end of the war the Japanese declared Indonesia independent and proclaimed Sukarno as its leader. For a while it looked as if the Dutch colonial rule would return to the archipelago, but in 1949 — partly as a result of American pressure — Holland gave up its territorial claims to Indonesia. There was, however one stipulation: The western half of the island of New Guinea, called West Irian, would remain under Dutch rule. Most of the inhabitants of West Irian were stone-age tribesmen; they should be encouraged to work out their own independence. Sukarno did not agree; he had set his heart on making West Irian part of Indonesia. In order to apply pressure on the Dutch he sought a close alliance with the Peking communists. There was some reason to believe that Indonesia would eventually move into the communist sphere, especially since the PKI, the communist part of Indonesia, rapidly gained in membership. On the other hand, the army, which was largely anti-communist, succeeded in increasing its political power. For the time being the Army and the PKI worked in a shaky alliance with President Sukarno, but bitter conflicts on the regional level soon developed.

In 1962 the West Irian problem was solved: the Dutch government agreed to turn the territory over to Indonesia. Unfortunately, another trouble spot developed at that time: Malaysia. Sukarno would have liked to add that region to his empire as well, but the British granted Malaysia its independence. The Indonesian Communist Party denounced Malaysia as a "concentration of colonial forces on the very frontiers of our country" an attitude

which Sukarno supported. —The PKI now adopted a pro-Chinese stand and advocated the creation of an armed peasants' force to fight the government troops of Malaysia. The army, understandably, did not allow the PKI to take the initiative in military matters. It was in this atmosphere of tension that the coup of September 1965 took place.

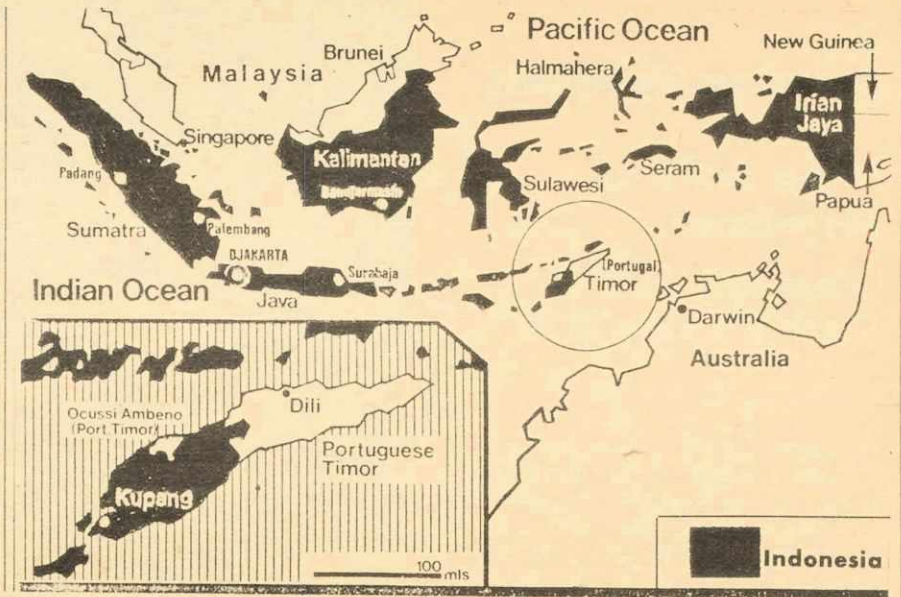
On that date a senior officer of Sukarno's palace guards tried to gain control of the army. He had six top-ranking generals kidnapped and assassinated and then called for support from the ranks. All enlisted men who supported him would be promoted one grade. The role of the PKI in the coup is not clear. It is doubtful that the communists took part in the uprising, but they welcomed the emergence of a new army leader who might be sympathetic toward the PKI.

The coup failed when general Suharto acted decisively to occupy strategic posts and restore order. On Oct. 4 a joint statement by the Muslim parties and the Catholic Party blamed the PKI for masterminding the coup and called on Sukarno to ban the communist party. Before Sept. 30 Sukarno had been able to maintain balance of power between the army and the PKI, but now the army, under Suharto's leadership, was in control and Sukarno's power rapidly faded. —Throughout Indonesia PKI members and their sympathizers were hunted down by the army and by mobs. Some observers put the number of killed as high as 200,000 or 300,000.

In 1966 the PKI was outlawed by Suharto and this decree resulted in waves of arrests in 1967 and 1968. Political prisoners were put in the following categories:

- the group against whom there is clear evidence of involvement in the September 30 movement;
- those believed to have been involved in the Sept. 30 coup, but against whom there is insufficient evidence;
- PKI sympathizers.

According to a 1974 publication of



the Dutch branch of Amnesty International at least 55,000 people are now spending their tenth year of imprisonment in jails, in labour camps and on prison islands throughout the Indonesian Republic. Apparently the Indonesian Government still sees those in detention as a serious threat to its stability.

In 1972 Amnesty International stated in an **Indonesia Special** issue: "Amnesty's aim is to help political prisoners and prisoners of conscience; we are not concerned with national politics, nor do we pass judgement on the beliefs of those in prison. Amnesty's interest in Indonesia began in 1961, long before the tragic events of 1965. Then, as now, it was motivated by a concern with the principles of human rights, had no partisan political interest, and worked for the release of individual prisoners of conscience, at that time critics of the Sukarno Government. Today its work is focused on more than 55,000 untried prisoners, detained as suspected communists after the attempted coup of September 1965."

The Christmas 1974 issue of **Hervormd Nederland**, weekly of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, contained a letter from a political prisoner in Indonesia. The letter reflects the sense of despair besetting those who are detained year after year. Some excerpts follow in closing:

"There are 123 political prisoners in this prison. A while ago a team

Mail - Star February 14 1976 60,000 killed

JAKARTA (AP) — About 60,000 persons have been killed since the outbreak of civil war in East Timor last August, the vice-chairman of East Timor's provisional government said Friday.

Francisco Xavier Lopez da Cruz also said the pro-Indonesian forces will complete their takeover of the former Portuguese colony in three or four weeks.

from Amnesty International was here. At that time the food was good and abundant — In 1966 I got house arrest as a result of false accusations. Three years later I was offered a pension with the observation that I had been involved in the September 30, 1965 coup. I refused the pension, for I was innocent. In 1973 I was arrested and I have been in prison ever since...Nothing is done to bring up my case. I have told my wife not to take action on behalf, because such action will only make the situation worse for us prisoners...

The authorities do not shy away from intimidation. Five or six times a year it becomes known that the guards have beaten a prisoner to death...

Mohandas Gandhi: Reform without violence

by Gurprit S. Kindra

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the great Indian social reformer, politician, and philosopher, was the pioneer exponent of satyagraha (Sanskrit truth force) or in English, non-violent resistance. Asserting man's unity under one God, he preached Christian and Moslem scriptures along with the Hindu; vigorously expounding abolition of untouchability. Called the Mahatma (Great souled) he was widely revered because he could exact political concessions by threatening "fasts unto death". He was a major figure in the non-violent struggles and conferences leading to India's freedom.

Gandhi's idea of non-violence states that if there is to be any injury, violence, suffering, or sacrifice it is to be on his side and not on the party whom he wanted to convert to his point of view. To some people with the false notion that the "frail old man" was too scared to use violence, I would like to point out that it requires much more courage and patience to stand the beating rather than retaliate violently. He was non-violent and yet a fearless critic, a bold reformer,

and a courageous revolutionary.

Political disputes between nations have most frequently been settled by violent means against those who were considered a hindrance. The existence of modern technological weapons will scarcely allow a continuation of this humiliating state of affairs for a long time to come. Therefore there must be other means to pursue the interests of one group against those of another group. At this point the idea of non-violence may help in two ways. First, it turns round the most disputed slogan "the end justifies the means". The idea of non-violence states that it is the quality of the means, e.g. the intention to suffer for the good ends but not to inflict suffering upon others, which provides the justification of the ends. Secondly, it states that it is only by gaining the approval of the masses that we can reasonably pursue our interests.

Non-violence plays a most important role in politics. It is a general tendency of our times to create international law courts which can be evoked for settling problems between nations. This is surely the right step in the right direction. But

frequently, at least in the near future, the authority of such an institution will be questioned by one of the parties. Also a general lack of interest among other nations may frustrate the judgement of such an institution. In such a case Gandhi's idea of non-violence could help to draw the attention of the people and emphasize the urgency of its solution because the personal engagement as Gandhi's idea of non-violence may be stronger than the somewhat impersonal idea of international law courts.

The recent revolts of students, on Indian campuses and the proletariat of many western countries, seem to be a revolt against the acquisitive base of society and the violence that excessive greed breeds. In this sense it surely should be welcomed as an effort to turn away from the evil traditions of the past. Perhaps to some degree the revolt may be due to the invisible influence of Mahatma Gandhi.

At present the whole world is in danger of destruction through violence. Large scale violence involving nuclear weapons and biological warfare could be catastrophic. Non-violence is the only way through which mankind can survive the tension of a bi-polar world.

Who can say that violent revolution is a manifest success? The persistence of war in the Middle East is achieving the utter ruin of the peoples of the countries invol-

ved and the only beneficiaries are the handful of capitalistic "developed" nations hawking all kinds of killing devices. Might not a non-violent opposition to their enemies be more effective and less miserable. Does violent revolution really lead to the well being of the masses? There has to be a better way.

Surely at the very least anyone who cares for the survival of mankind should give serious and prolonged attention to Gandhi's philosophy and his life before concluding that non-violence is of no significance.

Non-violence is most emphatically not the feeble weapon of those who have not the courage to give up their lives or to suffer hardship. It's discipline is more strict than that of a soldier, for it is surely harder to stand up to beatings unarmed and refuse to hit back then to go into battle with guns, ready to kill the enemy. It is the whole world that needs to stop and think of attending to the prophetic voice of Gandhi Ji. Truth and non-violence, the principles on which Gandhi lived, provide a new foundation for human society. We must re-examine our basic assumptions.

Our job now remains to translate truth and non-violence into a language that means something real to the people of the world, particularly the West, and then make it our own by living up to it.