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Sukarno Speaks

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Indonesia  
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Mr. Walter S. Rogers  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
522 Fifth Avenue  
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Early Sunday morning, I heard President Sukarno speak to 10,000 citizens of Bogor in commemoration of the Prophet Mohammad's birthday. That evening I listened to a lengthy radio broadcast by the President. I have heard Sukarno speak several times before.

When Sukarno speaks, the eyes and minds of the audience seem to be riveted on his commanding figure and each turn of phrase in his speech. To be perfectly honest, I share their rapt attention, and it is not mere professional or analytical zeal that commands my concentration. The fact is that I, like millions of others, am fascinated and swayed by Indonesia's most important personage.

Sukarno is the most effective speaker I have ever heard, and I have listened to FDR many times.

Admittedly, the main impact of a Sukarno speech has always diminished by the time I return to my room. After a short while, I have difficulty remembering the thread of Sukarno's principal argument or moral. By the time I refresh my memory from my notes or the next morning's newspaper, the magic has vanished entirely. I then wonder what I thought so stirring and profound in my recent experience.

This is no indictment of Sukarno's speeches, for the words and symbols he uses with such mastery are directed entirely to a nationalistic Indonesian audience. I have heard critics claim that Sukarno has an unequalled knowledge of the habits, hopes, and prejudices of each group he addresses, whether it be Javanese, Sudanese, or Dyak, hence his great success in formulating and manipulating nationalistic opinion. This opinion has more than a shade of truth in it, yet it misses an important aspect of Sukarno's role in present-day Indonesia; Sukarno not only understands his audience, he quite obviously identifies himself with it.

Opportunism is a misleading and narrow term for Sukarno's genius at intuiting and expressing the desires of the people he finds himself with. I have seen him change attitudes and bearing to suit his audience many times. Speaking to farmers, he is the Javanese aristocrat and understanding father of the people. With political leaders, he is the revolutionary comrade. With university students, he forgets his role as "papa" and joshes or talks heart-to-heart as an equal. The other day, in talking to some boy scouts, he recalled his early history as a "good-for-nothing boy." With Moslems, he is wholeheartedly Moslem.

Different aspects of the Sukarno personality are brought into play in different situations. He is immensely effective in doing this because the transformation of personality and attitude seems to be done unconsciously. The outsider can only

judge his success when he has had a chance to sit in an Indonesian audience and feel the electric sense of unity and purpose when Sukarno hits on the common-denominator of the hopes and fears of the group. At such a time, the observer is apt to discard the word "opportunist" as a description for the President and realize the presence of a mass leader of extraordinary skill.

With all his contradictions and quirks, Sukarno combines in his own unique personality most of the attitudes and ideas which have current force in Indonesia.

Considering the importance of Sukarno's personality in Indonesian politics, the speech he delivered last week in Palembang should be a matter of concern to Indonesians and foreigners alike. At the Palembang airport, while tens of thousands listened in a drizzling rain, the President made an unrestrained attack on the motives of western powers in Indonesia and lashed out indirectly but vigorously at the parties opposed to the present cabinet.

Anti-western nationalism is not new to Sukarno's attitude, nor is involvement in party politics foreign to his realm of activity. The noteworthy aspect of the November 9 address at Palembang was the specific nature of his charge against foreign powers and the implied charge of treason against his political opponents.

The following excerpts indicate the emphasis in the now-famous speech:

From reports that I receive as President of the Republic of Indonesia, it is clear that several national leaders are taking an active part in the affairs of foreign nations which are at this time bent on destroying each other. For millions of rupiah, these men have sold their nation and state to the interests of foreign nations, and among their objectives is the fall of the present cabinet...

The General Election is an instrument for us to achieve justice and prosperity...Thus, it is improper that an instrument to achieve our ideals be made a bone of contention. Yet it is clear that the General Election has already served to bring about a split in our ranks and among our political parties...

(Quoting newspaper account of speech) "The President further illustrated the meaning of the word 'progressive' by showing how the history of our people has progressed steadily since the days of the Indies Social Democratic Association, the Indonesian Communist Party, and the People's Unions." x.

Anyone who possesses social ideals must be consistently anti-capitalist, whether the capitalist be American, European, or of our own country...

By the Grace of God, Western New Guinea will be in our hands before the end of 1955.

Aside from the sensational accusation of bribery of Indonesian leaders by foreign powers, the speech was typical in its points of emphasis, which I would summarize as,

1. Our nation must be vigilant. We are still threatened by outside forces.
2. We must preserve solid unity. We must not allow politics to turn group against group.

x. Three Marxist groups of the pre-revolutionary period.

3. We must be consistently progressive and revolutionary.
4. We must be consistently anti-capitalist.
5. We must have Western New Guinea (Irian).

Because of speeches of this sort, Sukarno's critics claim that he is still fighting the revolution. It is a fact that the tensions and suspicions of the revolution still impregnate the Indonesian atmosphere, and it is equally true that Sukarno generally addresses his words to the complex of Indonesian emotions dealing with independence and national pride, rather than to the complex of frustrations and shallowly rooted hopes dealing with problems of economy and administration.

The critics will continue to criticize, but Sukarno will in all likelihood continue to play the role of the charismatic nationalistic leader. This has been his role since before 1945. Here, I would like to comment on two aspects of his role as they effect the current situation: (1) that Sukarno's view of his own role seems to be increasingly in conflict with the democratic ideals which are so important to Indonesian political life, and (2) that the increasingly anti-foreign tone of his thinking may well play into communist hands.

The powers of the Indonesian presidency are severely limited by the Provisional Constitution. Legally, Sukarno's role is very similar to that of the President of France, yet in reality Sukarno has wide influence in government and in society in general.

The furor over the Palembang speech revolves principally around a single phrase, "...and among their objectives is the fall of the present cabinet." In refusing to name the leaders he accuses, Sukarno has left the impression that the offenders are the leaders of the Masjumi and Indonesian Socialist parties, for these groups have worked energetically for the fall of the Ali Sastroamidjojo cabinet. The President himself has worked hard to preserve the same cabinet.

With his statement on the Ali cabinet, Sukarno has publicly entered the party political struggle. The importance of his indirect but clear support for the Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI) shouldn't be minimized. Sukarno has long been considered the real leader of the Indonesian Nationalist Party, notwithstanding his claim that he stands above party politics. The fact was not of tremendous importance so long as it was only verified by Djakarta gossip. Now that it has become a matter of public knowledge, the balance of strength of the various parties in the General Election campaign may be substantially altered. Without Sukarno, the PNI lacks roots. With Sukarno, the PNI could attract a heavy vote.

When questioned concerning the evidence behind his charge of bribery by foreign powers, Sukarno said that the bribery had been carried out in such a "slippery" manner that the offenders could not be legally prosecuted. He added, "We can only pass moral judgment on them." His use of "we" seems to indicate the public in general.

A recent newspaper story tells of Sukarno's activities to prop up the Ali cabinet. In convincing several wavering political leaders that the cabinet must be maintained, he made clear that it was not his personal wish that the cabinet be supported, but rather the desire of the people. It is clear from many of Sukarno's statements that he sees himself as the interpreter and transmitter of the people's will.

Few would contest the opinion that Sukarno has a mystical view of his relationship with the people of Indonesia.

My comments here on Sukarno apply in varying measure to great leaders everywhere, even in countries where democratic ideas have deep roots. Other presidents have played politics, abhorred political conflict, shown intolerance of opposition, and considered themselves barometers of the people's will. In Indonesia, however, the concept of the mystically empowered leader of a united people is much more easily understood than that of a leader bound by law and brought forward by democratic conflict. The importance of Sukarno's view of his role is that so many share it.

I heard two comments the other day which illustrate popular attitudes toward Sukarno. One young acquaintance told me, "Why of course Sukarno is great. Where would the Indonesian people be if he weren't?" Another friend commented on Sukarno's three marriages, "He had to marry again, for a radja must have as many descendants as possible for the good of the nation."

The Palembang accusation against "foreign powers" has to be considered against a background of growing anti-foreignism in nationalistic political circles. The discussions of Western New Guinea in the United Nations have helped to crystallize anti-Dutch feeling, and the popularity of America has not been increased by our negative stand on the issue. An even more important contributing factor is the sensational trial now being held in Djakarta in which a number of Dutchmen have been accused of aiding the Darul Islam rebels. One witness has already testified that he saw the leader of Darul Islam chatting in Djakarta with the Dutch High Commissioner, while another has told of seeing a Dutch submarine unloading arms for Darul Islam on the south coast of Java.

Anti-foreignism seems especially strong among those members and friends of the government parties who support the government's nationalistic economic policy.

The aim of this policy has been to bring a larger sector of the economy under the control of Indonesian nationals, a program which has been carried out in part by diverting scarce foreign exchange from foreign into Indonesian hands. When the present cabinet took office in mid-1953, it was claimed that Indonesians were receiving only 30% of the foreign exchange available for imports. The Minister of Economics recently claimed that this figure had been increased to over 70%. As an economic measure, the program has not been altogether successful, for it has evidently contributed to corruption and inflation. As a political measure, it has undoubtedly worked hardship on foreign importers and given strength to Indonesia's neophyte class of "national enterprisers."

Opponents of the cabinet have criticized its nationalistic economic policy on many points. A major criticism has been that the policy has diverted a great deal of national wealth into the hands of top members of the government parties.

Communists have welcomed the current conflict over economic policy, for it has helped bring about the "split within the national bourgeoisie" which Communist Party policy has worked for so vigorously. As the Indonesian Nationalist Party finds itself bombarded by opposition criticism, it is obliged to turn more and more to the Communist Party for support.

Nationalists are quick to point out that they espouse nationalistic policies as a matter of principle and not out of a desire to cooperate with the Indonesian Communist Party. Accepting this as true, it is still a fact that the Ali cabinet--which contains no communists--now depends on communist support in Parliament. The

communists have been able to claim,

The concrete and important influence of the Party is mirrored clearly in the interplay of political forces in the central government. In contrast to former times, and thanks to correct political leadership, our fraction in Parliament has been increasingly able to take measures of such a nature as to determine the direction of government policy.

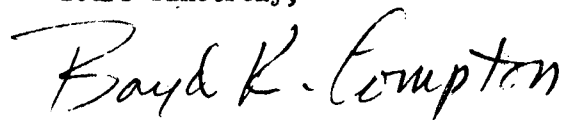
I would call this claim as much an exaggeration as the claim of some foreigners that the Indonesian government is currently dominated by communists. The most that can be said is that communist and Indonesian Nationalist Party policies are running in parallel at the present time. Each increase in anti-foreignism among nationalistic circles makes the alliance just that much stronger. Sukarno's Palembang speech has certainly worked in that direction.

Indonesian communists fully realize that they must support, flatter, and woo the "national bourgeoisie" (i.e. Sukarno and the Indonesian Nationalist Party) if they hope to compete with the powerful and unfriendly Masjumi Party. The most recent sign of friendliness was the Central Committee statement accepting Sukarno's Pantjasila as the model for the Indonesian state. It seems impossible to reconcile the Pantjasila (Nationalism, Humanitarianism, Democracy, Social Justice, and Belief in One God) with the nature of the People's Democracy, which the communists also advocate at the present time, but the effort is being enthusiastically made.

The communists themselves admit that the "national bourgeoisie" is a highly un-dependable and erratic ally. I do not doubt that Sukarno would quickly take measures against the communists if he considered their growth a real threat to the government. But from the tone of his recent addresses, I would judge that his attention is so clearly directed toward the threat of the "imperialist west" that the substantial gains of the Indonesian Communist Party have been given only secondary consideration.

The complex set of emotions and beliefs which dominate Sukarno make his conduct extremely difficult to analyse. While the communists and extremist Moslems have openly stated their intentions and programs, nationalists of Sukarno's type drive on toward their own admirable goals of independence, pride, and prosperity in a mixed atmosphere of hope and fear. For two years now, this atmosphere has encouraged the growth not of the Nationalist Party, but of the Moslem and communist extremes in Indonesian politics.

Yours sincerely,



Boyd R. Compton

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