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# “Heirs to What Had Been Accomplished”: D. N. Aidit, the PKI, and Maoism, 1950–1965

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## Abstract

*Why did the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) pursue a nonviolent, collaborative, and parliamentary path to power? How did it secure major electoral successes? The answers to both queries have much to do with the PKI's adaptation of Maoism. Although scholars recognize that Maoism was influential on PKI theory and praxis, they have hitherto undervalued the extent to which PKI leaders, notably Dipa Nusantara Aidit and Muhammad Hatta Lukman, engaged with Mao's ideas and how such ideas informed policy. Through textual exegesis of PKI leaders' writings and speeches, our article argues that the PKI's "Indonesianization" of Marxism–Leninism drew from several Maoist texts, but differed in its composition in a number of important ways. "Indonesianization" entailed cross-class alliances, the political agency of the peasantry, willingness to cooperate with parties across the political spectrum, and, most innovatively, a nonviolent agenda. The PKI also demonstrated an adaptive willingness to learn from all, while remaining beholden to none. Our goal is to show how PKI leaders spoke back in their dialectical engagement with Maoism, as Maoism, for them, did not constitute a static, orthodox, or monolithic "thing." Instead, Maoism was for Aidit and Lukman an ideological system within which lay an ideological discourse, critical interpretive paradigm, historical revolutionary experience, military strategy, and blueprint to socialist development against which to juxtapose their ideas and grand visions.*

After the Second World War, post-independence issues of underdevelopment and socioeconomic inequality prompted disenchanted intellectuals throughout Southeast Asia to question the ramshackle economic frameworks left behind by hastily departing colonial empires. Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, hereafter PKI) leader Dipa Nusantara Aidit (1923–65) looked to Marxism–Leninism as a lens through which to interpret and rectify the Indonesian situation. He cast a wide net in engaging with radical thought from within Indonesia and without. Of these radical wellsprings, however, scholars have largely overlooked Maoism, and, in so doing, have limited our understanding of why the PKI was successful for a time in pursuing a nonviolent revolutionary course. In comparing Indonesian communism under Aidit to Maoism in China,

we discern striking similarities and strong evidence of Indonesian communism's selective adaptation of Mao's early ideas.

We pose the following questions: why did the PKI, unlike every other Southeast Asian Communist movement, pursue a nonviolent, collaborative, and parliamentary path to power and work within the state and its legal strictures rather than attempt to overturn it? How did the PKI secure major electoral successes during the period of parliamentary democracy (1950–59) and achieve significant political influence as Soekarno's de facto partner under his authoritarian-flavored Guided Democracy (1959–65)? We contend that the answers to both queries have much to do with the PKI's selective adaptation of Maoism.

Maoism entered the PKI's orbit after decades of its leaders and theorists engaging with Marxist theory, which scholars have explored at length. Ruth McVey explored the PKI from its original effective use of a "bloc-within" strategy to its emergence as "the defender of the poor and the leader of the fight for independence from foreign capitalist rule," policies in accord with Stalinist ideas and Comintern doctrine during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>1</sup> Larisa Efimova concluded upon her discovery of correspondences between Stalin and the newly anointed PKI leader Aidit from 1951 to 1953 in archival records in Moscow that the PKI leadership was in fact genuinely Stalinist in orientation before its 1954 Fifth National Congress.<sup>2</sup> Robert Cribb, importantly, identified "continuity in Indonesian Marxist thought which constitutes a distinctive Indonesian tradition in the application of Marx's thought to Indonesian conditions ... the emphasis which the party placed on the preservation and spread of Marxist-Leninist ideas rather than on direct revolutionary action."<sup>3</sup> These findings, which demonstrate the PKI's open-mindedness to a broad spectrum of ideological discourses and adapting Marxism to Indonesian conditions, spurred us to uncover PKI engagements with Maoism, itself a theory-practice-theory-oriented ideological system with which Aidit and his fellow PKI leaders engaged seriously in the 1950s.

Several scholars have recognized that Maoism was an important ideological discourse that PKI leaders engaged intellectually.<sup>4</sup> Donald Hindley was among the first to trace preliminary threads between Mao's writings and policies and those of Aidit. Instead of using the map and compass of historiography to understand Maoism in its historical context, Hindley relied on the textual map and compass of literary criticism and academic Marxism to understand potential links between Mao and Aidit.<sup>5</sup> Rex Mortimer picked up Hindley's mantle, but focused less on literary comparisons and rhetorical similarities, and more on direct Maoist influences on Aidit

<sup>1</sup>Ruth McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Sheffield, 2007), 155.

<sup>2</sup>Larisa M. Efimova, *Stalin i Indoneziya: Politika SSSR v otnoshenii Indonezii v 1945–1953 godakh: Nyeizvestniye Stranitsiy* (Stalin and Indonesia: Soviet Policy towards Indonesia, 1945–1953: Unknown Pages) (Moscow, 2004), 156, 175–6.

<sup>3</sup>Robert Cribb, "The Indonesian Marxist Tradition," in Colin Mackerras and Nick Knight, eds., *Marxism in Asia* (London, 1985), 251–72, at 252.

<sup>4</sup>For instance, Donald Hindley, *The Communist Party of Indonesia, 1951–1963* (Berkeley, 1966), 30–31, 42, 72–7, 92–3, 188; Rex Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism under Sukarno: Ideology and Politics, 1959–1965* (Ithaca, 1974), 24, 56, 106 n. 51, 136, 146–8, 153–64, 202; David Mozingo, *Chinese Policy toward Indonesia, 1949–1967* (Ithaca, 1976), 20–21, 218–31.

<sup>5</sup>Hindley, *The Communist Party of Indonesia*.

and the PKI. Mortimer uncovered that Aidit read 1954 English-language translations of *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* by Lawrence and Wishart, the official Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) press.<sup>6</sup> He also claimed that in Aidit's 1957 analysis of contemporary Indonesian social structure, "Indonesian Society and the Indonesian Revolution," he "drew heavily upon" Mao's writings. "Many passages," Mortimer continues, "were taken almost word for word" from one of Mao's essays.<sup>7</sup>

Other scholars have acknowledged the link between Aidit and Maoism, but either in too brief compass or by eliding complexities. Their analyses of PKI engagement with Maoism either reflect a basic grasp (or complete misunderstanding) of what constitutes Maoism, or fail to portray the PKI as crafters of an indigenous Marxism. Justus van der Kroef provided the first study of the "Indonesian Maoists," though his study applied the term "Maoist" as a simplistic catchall for PKI ideology.<sup>8</sup> Julia Lovell has argued against decades of PKI scholarship and in contravention to Indonesian scholars' findings to claim that Indonesian Communists were "intoxicated" by Maoist propaganda.<sup>9</sup> Instead of acknowledging that Aidit engaged with Maoism seriously in his "Indonesianization" of Marxism-Leninism, Lovell sidesteps the PKI's steadfast commitment to nonviolent cooperation with Soekarno's Indonesian National Party (Partai Nasional Indonesia, PNI)—with Beijing's encouragement—and a cross-class alliance during Guided Democracy.

One scholar who does not do this is Cribb, whose chapter on the PKI's Marxism credits the party's indigenous interpretation of Marxism for its "temporary political successes in a society which, despite certain resemblances to [those] of China and Indochina, does not permit the uncritical application of any externally derived interpretation of the thought of Marx."<sup>10</sup> This, we argue, is a core tenet of the Maoist *ideological system*: dialogic engagement with an exogenous ideological discourse and creative adaptation of this discourse with a view to application in a particular historical situation and sociocultural milieu whilst maintaining the original ideological discourse's purported universality.<sup>11</sup> Building on the work of Mortimer and Cribb, we identify specific Maoist ideas that the PKI adapted or rejected in formulating their political strategy.

To accomplish this task, we analyze the writings and speeches of Aidit and his fellow PKI leader Muhammad Hatta Lukman (1920–65). Contrasting their arguments against Maoist ideas, we demonstrate their adaptation of the Marxist–

<sup>6</sup>Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism*, 148. It is possible that Aidit obtained copies of *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (London, 1945) from Dutch, Singaporean, or Malayan Communists. Mortimer does not divulge how or why Aidit consulted these translations via the CPGB publication house.

<sup>7</sup>Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism*, 148. He continues, "Superficially, there was a good deal in common between the circumstances of China and Indonesia, and consequently Aidit's account carried conviction beyond the ranks of the PKI. In a number of respects crucial for Aidit's political strategy, however, the Indonesian case was significantly different from the Chinese."

<sup>8</sup>Justus van der Kroef, "The Indonesian Maoists: Doctrines and Perspectives," *Occasional Papers/Reprints Series in Contemporary Asian Studies* 3 (1977), 1–31.

<sup>9</sup>Julia Lovell, *Maoism: A Global History* (London, 2019), 154.

<sup>10</sup>Cribb, "The Indonesian Marxist Tradition," 252.

<sup>11</sup>See Matthew Galway, *The Emergence of Global Maoism: China and the Cambodian Communist Movement, 1949–1979* (Ithaca, 2022), 5–13.

Leninist–Maoist canon to suit Indonesian conditions.<sup>12</sup> We argue that Aidit’s “Indonesianization” of Marxism–Leninism drew from Mao’s prior vernacularization (or “sinification”) of the same ideological discourse, but differed in its composition.<sup>13</sup> “Indonesianization” entailed cross-class alliances inclusive of peasants’ political agency, cooperation with parties across the political spectrum on an issue-by-issue basis, and a nonviolent agenda before 1965. Especially novel in the “Indonesianization” process was engaging with, drawing on, and adapting Maoism with a view toward nonviolent praxis rather than violent revolution against the state. This accounted for the PKI’s positionality in postindependence Indonesian politics, and built on the recognition of the previous PKI incarnations’ abortive pushes for political power in 1926 and 1948.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the PKI was in no position to initiate violent revolution like Communist parties elsewhere had done, nor did it wish to do so at the risk of “throw[ing] its united front into disarray” and drawing itself into a showdown with the Indonesian military.<sup>15</sup> Aidit’s PKI thus demonstrated an adaptive willingness to learn from all, while remaining beholden to none.

In theory and outlook, Aidit’s PKI viewed itself as an integral part of the Indonesian nationalist movement as well as an essential cog in the moving wheel of the world Communist movement. The PKI leadership saw no contradiction here. But as Mortimer notes, *in praxis* the Aidit leadership “acknowledged no other authority than themselves as entitled to determine how the national and international tasks of the party were to be reconciled.” Importantly, Mortimer continues, after a “middle course” between Moscow and Beijing became unfeasible, the PKI “shifted away from the generalized endorsement of Soviet world analysis that had marked its policy in the 1950s and toward a close identification with the international standpoint of the Communist Party of China.”<sup>16</sup>

The view that the PKI was beholden to none, but open to learning from all, underpinned Aidit’s approach to critical engagement with Maoist texts. Just as Mao exercised exegetical initiative in departing from Lenin and Stalin, Aidit had no qualms with departing from Mao. We show how he engaged with Mao’s ideas and formulas as part of an effort to make the foreign “speak,” while *speaking back* in a dialectical engagement with radical thought from outside his immediate sociocultural milieu. Maoism, for him, did not constitute a static, orthodox, or monolithic “thing” because there has never been an “orthodox” Mao Zedong thought or Maoism.<sup>17</sup> Instead, Maoism was for Aidit an entire system within which lay an ideological discourse, critical interpretive paradigm, historical revolutionary experience, military strategy, and blueprint to socialist development against

<sup>12</sup>Rex Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism under Sukarno* (Ithaca, 1974), 33.

<sup>13</sup>On Mao’s sinification of Marxism–Leninism see Nick Knight, *Rethinking Mao: Explorations in Mao Zedong Thought* (Lanham, 2007), 197–216; Arik Dirlik, *Marxism in the Chinese Revolution* (Lanham, 2005), 75–104; and Raymond F. Wylie, *The Emergence of Maoism* (Stanford, 1980).

<sup>14</sup>McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 290–346.

<sup>15</sup>Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism under Sukarno*, 60.

<sup>16</sup>Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism*, 329–30. On views of China by non-PKI intellectuals at the beginning of the People’s Republic of China see Liu Hong, *China and the Shaping of Indonesia, 1949–1965* (Singapore, 2011), 59–78.

<sup>17</sup>Knight, *Rethinking Mao*, 48–9.

which to juxtapose his own ideas and grand vision.<sup>18</sup> This was not merely rhetoric and posturing; Aidit and Lukman's ideas were disseminated and debated within formal educational classes undertaken by party cadres, particularly after the establishment of the Universitas Rakyat (People's University) in 1958.<sup>19</sup>

Mortimer rightly identified the PKI's adaptation of Maoism without subordinating itself to Beijing's blueprint, as the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) did.<sup>20</sup> Despite drifting away from the USSR and into closer identification with the CCP during the 1960s, Aidit's PKI remained functionally autonomous in both ideology and policy. Mortimer's monograph, while still the authoritative account of the 1960s PKI, does not make use of Chinese sources. Building on Mortimer's insights, we scrutinize Aidit's publications in conjunction with Mao's Chinese-language writings to show exactly how the PKI "incorporated only so much of China's theses as matched their own program."<sup>21</sup>

### Aidit and his cohorts' coming-of-age

The dominant PKI leaders of the 1950s and 1960s, notably Aidit, Lukman, Sudisman (1920–68), and Njoto (1925–65), had not studied abroad as students. Instead, they traveled from hinterlands to major centers in the Dutch East Indies, where they met influential figures who shaped their worldviews.<sup>22</sup> They were more domestically minded and Indonesia-centric than the earlier generation of republican leaders like Sjahrir and Hatta, or older PKI leaders Semaun, Darsono, and Tan Malaka, all of whom sojourned for years outside the then Netherlands East Indies.

Aidit was born on 30 July 1923 on Belitung Island off the eastern coast of Sumatra to an ethnic Malay family. He moved to Jakarta (Batavia), to attend the Hollandsche Inlandsch School and Middestand Handel School by grace of his father's position as a state official. Aidit studied Dutch to become a businessperson. Over time, natives' experiences in European-style colonial schools gave rise to a sense of "generational solidarity."<sup>23</sup>

The Japanese occupation was formative for Aidit and may have influenced his later ideological innovations. Even before the occupation, he joined the left-wing nationalist and Communist-influenced Gerindo (Gerakan Rakjat Indonesian—Indonesian People's Movement) as part of Barisan Gerindo, its youth organization. The former Gerindo leader and revolution-era prime minister, Amir Sjarifuddin (1947–8), had been partial to Marxist critiques of capitalism and imperialism since his days as a journalist in the 1930s. Amir was possibly an underground PKI member, and openly declared his alignment with the PKI upon the veteran

<sup>18</sup>Galway, *The Emergence of Global Maoism*, 6–7, 10.

<sup>19</sup>Ruth T. McVey, "Teaching Modernity: The PKI as an Educational Institution," *Indonesia* 50 (1990), 5–27, at 5, 13.

<sup>20</sup>Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism*, 330.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup>For a similar phenomenon in China and the spatial dimensions of center versus periphery in the construction of ideology see Yeh Wen-hsin, *Provincial Passages: Culture, Space, and the Origins of Chinese Communism* (Berkeley, 1996).

<sup>23</sup>The colonial legal category of *inlander* encompassed various non-European populations.

Stalinist Musso's return in 1948.<sup>24</sup> Amir had been one of Aidit's earliest progressive contacts in Gerindo and spurred his nascent nationalism.<sup>25</sup> Aidit's participation in Japanese-sponsored youth organizations also put him in contact with other radicals and new reading materials.

Young Generation (Angkatan Muda, est. mid-1944) was one such organization, and Aidit's participation connected him with the underground PKI. Young Generation was an organization for "controlling undesirable elements among the youth ... who were known or suspected of having 'illegal' connections or who were persistently and openly hostile to the Japanese and at the same time influential among their comrades."<sup>26</sup> Although the Japanese monitored suspected trouble-makers like Aidit, Young Generation grew steadily and crystallized into a tight-knit group. Aidit turned such connections into membership in the New Generation Hostel of Indonesia (Asrama Angkatan Baru Indonesia), a Japanese-sponsored "political training school" in which he received a "nationalist education" and wherein "Sukarno had given him his first training in Marxism."<sup>27</sup>

Prewar connections, notably with Gerindo, facilitated Aidit's gravitation to the PKI as well. His future colleague Sudisman (who would sit on the PKI Politburo with Aidit) was also a Gerindo affiliate. Sudisman became a member of the underground PKI during the Japanese occupation and participated in anti-Japanese student movements until his 1942 arrest, remaining incarcerated until 1945.<sup>28</sup> Rather than pushing for power, the underground PKI sought broadened participation and de-emphasized ideological rigidity given its small numbers and intense Japanese surveillance.<sup>29</sup> Although nationalist organizations such as Gerindo led to Aidit's first exposure to Marxism, he recalled that he "did not acquire more than a vague notion of Marxism until the war years." During the Japanese occupation, participation in the underground PKI led Aidit to Muhammad Jusuf, a "Marxist with mystical tendencies ... [from] whom Aidit borrowed a copy of Marx's *Das Kapital* in Dutch."<sup>30</sup> But the European setting of Marxian analysis spoke very little to Indonesian realities, and Aidit was quick to realize this limitation.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Harry Poeze, "The Cold War in Indonesia, 1948," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40/3 (2009), 497–517, at 512. On Amir's communist credentials see Jacques Leclerc, "Afterword: The Masked Hero," in Anton Lucas, ed., *Local Opposition and Underground Resistance to the Japanese in Java, 1942–1945* (Melbourne, 1986), 341–47.

<sup>25</sup>George M. Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca, 1952), xvi, 38–9, 272–73.

<sup>26</sup>Benedict Anderson, *Some Aspects of Indonesian Politics under the Japanese Occupation: 1944–45* (Ithaca, 1961), 51–2.

<sup>27</sup>Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism*, 35–6, quoting *Harian Rakjat* (People's Daily), 13 March 1965.

<sup>28</sup>"Biographical Note," in *Analysis of Responsibility: Defence Speech of Sudisman, General Secretary of the Indonesian Communist Party at His Trial before the Special Military Tribunal, Jakarta, 21 July 1967*, trans. Benedict Anderson (Melbourne, 1975), 1.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*; McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 155.

<sup>30</sup>Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism*, 332. Along with Soeprapto, Muhammad Jusuf was among the most prominent PKI leaders during the early phase of the Indonesian Revolution, but his ties to the Japanese weakened his legitimacy. Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, 158–9.

<sup>31</sup>Donald Hindley, *The Communist Party of Indonesia, 1951–1963* (Berkeley, 1966), 30. See also Tan Malaka, "The Birth and Growth of the Republic of Indonesia," in Malaka, *From Jail to Jail*, vol. 3, trans. Helen Jarvis (Athens, OH, 1991), 67–8, emphasis added by Jarvis. Aidit may have read Tan Malaka's writings by the end of the revolution because they circulated as *samizdat* since the 1920s and were reprinted during the revolution.



Aidit eventually ascended to the PKI Central Committee in 1947.<sup>32</sup> He became a delegate to the Komite Nasional Indonesia (KNI, the de facto republican parliament), and a full PKI Politburo member in 1948. The fratricide at Madiun in September 1948, however, devastated PKI ranks and scattered surviving party cadres as they fled Madiun or were imprisoned.<sup>33</sup> However, the PKI's 1948 decimation at Madiun created a leadership vacuum that allowed a new generation of leaders to assert their influence. Aidit, who claimed to have spent 1949–50 in China but likely remained in Jakarta, was by 1951 a serious candidate for PKI leadership.<sup>34</sup>

The shared revolutionary experiences of Aidit and his cohorts allowed them to become a tight-knit and cohesive leadership group. Aidit and company ousted older PKI leaders such as Tan Ling Djie, though not Alimin, and mustered enough *pemuda* support to win an internal election for PKI leadership in January 1951.<sup>35</sup> This ushered in a new five-person Politburo dominated by Aidit's group: Aidit as first secretary and Sudisman, Lukman, and Njoto as Politburo members.<sup>36</sup> Despite its commitment to building a cadre party rather than a mass party in the 1950s, Aidit's PKI dramatically expanded its rank and file. Mortimer estimates that PKI membership skyrocketed from seven thousand in 1952 to 150,000 in 1954.<sup>37</sup>

As first secretary, Aidit also oversaw the expansion of PKI influence over trade union federations. These included the Central All-Indonesian Workers Organization (Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia—SOBSI—established 1947) and mass organizations such as the Indonesian Peasants' Front (Barisan Tani Indonesia—BTI), the Indonesian Women's Movement (Gerakan Wanita Indonesia—Gerwani), and the Worker's Youth (Pemuda Rakjat).<sup>38</sup> PKI-affiliated unions and organizations won significant support, even after adjusting for probable deliberate inflation. In 1963, Aidit claimed that 1.2 million of four million organized workers were SOBSI members, whereas the BTI had 6.3 million members. Even Pemuda Rakjat and Gerwani claimed 1.5 million members each.<sup>39</sup> These numbers may not be strictly reliable, but they do paint a rough picture of the PKI's broad-based support. Certainly,

<sup>32</sup>Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism*, 38.

<sup>33</sup>Ruth McVey, "Indonesian Communism and the Transition to Guided Democracy," in A. Doak Barnett, ed., *Communist Strategies in Asia* (New York, 1963), 148–95, at 149. On the Madiun affair see Ann Swift, *The Road to Madiun: The Indonesian Communist Uprising of 1948* (Jakarta, 2010); and Harry Poeze, *Madiun 1948: PKI Bergerak* (Jakarta, 2011).

<sup>34</sup>John Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder: The September 30th Movement and Suharto's Coup d'État in Indonesia* (Madison, 2006), 125. See also Hong Liu, *China and the Shaping of Indonesia, 1949–1965* (Singapore, 2011), 277–8.

<sup>35</sup>Alimin himself evinced an attraction to Maoist ideas in the early 1950s, prefiguring Aidit. See Harry Poeze, *Verguisd en Vergeten: Tan Malaka, de Linkse Beweging en de Indonesische Revolutie, 1945–1949* (Leiden, 2007), 583–9.

<sup>36</sup>Hindley, *The Communist Party of Indonesia*, 63. The last Politburo member not loyal to Aidit was veteran communist Alimin, who was shunted into an ineffectual sinecure in October 1953. Aidit loyalist Sakirman replaced him.

<sup>37</sup>Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism*, 40–42.

<sup>38</sup>Olle Tornquist, *Dilemmas of Third World Communism: The Destruction of the PKI in Indonesia* (London, 1984), 74; and McVey, "Indonesian Communism and the Transition to Guided Democracy," 154–5.

<sup>39</sup>D. N. Aidit, *The Indonesian Revolution and the Immediate Tasks of the Communist Party of Indonesia* (Peking, 1964), 57.

their parliamentary opponents, particularly Masjumi, were in no doubt as to the threat posed by the PKI's mass support.<sup>40</sup>

### Mao and more: the PKI's creative adaptation (1955–1965)

#### *Mise en scène: the meanings of Maoism in 1950s Indonesia*

Ruth McVey identifies multiple meanings of China's presence to Indonesians, arguing that "China has been not one thing to the Indonesians but three: a state, a revolution, and an ethnic minority." China's images in Indonesian eyes, she contends, were at best ambivalent.<sup>41</sup> But what set the stage of Maoism's emergence in progressive circles? How did it arise among the PKI leadership as an ideological system of interest?

The emergence of Maoism in Indonesian intellectual circles was facilitated by three principal factors. First, Stalin's death on 5 March 1953 and the subsequent internal struggle over Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) leadership, Mozingo notes, "greatly weakened the presumption of Moscow's leadership of the Sino-Soviet alliance—a process that probably began as a result of dissatisfactions relating to the Korean War."<sup>42</sup> Although the CCP had assertive tendencies with regard to the world Communist movement before Stalin's passing, the absence of Stalin, and Mao Zedong's increasingly iconic stature, helped to position the CCP as a spiritual successor to leadership of the global Communist movement. Most importantly, Stalin's successor, Nikita Khrushchev, denounced his predecessor in 1956, which, Mortimer contends, led the PKI leadership to "resent" the CPSU for "delivering a blow to a prestigious international Communist figure without prior consultation with other parties."<sup>43</sup> Stalin's death and Khrushchev's posthumous denunciation of Stalin led to a seismic shift among Communist parties in Asia: the CCP became an increasingly attractive revolutionary model on which to pattern their own approach to winning state power, and regarded the Chinese as leaders of the world Communist revolution.<sup>44</sup> For Aidit and the PKI leadership, de-Stalinization and the overall ideological "drift" in Soviet politics and foreign policy under Khrushchev left them without clear substantive policy guidance—and without safe political cover—from Moscow. This ultimately pushed the PKI leadership further toward Mao as a safer and more certain source of ideological legitimization during this period.

<sup>40</sup>Rémy Madinier, *Islam and Politics in Indonesia: The Masjumi Party between Democracy and Integralism*, trans. Jeremy Desmond (Singapore, 2015), 218, 278.

<sup>41</sup>Ruth McVey, "Indonesian Communism and China," in Tang Tsou, ed., *China in Crisis*, vol. 2 (Chicago, 1969), 357–94.

<sup>42</sup>Mozingo, *Chinese Policy towards Indonesia*, 121.

<sup>43</sup>Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism under Sukarno*, 335 n. 11. See also D. N. Aidit, "Tentang Perawatan Ke-empat Negeri," *Bintang Merah* 12 (June 1956), 216–18. Archival documents from Moscow reveal that Aidit and Stalin had met before his death, and had several CCP-facilitated exchanges that, Efimova contends, influenced the PKI's orientation in advance of its 1954 fifth national congress. Efimova, *Stalin i Indoneziya*, 152–72. On Aidit's and the PKI's later alignment with Beijing see Taomo Zhou, *Migration in the Time of Revolution: China, Indonesia, and the Cold War* (Ithaca, 2019), 155–6.

<sup>44</sup>Galway, *The Emergence of Global Maoism*, 63–4. Importantly, though, the PKI "maintain[ed] a show of friendly relations with the CPSU and its supporting parties," especially during the Soviet Union's grants of support during the 1959–61 campaign to liberate in West Irian from Dutch rule. Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism under Sukarno*, 334.



A second factor was the development of close relations between Soekarno and Beijing, which made the CCP and its commitment to socialist development especially palatable to Indonesian anti-imperialists and Communists. Soekarno was the first Indonesian head of state to visit Maoist China in 1956. “Greatly impressed by the effectiveness of China’s highly centralized political system,” Soekarno lauded the CCP’s collective leadership and Maoist China overall for “catching up with the developed world at an amazing speed.”<sup>45</sup> Soekarno’s visit, Zhou speculates, might well have left a lasting imprint on him and even underpinned his authoritarian turn to “Guided Democracy.”<sup>46</sup> The CCP also pledged material aid in the form of cotton, rice, and military supplies to Indonesia as part of the Indonesian state’s attempt to neutralize separatism in the archipelago. In March 1958, Marshal Chen Yi intimated to Ambassador Soekardjo that the CCP was resolutely committed to give Indonesia “unconditional help” whenever President Soekarno so required. A military delegation followed in that same year that returned to Jakarta with “20 million USD worth of military equipment for the Indonesian army, navy, and air force” from the CCP.<sup>47</sup> Friendly China–Indonesia relations further boosted Maoist China’s international image as an anti-imperialist, nonaligned nation whose leadership welcomed and supported materially non-Communist leaders like Soekarno and Sihanouk, among others.<sup>48</sup>

Third, Aidit’s ascent to leadership involved a harsh attack on the once influential ethnic Chinese PKI leader, Tan Ling Djie (Chen Linru), amid a broader climate of increasing sinophobia. In August 1952, the PKI Central Committee initiated an investigation into Tan Ling Djie’s activities to uncover contradictions to the party line. Despite his “self-criticism” and open admission of fault, the Central Committee dismissed his contrition as disingenuous and accused him at the 6–8 October 1953 PKI plenum of committing “errors of subjectivism, legalism and liquidationism.”<sup>49</sup> The PKI Central Committee opted against full expulsion, but ejected him from the Central Committee in October 1953.<sup>50</sup> The PKI Central

<sup>45</sup>Zhou, *Migration in the Time of Revolution*, 66, quoting “Sujianuo zongtong chuguo fangwen chengjiu juda, Yindunixiya baozhi relie zanyang” (President Sukarno’s Foreign Visit Was Extremely Fruitful and Was Warmly Praised by Indonesian Newspapers), *Renmin Ribao* (People’s Daily), 19 Oct. 1956; “Sujianuo zongtong dui Zhongguo renminde guangbo yanshuo” (President Sukarno Delivered a Speech to the Chinese People on the Radio), *Renmin Ribao* (People’s Daily), 16 Oct. 1956.

<sup>46</sup>Zhou, *Migration in the Time of Revolution*, 66. On positive CCP–PNI relations, see also “Zhongguo he Yindunixiyade youyi zhi qiao” (The Bridge of Friendship between China and Indonesia), *Renmin Ribao* (People’s Daily), 15 Oct. 1956.

<sup>47</sup>Zhou, *Migration in the Time of Revolution*, 69, citing “Chen Yi buzhang tong Yindunixiya Sujiazuo jiu Yinni panluan he goumi deng wenti de tanhua jilu” (Minutes of a Discussion between Foreign Minister Chen Yi and Indonesian Ambassador Soekardjo on Regional Rebellions in Indonesia, Rice Purchase, etc.) (2 March 1958), Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, no. 105-00366-02; “Zhang fubuzhang jiejian Yinni Sujiazuo dashi de tanhua jilu” (Minutes of a Discussion between Vice Foreign Minister Zhang and the Indonesian Ambassador Soekardjo) (29 April 1958), Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, no. 105-00366-01. See also Audrey R. Kahin and George McT. Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy: The Secret Eisenhower and Dulles Debacle in Indonesia* (New York, 1995), 54–65; and Fan Zhonghui, *Jiangjun, Waijiao jia, Yishu jia: Huang Zhen zhuan* (General, Diplomat, and Artist: A Biography of Huang Zhen) (Beijing, 2007), 377.

<sup>48</sup>Galway, *The Emergence of Global Maoism*, 60–62.

<sup>49</sup>Hindley, *The Communist Party of Indonesia*, 63–4.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 79. Hindley characterizes Tan Ling Djie’s purported failings as follows: “In the field of organization. Tan Ling Djie-ism was condemned as basically liquidationist. It advocated the creation of a working-

Committee subsequently forced ethnic Chinese members out of leadership positions. As Zhou notes, this may have been part of a strategy to “present itself as a nationalist party rather than a proxy of ‘red China.’”<sup>51</sup> On one hand, the combined pressures of internal fissures within the PKI and the emerging Sino-Soviet split provided a powerful incentive for Aidit to develop bold new visions and strategies, going beyond Stalinist precepts. On the other, the PKI was keen to avoid being seen as a CCP proxy in an already sinophobic environment. Cumulatively, this situation facilitated his selective adaptation of Maoist ideas with little regard for the prevailing CCP ideological orthodoxy of the moment.

### *The indispensable united front*

In 1951, the PKI resurfaced in a Marxist-friendly, but decidedly noncommunist, state. Its leadership entered parliamentary politics and its membership was willing to work alongside the anti-imperialist PNI toward figuring out a way forward—“not just [a problem] on the composition of the state but, more important, on what the state should be and do.”<sup>52</sup> Aidit and his comrades sought to reform Indonesian society by joining Marxist–Leninist universals to the concrete conditions of the Indonesian historical situation, not unlike what Mao had stressed in his writings. Mao’s emphasis on creative adaptation in applying Marxism–Leninism to national historical conditions underpinned the PKI approach, and as Mao had done with sinification, the PKI adaptation of Marxism–Leninism did not abandon the original theory’s universality.<sup>53</sup>

In a May 1955 speech marking the PKI’s thirty-fifth anniversary, Aidit was unequivocal in his admiration of Mao. He positioned Mao within the same pantheon of Communist intellectuals that included Lenin and Stalin, canonizing him as a Communist ideologue of global stature. The speech’s main theme was the “broadening of the united front and the building of the party,” which Aidit used to describe the PKI’s activities under his leadership. Before beginning his speech, Aidit quoted Mao’s 30 June 1949 commemoration speech “On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship.”<sup>54</sup> Notably, this quote was not about the CCP’s path to power, but instead Mao’s thoughts on the October Revolution’s global resonance. In Aidit’s eyes, Mao was not merely an adapter of Marxism–Leninism to Chinese conditions, but a producer of insights that were important for all Communist movements. Aidit characterized Mao’s ideas as expressive of a

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class party other than the PKI. This was ‘tailism’ because the working class already had sufficient political consciousness to support an openly Communist party. In the sphere of policy, Tan Ling Djie-ism was described as ‘legalistic,’ as ‘nothing other than bourgeois liberalism,’ because it wished to tone down the Party program, to divert the members too much from the class struggle, to place excessive emphasis on the parliamentary struggle.”

<sup>51</sup>Zhou, *Migration in the Time of Revolution*, 108.

<sup>52</sup>Robert Elson, *The Idea of Indonesia: A History* (Cambridge, 2008), 153. Sukarno won favor among PKI leaders for hosting the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, though they differed on policy significantly. Jennifer Lindsay, “Heirs to World Culture 1950–1965: An Introduction,” in Jennifer Lindsay and Maya H. T. Lim, eds., *Heirs to World Culture: Being Indonesian, 1950–1965* (Leiden, 2012), 1–30, at 9.

<sup>53</sup>See Galway, *The Emergence of Global Maoism*, 5–13.

<sup>54</sup>Mao Zedong, “On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship” (30 June 1949), in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 4, 1st edn (Beijing, 1961), 411–24.

“proletarian world outlook and an instrument for foreseeing a nation’s future and considering anew one’s own problems.”<sup>55</sup> Even Lenin’s *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917) was only quoted after Mao. The lesson Aidit explicitly drew from Lenin and Mao was that Indonesian Communists “had to adapt themselves to the peculiar conditions which did not exist in European countries.”<sup>56</sup>

This speech’s most direct connection to Maoism lay in the political agency of the peasantry. Like Mao, Aidit insisted on urban proletarian leadership over a broad workers’ movement. Unlike Soekarno’s *marhaen* or Tan Malaka’s *murba*, Aidit made a clear categorical distinction between peasantry and proletariat.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, Aidit identified two big mistakes that the PKI had made before 1950: first, it had been wary of relying on the peasants because they were insufficiently politically conscious; and second, it had been reluctant to coopt the middle class and intelligentsia because capitalist forces had already coopted them.<sup>58</sup> This reveals the unambiguous tenor of Aidit’s Maoist inspirations: peasants were politically agentive, and even reliable as revolutionary actors. They merely required training and mobilization, which the PKI had pursued since before the 1955 general election and later more decisively during the ill-fated 1964 *turun kebawah* campaign.<sup>59</sup>

At the same time, Aidit distanced the PKI from class warfare. He recognized the importance of winning over the middle class alongside the peasantry, and even made it clear that the united front had to be genuine rather than coercive.<sup>60</sup> “This initiative does not to the slightest degree mean that the Communists should force other people to follow it,” he averred, “but the C.P.I. [PKI] must patiently persuade honest people that the only way to achieve victory is by forming a national front supported by all progressive and anti-Imperialist people.”<sup>61</sup>

Aidit’s emphasis on the political import of the peasantry facilitated his embrace of the bourgeoisie’s revolutionary potential. This position differed significantly from Stalin’s forced collectivization (1928) and Lenin’s New Economic Policy (1922), both of which had scant regard for the peasantry and bourgeoisie. In Aidit’s words,

The August Revolution ... gave the C.P.I. [PKI] experiences in the united front. The [August] revolution gave the C.P.I. important experiences concerning the wavering nature of the national bourgeoisie, that under certain conditions, this class can participate and firmly side with the [socialist] revolution,

<sup>55</sup>D. N. Aidit, *The Birth and Growth of the Communist Party of Indonesia* (Jakarta, 1958), 6.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 8. *Marhaen* was a conceptual category (of shopkeepers, petty traders, and cottage industry workers, inter alia) that Soekarno popularized and corresponds to a lumpenproletariat. Several Marxist movements used the term. *Murba* was Tan Malaka’s modification of proletariat, which corresponded to the “poor” or “dispossessed,” and included the lumpenproletariat and agrarian smallholders. He ascribed it political agency. Oliver Crawford, “The Political Thought of Tan Malaka,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2018), 182.

<sup>58</sup>Aidit, *The Birth and Growth of the Communist Party of Indonesia*, 13.

<sup>59</sup>Hindley, *The Communist Party of Indonesia*, 164–74. The *turunkebawah* (going-down) campaigns of 1964 were an attempt to effect land redistribution at the village level after years of national-level obstruction. Initially successful, the conservative backlash was so strong that the PKI backpedaled within months.

<sup>60</sup>Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism*, 152–69.

<sup>61</sup>Aidit, *The Birth and Growth of the Communist Party of Indonesia*, 30.

but under other conditions, it can waver and betray. Because of this, the proletariat and the C.P.I. must always and unceasingly draw the bourgeoisie into the revolution but they must also guard against the possibility of their betraying the [socialist] revolution. The dualistic character of the Indonesian national bourgeoisie greatly affects the political line and the up-building of the Party. The progress or decline of the Party and of the [socialist] revolution depends to a great extent on the Party's relations with the national bourgeoisie and the reverse is also true.<sup>62</sup>

Aidit recognized hazards in this strategy. He qualified this statement by asserting that, “[in] uniting with the national bourgeoisie, the Party must not abandon its independence and it must not neglect its most reliable and most numerous ally, the peasantry.”<sup>63</sup>

Aidit's emphasis on the importance of a united front mirrored the CCP's experiences with the first and second united fronts and the CCP's broad-classes front in some of Mao's most famous writings.<sup>64</sup> Aidit's speech was reminiscent of Mao's calls for a broad-classes front in his 1927 “Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan” (“Hunan nongmin yundong kaocha baogao”), a sentiment that he repeated during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression (1937–45), but which he revised after 1945.<sup>65</sup> In Mao's 1940 essay “On New Democracy” (“Xin minzhuzhuyi lun”), the “classic formulation of the premises of Chinese Marxism,”<sup>66</sup> he intimated that socialist governmental structure would emerge under the stewardship of the “joint dictatorship of several anti-imperialist classes.”<sup>67</sup> Mao elaborated further,

there are two kinds of revolutions. The first is in the bourgeois or capitalist category ... The second kind, namely, the proletarian–socialist world revolution ... has the proletariat of the capitalist countries as its main force and the oppressed peoples of the colonies and semicolonies as its allies. No matter what classes, parties, or individuals in an oppressed nation join the revolution, and no matter whether they are conscious of this point or understand it subjectively, so long as they oppose imperialism, their revolution becomes part of the proletarian–socialist world revolution and they become its allies.<sup>68</sup>

It was exactly this insight that Aidit sought to apply to Indonesia.

Aidit's Maoist borrowings were also evident in subtle ways. He was in the habit of making PKI–CCP comparisons, noting that PKI membership had stood at 1,140

<sup>62</sup>Ibid. 35.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>64</sup>On the CCP's early experiences with united fronts and broad recruitment after the 1927 Shanghai massacre see Ying Xing, “Cong ‘difangjunshihua’ dao ‘junshidifanghua’: Yi Hongsijun ‘banzhefazhan’ zhanlüedeyuanliubianweizhongxin” (From “Local Militarization” to “Military Localization”: A Focus on the Origins and Development of the Fourth Red Army's “Integrated-Development” Strategy), *Kaifangshidai* (Open Times) (China) 5 (2018), 1–42.

<sup>65</sup>Mao Zedong, “Report on the Peasant Movement in Hunan” (Feb. 1927), in *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912–1949* (hereafter *MRP*), ed. Stuart Schram and Timothy Cheek, 8 vols. (Armonk, 1992), 2: 430–35.

<sup>66</sup>Dirlik, *Marxism in the Chinese Revolution*, 79.

<sup>67</sup>Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy,” in *MRP*, 7: 330–69, at 341.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 337.

in 1924 in comparison to the CCP's 900. However, he noted, the PKI of the 1920s had failed to "consolidate the broad sympathy of the masses," managing only to arouse only "a spirit of anti-Dutch Imperialism."<sup>69</sup> The fundamental error, in Aidit's view, was the PKI's lack of patience and investment in incremental progress. Instead, it "fell prey to 'leftist' slogans," and attempted to do the prodigious work of the socialist revolution all at once—stage a violent revolution, overthrow the colonial government, liquidate the feudal landowners, and so on. This resulted in uniting its enemies and politically isolating the PKI.<sup>70</sup>

By 1955, Aidit had begun to emphasize "small practical activities," signaling his willingness to learn from past PKI mistakes and from the CCP's experiences after the 1927 Shanghai massacre as well as during the Jiangxi Soviet and Yan'an years (the early 1930s and the 1940s). Such activities included "insignificant actions which were linked with the everyday needs of the workers, peasants, and the working intelligentsia ... It was only here, in such activities, that the party would unite with the broad working masses around the party."<sup>71</sup> Aidit placed primacy on meeting the material needs of soldiers and workers wherever possible, recognizing that their urgent needs had been repeatedly deferred in favor of first winning the Indonesian revolution. While the "parliamentary struggle" was important, it always went hand in hand with a "people's democracy program"; parliamentary victories served primarily to create space and opportunities to implement concrete actions that would improve the masses' lives.<sup>72</sup> This formulation bears a striking resemblance to Mao's 1934 call for the CCP Central Executive Committee in Jiangxi on the importance of mass mobilization and meeting the needs of the broad masses:

There is one very important question that the comrades have failed to stress ... the question of linking the lives of the people with the revolutionary war ... The central task of the soviets is to mobilize the broad masses to take part in the revolutionary war, overthrow the imperialist Guomindang by means of such war, spread the revolution throughout the country, and drive imperialism out of China. Leading and organizing the revolutionary war is the central task of the soviets ... If we really comprehend this task, understand that developing the revolutionary war is our most basic and urgent task, and understand that the revolution must at all costs be spread throughout the country, then we should in no way ignore or underestimate the question of immediate interests, the well-being of the broad masses. Why is this so? It is because war is the war of the masses; it can be waged only by mobilizing the masses and by relying upon them. Only by mobilizing the masses on a huge scale to participate in and support the war can we win victory in it.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>69</sup>Aidit, *The Birth and Growth of the Communist Party of Indonesia*, 9.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 17–18.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>72</sup>D. N. Aidit, *Pertahankan Republik Proklamasi 1945!* (Jakarta, 1955), 11.

<sup>73</sup>Mao Zedong, "Conclusions Regarding the Report of the Central Executive Committee" (27 Jan. 1934), in *MRP IV* 4: 714–22, at 716. See also Mao, "The United Front in Cultural Work" (30 Oct. 1944), in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 3 (Beijing, 1965) 236–7.

This argument bore more than a passing resemblance to the CCP's application of the mass line (in theory in the 1920s, but in practice in 1943), which urged cadres to "listen to the masses and implement policies in accordance with popular will."<sup>74</sup> Aidit had learned from the CCP's experiences and Mao's ideas on the primacy of the masses in revolutionary mobilization—attentively listening to people's grievances, interpreting them within a Marxist–Leninist framework, and taking decisive action to resolve them. Actively adapting these principles to suit independent Indonesia's political economy, Aidit emphasized cadre training and concrete actions, including union actions, education provision, and organizing agricultural cooperatives, all to tangibly improve the masses' lives.<sup>75</sup>

By 1955, then, Aidit was unequivocal about an inclusive national united front and his Maoist inspirations. He was also explicit about the PKI's metabolization of other Communist parties' ideas and experiences. In a May 1955 interview with political scientist A. Doak Barnett of the American Universities Field Staff, Aidit stated that the PKI would build the foundation of a national united front by making progress on issues of common concern.<sup>76</sup> The PKI had fundamental ideological differences with the PNI, to say nothing of its parliamentary opponents, the Islamic party Masjumi and the Indonesian Socialist Party (PSI). But there were pressing issues on which all parties could cooperate, like the decolonization of the economy, land reform, and ejecting the Dutch from West Irian. Aidit mirrored his support for a united front across classes in calling for openness to a maximally inclusive parliamentary united front that included cooperating with Masjumi and the PSI.<sup>77</sup>

In response to Barnett's query on the PKI–CCP relationship and PKI links to Moscow, Aidit asserted that the PKI learned from all, but was beholden to none:

The ideology of the PKI is the ideology of the proletarian class, that is to say, the same as the ideology of Communist Parties in all other countries, the same as the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Communist Party of China, and the Communist Party of the USA. Since the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, the PKI has no organizational ties with any Communist Party abroad. Apart from studying the writings of their own PKI leaders, the members of the PKI have a duty to study the writings of foreign working class leaders, in the first place the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao Tse-Tung. The history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and of the Communist

<sup>74</sup>Aminda Smith, *Thought Reform and China's Dangerous Classes: Reeducation, Resistance, and the People* (Lanham, 2012), 18, 98–9.

<sup>75</sup>Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism*, 253–71, McVey, "Teaching Modernity," 18.

<sup>76</sup>Born and raised in Shanghai, Barnett worked as a correspondent for the *Chicago Daily News* during the Third Chinese Revolutionary Civil War (1945–9) and traveled throughout China. His familiarity with the CCP's rise to power predisposed him to perceive ideological similarities between the PKI and the CCP. The American Universities Field Staff described itself as a "corps of correspondents" who furnished "accurate, firsthand information on foreign areas" to US universities. It claimed to be an independent organization, but likely had links to US intelligence services. See "American Universities Field Service," *Engineering and Science* (later *Caltech*) 18/4 (1955), 15–16.

<sup>77</sup>D. N. Aidit, "Echoes of Mao Tse-Tung in Djakarta: An Interview with D. N. Aidit, Secretary General of the Indonesian Communist Party," interview by A. Doak Barnett, ABD-6-'55, American Universities Field Staff, 21 May 1955, 5.



Party of China are the most important books to be studied by PKI members.<sup>78</sup>

Aidit regarded the reconstituted PKI as starting afresh under his leadership. Its prior Comintern connection did not translate into commensurate ties to Moscow or Beijing. Aidit refused to be pinned down by Barnett's questions ("Is Mao or Stalin more important to you?"), responding with "Stalin also wrote on the peasant question. Comrade Mao Tse-Tung took as a basis the writings of Stalin and adapted them to China. We will do the same."<sup>79</sup>

Amused by Barnett's persistence, Aidit laughed and told Barnett, "We start from Marx."<sup>80</sup> This might seem like a cryptic response, but in light of the PKI's pre-1965 political strategy of working within the state rather than against it, Aidit likely spoke honestly. Much like Mao, Aidit recognized that Communists ought to begin with Marx and apply Marxist theory upon investigation of concrete circumstances:

When we say that Marxism is correct, it is absolutely not because Marx was some kind of "sage," but because his theories have been proven correct in our practice, and in our struggles. We need Marxism in our struggle. If we welcome this theory, it has nothing whatsoever to do with any formalistic or even mystical notions of a "sage." Many people who have read Marxist "books" have become renegades to the revolution, while illiterate workers have often been able to grasp Marxism very well. We must study Marxist "books," but they must be integrated with our actual situation.<sup>81</sup>

This idea had spurred the CCP to form a broad-masses front on the road to establishing socialism in China. Mao often railed against dogmatists in "On the New Stage" (1938) and "On New Democracy" (1940), arguing that one ought to apply Marxian universals to fit China's concrete realities.<sup>82</sup> Marx, as with Lenin and Stalin, was an essential theoretical point of departure for Mao and Aidit, but not the final destination. Aidit clearly recognized that the CCP's and CPSU's paths to power could never be imitated blindly.

Aidit was not the only senior PKI leader who advocated for a united front as a necessary step on the road to socialism and not as an instrumentalist shortcut to state power. PKI Politburo member Lukman also supported this position, evident in the pedagogical pamphlets he authored for PKI cadres. In *Tentang Front Persatuan Nasional* (Towards a National United Front) (1960), Lukman argued

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 9. Aidit certainly embraced aspects of Stalinism. In 1954, Aidit lent his unequivocal support to Stalin's claim in *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* (1951) that socialist economies were still subject to the law of value, and therefore had to develop and manage their productive forces through business elites if necessary. This same argument would form the basis for Xue Muqiao's 1981 justification of economic reform in the PRC. Aidit never recanted this position, despite Mao's opposition to it—articulated in *A Critique of Soviet Economics*—after the Sino-Soviet split. See D. N. Aidit, *Djalan ke Demokrasi Rakjat bagi Indonesia* (Jakarta, 1955), 9–11.

<sup>80</sup>Aidit, "Echoes of Mao Tse-Tung in Djakarta," 9.

<sup>81</sup>Mao Zedong, "Oppose Bookism" (May 1930), in *MRP*, 3: 419–26, at 421.

<sup>82</sup>On these two essays and Mao's criticisms of dogmatists see Dirlik, *Marxism in the Chinese Revolution*, 75–104; and Knight, *Rethinking Mao*, 197–216.

that before the CCP's military victory in 1949, the CCP "could and needed to build a united front with the national bourgeoisie [... *membikinblok dan mengadakan kerdjasama*]" during the 1911 revolution. Unlike Russia, Indonesia was a semi-colonized country that necessitated a different approach to "cultivating socialist revolution."<sup>83</sup> The PKI was therefore justified in seeking a similar path to socialist revolution in Indonesia; even the Bolsheviks had been rightly willing to collaborate with the bourgeoisie during the unsuccessful 1905 revolution.<sup>84</sup>

Lukman regarded this as perfectly in accordance with Lenin's and Stalin's ideas. He cited Lenin's speech at the second Comintern Congress (1920) and an unspecified text by Stalin to argue that both Soviet leaders recognized that the path to revolution differed for imperialist nations and colonized ones. The latter had to struggle first for independence, and the bourgeoisie could be legitimate allies in that struggle. To insist on the same road to revolution was a "deviation from the path of Marxism and the path of Leninism, making the same mistakes as the Second International."<sup>85</sup>

Lukman also admired Maoist ideas and was a pupil of the CCP's historical experiences. In his analysis of Liu Shaoqi's *Internationalism and Nationalism* (1952), Lukman posited,

Bourgeois nationalism in colonial and semicolonial countries possesses definitively progressive characteristics [*arti progressif yang menentukan*] if the bourgeoisie mobilizes the masses against imperialism and feudalism. As Lenin argued in his speech to the Second [*sic*] Congress of the Peoples of the East [1920], such nationalism has historical justification ... such alliances do not obstruct our education and organization of the farmers and masses, which infuses them with a revolutionary spirit ... The clearest example of this kind of cooperation is what occurred between the Chinese communists and Sun Yat-Sen.<sup>86</sup>

Lukman also placed a discernibly Maoist emphasis on peasants' political agency because they constituted the vast majority of the *rakyat* (Indonesian masses). He argued that the socialist revolution in Indonesia could not succeed without the mobilization of farmers.<sup>87</sup> Lukman, importantly, quoted Mao on the question of how to accommodate ethnic minorities in the PRC: "It is impossible to solve the consequential question of minority peoples and isolate reactionaries from various minority peoples without a large number of communist cadres from ethnic minority backgrounds."<sup>88</sup> With an eye on Indonesia's own ethnic Chinese minority, Lukman wholeheartedly endorsed Mao's position on this matter, demonstrating his willingness to study and adapt the CCP's historical experiences where relevant.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>83</sup>M. H. Lukman, *Tentang Front Persatuan Nasional* (Jakarta, 1960), 11–12.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 10–11.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, 22–3. See Liu Shaoqi, *Internationalism and Nationalism* (Beijing, 1952).

<sup>87</sup>Lukman, *Tentang Front Persatuan Nasional*, 23.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>89</sup>On Mao's stance on national minorities see Mao Zedong, "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions among the People" (27 Feb. 1957), in *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao: From the Hundred Flowers to*

### Deferring revolution

As preceding paragraphs have indicated, Mao's ideas and the CCP revolutionary experience were rich wellsprings for PKI political strategy in the 1950s. Aidit freely expressed admiration for the "[g]reat freedom struggle of the Chinese people." Yet he also identified the disastrous Madiun affair as the result of then prime minister Amir Sjarifuddin's attempt to replicate the Chinese revolutionary experience.<sup>90</sup> Amir had overemphasized similarities between China and Indonesia and, in so doing, did not adjust for serious differences. The most important difference was geography: absent a friendly rearguard (in the CCP's case northwest China bordered the USSR) and the advantage of strategic depth that a mountainous and forested hinterland granted, peasant insurgency was unlikely to succeed in Indonesia.<sup>91</sup>

Aidit's admiration for the CCP and Mao was unequivocal, but the revolutionary lesson that Aidit drew from China differed markedly from contemporaneous CCP ideology. Aidit retrospectively argued that the PKI ought to have used a combined strategy of consistent guerrilla warfare,<sup>92</sup> organized labor action in Dutch-controlled urban areas and plantations, and penetration and subversion of the Dutch colonial army to achieve victory in the Indonesian Revolution.<sup>93</sup>

Beyond reflections on revolutionary strategy, Aidit was also shockingly explicit about his willingness to defer socialist revolution after the establishment of a democratic state.<sup>94</sup> Towards the end of his 1955 speech, Aidit declared that the PKI

considers that this government [the elected government after the 1955 general election] must not be a government of dictatorship of the proletariat but a government of the dictatorship of the people. This government will effect not socialist but democratic reforms. It will be a government capable of uniting all anti-feudal and anti-imperialist forces, of transferring land to the peasants without compensation, of ensuring the democratic rights of the people; a government capable of defending the national industry and trade against foreign competition, of improving the material conditions of workers and abolishing unemployment.<sup>95</sup>

This position was reminiscent of Mao's calls for a new democratic government in his seminal essay "On New Democracy" (1940). As Mao intimated,

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*the Great Leap Forward*, ed. Roderick MacFarquhar, Timothy Cheek, and Eugene Wu (Cambridge, MA, 1989), 131–90, at 184.

<sup>90</sup>Aidit, *The Birth and Growth of the Communist Party of Indonesia*, 24–5.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, 27. Debates about the applicability of proletarian revolution to colonized nations stretched back to the 1920s, when PKI leaders like Darsono attempted to explain the Indies' peculiar political situation to the Comintern's India Sub-secretariat. The adaptation of Mao's ideas was therefore part of a decades-long dialectical process simultaneously informed by the sobering experience of unsuccessful uprisings. See Partai Komunis Indonesia and Komintern, "Report of Comrade Darsana to India Sub-secretariat, May 6, 1926," in "Notulen van vergaderingen van het Subsecretariaat voor India en Indonesië. Met bijlagen. 1926," Archief Komintern—Partai Komunis Indonesia, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis.

<sup>92</sup>See Mao Zedong, "On Protracted War" (26 May 1938), in *MRP*, 6: 319–89.

<sup>93</sup>Aidit, *The Birth and Growth of the Communist Party of Indonesia*, 28.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, 41.

In China today, the new-democratic state takes the form of the anti-Japanese united front. It is anti-Japanese and anti-imperialist; it is also a united front, an alliance of several revolutionary classes. But unfortunately, despite the fact that the War of Resistance has been going on for so long, the work of democratizing the state has already started, and the Japanese imperialists have exploited this fundamental weakness to stride into our country. If nothing is done about it, our national future will be gravely imperiled. *We hope that the movement for constitutional government that has just started will prevent this danger.*<sup>96</sup>

Like Aidit, Mao was clear that at no point was socialist transition to occur in a single step, and without the requisite historical circumstances in place. As he argued in “On Contradiction” (1937),

the fundamental contradiction in a process and the essence of the process determined by this fundamental contradiction will not disappear until the process is completed; but the conditions usually differ at each stage of development of a process ... although the nature of the fundamental contradiction in a process and the essence of the process remain unchanged, the fundamental contradiction becomes more and more intensified as it passes from one stage to another ... hence the process is marked by stages.<sup>97</sup>

A new democratic state, likewise, must confront and address contradictions by proceeding through stages, for the Chinese revolution comprised a democratic *and* a socialist revolution.

Whether this was ideological flexibility or strategic circumspection, Aidit was similarly empathic about deferring socialist edification. In an August 1961 public lecture to mark the inauguration of the PKI’s Aliarcham Institute of Social Sciences, Aidit made the case for patience again. One can glean Aidit’s emphasis on passing through stages and the hazards of single-step or hasty socialism:

Indonesian socialism is not scientific, but merely fantastic, if it is supposed to be put into effect now, while imperialism and the remnants of feudalism remain. It is unscientific because it skips a phase of the struggle, the struggle against imperialism and feudalism for a national and democratic society. If we are compelled to achieve socialism now, the result will certainly be an “imperialist socialism” or a “feudal socialism,” in short, a false socialism.<sup>98</sup>

Indeed, Aidit was wary of the risks of acting rashly and knew of the long road to reconstituting the PKI as a major political player in Indonesia. The PKI had survived decimation in 1948, thrived in the 1950s, won over 16 percent of the popular vote in the 1955 elections, and become the fourth-largest party in the parliament. It consolidated its position with a strong showing in the 1957 regional elections by

<sup>96</sup>Mao, “On New Democracy,” 341, original emphasis.

<sup>97</sup>Mao Zedong, “The Law of the Unity of Contradictions [On Contradiction]” (Aug. 1937), in *Mao Zedong on Dialectical Materialism: Writings on Philosophy, 1937*, ed. Nick Knight (Armonk, 1990), 173–4.

<sup>98</sup>D. N. Aidit, *Indonesian Socialism and the Conditions for Its Implementation* (Jakarta, 1962), 5.

winning nearly 20 percent of the popular vote and finishing second only to Masjumi. Despite dramatic electoral victories, Aidit's position on deferring revolution had not shifted between 1955 and 1961.

### *Incremental land reform and the mixed economy*

Another striking adaptation of Mao's ideas lay in the realm of land reform. Before he framed this policy, though, Aidit peered through the lens of Mao's own rural investigations to examine closely Indonesia's socioeconomic classes in the rural sector. His verbiage, class categories, and proposals all reflect clear Maoist imprints. Hardly a totemic invocation of Maoist buzzwords, Aidit's 1957 manual, "Indonesian Society and the Indonesian Revolution," drew directly from Mao's 1939 essay "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party" ("Zhongguo geming he Zhongguo gongchandang") in its analysis of post-independence Indonesian society.<sup>99</sup> Class formations in Indonesia were, as Mortimer puts it, "less pronounced" and "operated less as determinants of political behavior and action" with regard to workers and peasants. Aidit observed that Indonesia's proletariat was comparatively "young and inexperienced," and peasants, as in China, constituted the overwhelming majority of the rural sector's populace.<sup>100</sup> But Mortimer claims incorrectly that Mao and Aidit "substitute[ed] the peasantry for the proletariat as the mass recipients of the revolutionary legacy," which is indefensible if one actually reads either Mao or Aidit.<sup>101</sup> Their respective recognitions that peasants could play important roles in the revolutionary movement never went hand in glove with placing primacy on them as *the* revolutionary class over the proletariat.

Importantly with regard to Aidit's adaptation, because of social differences between Indonesia and China, Aidit adapted what he read and valued in Mao's 1939 analysis to a different situation in Indonesia. For instance, in Java, Aidit acknowledged—and Mortimer noted—that "acute land shortage rather than its unequal distribution defined the peasants' predicament." Indonesia's "socio-cultural cleavages" spurred primarily by ethnic and religious disputes "were all-pervasive and potent, cutting across incipient class solidarities and affecting the political process in a decisive manner."<sup>102</sup> This placed the PKI in an unenviable position betwixt two poles. On the one hand, it sought to unite and mobilize workers and peasants behind class factors. On the other, it could neither rely upon, nor formulate concrete party policy on, the working class (described by Mortimer as "largely peasants in overalls") or the less dependable peasants ("even less of a force to count on for the promotion of class-based policies").<sup>103</sup> The political situation in postindependence Indonesia necessitated a balancing act in order not to compromise its political alliance with the ruling PNI. This entailed downplaying class appeals and highlighting radical nationalism.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>99</sup>Mao's 1939 essay followed several socioeconomic analyses that began with his 1926 "Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society" and reached its most refined form in his exhaustive "Xunwu Investigation" and "Xingguo Investigation" (both 1930). Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism*, 157, acknowledges that the PKI adopted the "Maoist formula that divided actors into left, middle, and right (or diehard) forces."

<sup>100</sup>Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism*, 148–9.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 154. Mortimer notes that this stance was from the 1954 congress.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 148–49.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 150–51.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 151.

Indeed, by 1961, Aidit cautioned against adopting exclusionary economic policies based on class in favor of cultivating broad support for the PKI: "It is a mistake, therefore, to view the small businessman as more dangerous than imperialism."<sup>105</sup> Consonant with his ideological attachment to cross-class alliances, Aidit did not want to see the countryside convulsed by violence or the cities burning when there were larger matters at hand. Foreign capital owned large swathes of the commodity-export-oriented Indonesian economy, commercial and aristocratic landholdings remained large, and smallholders owned such tiny plots of land that the republic's tax base was correspondingly minuscule (only 20 percent of government revenue came from direct taxation in 1956 and 1957).<sup>106</sup> Two-thirds of the workforce were in the agricultural sector, but could pay no more than token taxes because of their precarious livelihoods.<sup>107</sup> Aidit knew that dealing with present problems was essential to grease the cogs of history and inch Indonesia toward socialism.

Rather than gratifying kulak purges or anti-Chinese riots, which might have endeared the PKI to potential recruits, Aidit emphasized land redistribution as the first step to industrialization.<sup>108</sup> On this matter, he argued, the PKI could make common cause with parties and voters across the political spectrum. In drawing on a non-comprehensive *Bintang Merah* land survey undertaken in 1959 and published in 1960, Aidit noted that commercial and aristocratic landlords owned huge estates in many parts of Indonesia. In areas such as Pekan district, Lombok, they owned virtually 100 percent of arable land. Of the twenty-one districts surveyed, the proportion of landlords' holdings was above 54 percent in eight districts, a phenomenon that was especially disproportionate in population-dense West Java. The same survey uncovered that throughout Java, Sulawesi, and the Lesser Sunda Islands, most smallholders owned less than two hectares of land.<sup>109</sup> A large proportion of these were sharecroppers and owned no land at all.

In recognizing that Indonesia was a fundamentally agrarian economy in which sharecroppers lived precarious lives, Aidit advocated not for immediate industrialization, but

<sup>105</sup>Aidit, *Indonesian Socialism*, 2.

<sup>106</sup>Howard Dick, Vincent Houben, J. Thomas Lindblad, and Thee Kian Wie, eds., *The Emergence of a National Economy: An Economic History of Indonesia, 1800–2000* (Leiden, 2002), 175. Aidit's position is reminiscent of arguments in French Egyptian Maoist Samir Amin's thesis. Samir Amin, "Les effets structurels de l'intégration internationale des économies précapitalistes: Une étude technique du mécanisme qui a engendré les économies dites sous-développées (Structural Effects of the International Integration of Precapitalist Economies: A Technical Study of the Mechanism That Engendered Underdeveloped Economies)" (Ph.D. dissertation, Université de Paris, 1957), 1–9, 139–41, 484–5.

<sup>107</sup>On Indonesia's continued dependence on commodity exports, and its consequent inability to accumulate capital for industrialization, see Dick *et al.*, *The Emergence of a National Economy*, 174–5.

<sup>108</sup>Aidit, *Indonesian Socialism*, 3–4. The state's failure to enact land reform or formulate a coherent plan for the deployment of state capital led to ethnic Chinese private investors filling the void. In 1929, ethnic Chinese owned negligible amounts of plantation land. By 1952, they owned 19 percent. See Richard Robison, *Indonesia: The Rise of Capital* (Jakarta, 2009), 43.

<sup>109</sup>Aidit, *Indonesian Socialism*, 33–4. *Bintang Merah* (Red Star) was one of the PKI's flagship publications, serving as a magazine counterpart to the daily newspaper *Harian Rakjat*. For a similar investigation by a Cambodian Marxist-turned-Maoist see Matthew Galway, "Specters of Dependency: Hou Yuon and the Origins of Cambodia's Marxist Vision (1955–1975)," *Cross Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 31 (2019), 126–61.



for urgent land redistribution, as sharecroppers commonly rendered 50 percent of each harvest to their landlords.<sup>110</sup> Aidit called this the PKI's "614 Movement." Rather than seize land and present the state with a *fait accompli* (as many peasants had between 1942 and 1950), the 614 Movement aimed to bend the state to its will by forcing or persuading the government to implement a nationwide land redistribution program backed by force of law. Its first step the drastic reduction of land rent that peasants paid to landlords, whereupon communities could use the resultant capital as an "industrialization fund" with which they could mechanize agriculture.<sup>111</sup>

The PKI's willingness to work within state and legal strictures rather than against them was a rational response to the Indonesian politico-economic situation. The right-leaning military, whose top brass opposed the PKI and competed with it for political influence, maintained a monopoly on weapons and direct control over various lucrative industries.<sup>112</sup> Although numerous and well organized, PKI cadres remained unarmed; the military had successfully blocked PKI attempts to arm those veterans' associations it controlled. In recognizing that asymmetry, the PKI sought other ways to influence policy, including working within the democratic (and, from 1959 onward, semi-authoritarian) state rather than attempting to capture it. This was the PKI creatively adapting Marxism–Leninism to play to their strengths and ameliorate their weaknesses. As Aidit put it succinctly, "At the present time, when the historical conditions are not ripe, the PKI does not plan or describe in detail a future socialist Indonesia. The PKI adopts this attitude because, as Engels said in his *Utopian and Scientific Socialism*, 'The more completely these systems are depicted, the more inevitably they become mere fantasies.'"<sup>113</sup>

This 1961 lecture also included Aidit's plan for funding industrialization, which he linked to land redistribution and which bore a striking resemblance to Mao's ideas. During the development of the Jiangxi Soviet, CCP leaders debated how to redistribute land in southwest Jiangxi and western Fujian and ultimately decided on a gradualist approach. Amid the 1946–8 Land Reform Movement, the CCP used redistribution to gather revenue from taxation, whether in monies, grain, or other products, to exchange surpluses with Moscow for

<sup>110</sup>Aidit, *Indonesian Socialism*, 35. Although the severity of class stratification, landlordism, and usury in China was more severe and on a wider scale than in Indonesia, there is much in common, as Mortimer acknowledges. Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism*, 148–52. On early CCP land redistribution conversations see Ying, "Cong 'difangjunshihua' dao 'junshidifanghua,'" 25–7, 33–4; Klaus Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern: From the Great Qing to Xi Jinping* (Cambridge, MA, 2019), 293–6; and Brian DeMare, *Land Wars: The Story of China's Agrarian Revolution* (Stanford, 2019), 6–10. On Mao's Xunwu investigation see Mao Zedong, "Xunwu Investigation" (May 1930), in *MRP*, 3: 296–418.

<sup>111</sup>Aidit, *Indonesian Socialism*, 35. This proved ineffective and the PKI attempted unilateral land redistribution in 1964. On similar Maoist-inspired proposals for agricultural cooperatives in Cambodia see Galway, *The Emergence of Global Maoism*, 114–35.

<sup>112</sup>Bambang Purwanto, "Economic Decolonization and the Rise of Indonesian Military Business," in J. Th. Lindblad and Peter Post, eds., *Indonesian Economic Decolonization in Regional and International Perspective* (Leiden, 2009), 39–57. This trend of military control of lucrative industries continued unabated in the Suharto years. Michael Vatikiotis, *Indonesian Politics under Suharto: The Rise and Fall of the New Order*, 3rd edn (London, 1993), 71–2.

<sup>113</sup>Aidit, *Indonesian Socialism*, 25.

industrial machinery.<sup>114</sup> Aidit argued that Indonesia was still colonized economically: it remained heavily dependent on the export of raw materials for foreign exchange, and for tax revenue in general. By the government's own admission, up to 60 percent of state revenue depended on commodity exports, which put Indonesia at the mercy of global commodity markets. The political economy of independent Indonesia was effectively very similar to that of the captive Netherlands East Indies.<sup>115</sup> Its mode of production and its role in the international economy had barely changed.

A restructuring of the political economy was the necessary first step (of many) toward socialism: "only a foreign trade policy adapted to the requirements of international economic reconstruction can free Indonesia from its dependence on foreign monopoly capital."<sup>116</sup> What did this restructuring entail? On one hand, withdrawal from the postwar Bretton Woods system; and on the other, expanding the tax base through land redistribution. Land redistribution would make smallholders prosperous enough to contribute collectively to the exchequer.

Aidit argued that Indonesia's commitment to the Bretton Woods system and its membership in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) committed it to a fixed currency exchange pegged to the US dollar, which reduced Indonesia's competitive advantage in exports. In its place, he proposed "a free and healthy monetary system pegged to the value of production," though he did not provide specific details. In a moment of remarkable prescience, he also suggested the abandonment of the gold standard and a reversion to fiat currency, a bold move given the recent experience of wartime inflation. This withdrawal from the Bretton Woods system would be the first step toward reducing Indonesia's vulnerability to global market conditions and facilitating the accumulation of capital for state-led industrialization. Aidit was not opposed to IMF per se but understood that the conditional nature of IMF loans effectively rendered them a tool of US foreign policy, and simply not beneficial to the economy that Indonesia had inherited.<sup>117</sup>

Aidit's 1962 work *Indonesian Socialism* presents his second policy plank of land redistribution. The eventual seizure of landlords' property and free redistribution to tenant farmers—instead of forming collective farms—would allow agricultural surplus to form the basis of state revenue. This policy was moderate in scope: Aidit stated explicitly that the Indonesian state would not seize the lands of "rich farmers," and would reserve redistribution only for commercial and aristocratic landlords, especially plantations owned by foreign businesses. The state would acquire smallholder surplus at fixed rates to fund industrialization. A national

<sup>114</sup>Mühlhahn, *Making China Modern*, 402–5; and Yunhui Lin, *Xiang Shehuizhuyi guodu: Zhongguo Jingjiyu Shehuide Zhuanxing, 1953–1955* (Transition to Socialism: The Transformation of Chinese Economy and Society, 1953–1955) (Hong Kong, 2009), 32–44.

<sup>115</sup>Aidit, *Indonesian Socialism*, 45. On fundamental similarities between Indonesia's colonial and independent economies see Dick et al., *The Emergence of a National Economy*, 174.

<sup>116</sup>Aidit, *Indonesian Socialism*, 42–3.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 43–4, 49–50, 70. Aidit did not pontificate on IMF evils as a point of ideology; he evenhandedly recognized that Czechoslovakia's IMF membership did not hamstring its economy because its economy was relatively mature and sufficiently industrial. Indonesia, like other developing countries, had a commodity-producing, nonindustrial economy. Under such conditions, IMF membership was a de facto shackle.

minimum income set in consultation with agricultural cooperatives, peasant associations, and labor unions would balance this acquisition of surplus value and prevent this form of taxation from becoming excessively onerous. Aidit also pointed out that by empowering smallholders through land distribution, they could become consumers. This, in turn, would drive domestic demand for consumer goods and stimulate the economy instead of forcing them to remain as subsistence-level wage slaves in the foreign-dominated rubber, coffee, tin, tea, crude oil, and sugar industries (Indonesia's main commodity exports).<sup>118</sup> This particular position did not necessarily reflect Mao's direct influence, as Mao had urged in his May 1930 Xunwu investigation (*Xunwu diaocha*) that attacking rich peasants was "the paramount policy of the rural struggle."<sup>119</sup> However, Aidit's position here does reflect the Mao-ish positions of dependency theorists such as influential French Egyptian economist Samir Amin.<sup>120</sup> Aidit was indeed keen to learn from Mao and the Chinese revolutionary experience, but it is evident that he remained adaptive and never servile to an orthodox interpretation of Maoism because no such orthodoxy exists, or has ever existed.<sup>121</sup> He was ultimately comfortable with departing from Mao whenever circumstances warranted, which was itself a thoroughly Maoist response to the application of the universal features of Marxism-Leninism (and by now also Maoism) to particular historical circumstances.<sup>122</sup>

In a similar vein, Aidit was surprisingly firm in his commitment to a mixed economy and open to private enterprise. He argued that the "government economy" (state-owned enterprises, regulatory and planning agencies) should "occupy the command position and stimulate, lead, and encourage the development of industry, including heavy industry." Private enterprise was not to be abolished, but guided, nurtured, and restrained:

Building a national economy does not mean that all private economy is to be extinguished. On the contrary, in our country whose economy is still backward, there are still many production areas, especially in light industry, that are not and cannot be included in the government sector of the economy ... all branches of production, except those vital for national economic development and the urgent requirements of the people, can be carried out by private concerns.<sup>123</sup>

This flexible, adaptive, and independent-minded economic policy was very different from the planned economies of the Soviet bloc and the PRC's collectivization of agriculture. Indeed, Mao was adamant that privatization represented an enormous obstacle to the Chinese Revolution. For Mao, China had to embrace democratic centralism and inclusionary participation, and develop the national economy

<sup>118</sup>Aidit, *Indonesian Socialism*, 42, 48–9, 52, 62, 70.

<sup>119</sup>Mao Zedong, *Report from Xunwu*, ed. and trans. Robert Thompsons (Stanford, 1990), 157.

<sup>120</sup>On the connection between Samir Amin and Cambodian Communists Hou Yuon and Khieu Samphan see Galway, "Specters of Dependency," 126–61.

<sup>121</sup>Christophe Bourseiller, *Les Maoïstes: La folle histoire des gardes rouges français* (The Maoists: The Crazy Story of the French Red Guards) (Paris, 1996), 300; and Knight, *Rethinking Mao*, 48–9.

<sup>122</sup>Galway, *The Emergence of Global Maoism*, 199–200.

<sup>123</sup>Aidit, *Indonesian Socialism*, 51.

“along the path of the ‘regulation of capital’ and the ‘equalization of landownership,’ and ... never be ‘privately owned by the few’; we must never permit the few capitalists and landlords to ‘dominate the livelihood of the people’; we must never establish a capitalist society of the European–American type or allow the old semi-feudal society to survive.”<sup>124</sup> Aidit certainly agreed on the last point, but not the rest. Mao abhorred private enterprise, but Aidit recognized potential and necessity in the private sector. Aidit may have drawn these insights from the CCP’s experience during the Land Reform Movement, when the CCP taxed peasants to fund its endeavors and thus needed to be lenient towards richer peasants.<sup>125</sup>

In contrast to Mao, Aidit explained his approach to private enterprise more bluntly: “Only stupid men who are afraid of the imperialists are now crying that all private businesses be abolished, while they remain silent about foreign monopolists.”<sup>126</sup> Aidit also explicitly proposed learning from the successes and failures of Indian and Chinese economic development policies, advocating investment in industrialization and heavy industry but also in the production of consumer goods and even the cultivation of tourism.<sup>127</sup> This was undoubtedly a reference to the contemporaneous Great Leap Forward (1958–62); by the time Aidit gave his 1961 lecture, the enormous human costs and economic failures of Mao’s policy were increasingly evident. The limitations of forced collectivization became especially difficult to ignore after Mao stepped down as PRC chairman on 27 April 1959 and Peng Dehuai openly criticized the Great Leap Forward at the Lushan conference in July 1959. The Sino-Soviet split had also reached boiling point in 1961, with the PRC’s denunciation of Soviet Communism as revisionist. Domestically, the PKI’s fortunes were nearly at their zenith: the party had won over 20 percent of the popular vote in the 1957 regional elections and secured Soekarno’s patronage under Guided Democracy, and its main parliamentary competitor, Masjumi, had been forcibly disbanded. The party seemed positioned as never before to influence government policy, and the Second World was bereft of an unambiguous role model. This made for a confident, assertive PKI leadership that was boldly staking out its own intellectual positions and politico-economic strategy. These plans were made with reference to both the successes and the failures of the CCP, but the PKI’s path to power would be rooted in Indonesian realities.

This, then, was Aidit’s adaptation of Marxist dialectical materialism. Decolonization had to happen first, in the sense that Indonesia’s political economy had to change, with residual foreign military and economic interests ejected, before Indonesia could make progress on the long road to socialism. However, Aidit did not mean that Indonesia had to go through a liberal capitalist stage.<sup>128</sup> What he proposed was not obeisance to the iron laws of Marxist teleology, but rather a pragmatic understanding that Indonesia could not simply leapfrog economic stages—as Mao had attempted—with decisive action. In Aidit’s words, the PKI goal for the short to medium term was to

<sup>124</sup>Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy,” 344.

<sup>125</sup>Harold Tanner, *Where Chiang Kai-Shek Lost China: The Liao-Shen Campaign, 1948* (Bloomington, 2015), 133–9.

<sup>126</sup>Aidit, *Indonesian Socialism*, 51.

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, 53, 57, 72–6.

create “better material conditions for the later building of a socialist society” via economic decolonization.<sup>129</sup> This was what Aidit meant when he said that Indonesian socialism was “scientific insofar as measures taken for its realization conform to the laws of social development under the concrete conditions in Indonesia.”<sup>130</sup>

### *The temptations of unilateral action*

As its political influence waxed during the 1960s, the PKI took on a more overtly Maoist stance in its analysis of the rural classes.<sup>131</sup> Expanding on Aidit’s 1955 speech, in which he had asserted the importance of relying on peasants, PKI leaders began to argue that the party ought to “root the peasants’ struggle amongst the landless and the poor peasants.”<sup>132</sup> This was a natural extension of rural cadre-training efforts that began in earnest in 1959, as opportunities for urban grassroots agitation became increasing circumscribed.<sup>133</sup> In the 1963 revisions to the fifth PKI congress’s proceedings, Aidit argued that the solution to prevailing semifeudalism was to establish a “government of the people, of democracy,” in place of the “state power” of the feudalists and compradors tied to foreign capital. To realize this aim, the working class had to assume the leadership of the larger masses and “wage a struggle to improve its living standard ... [and] support the struggle of the peasantry for land ... the struggle of the national bourgeoisie against foreign competition ... of the whole Indonesian people for national independence and democratic liberties.”<sup>134</sup> Aidit’s report made it clear that the PKI would strive for *true* independence as a first step toward realizing an equitable socialist future, which meant improving living standards for the Indonesian working class and peasantry in the present.<sup>135</sup> This was the basis upon which *aksi sepihak*, an attempt to unilaterally redistribute land to rural smallholders, was undertaken in 1964.<sup>136</sup> Despite its failure, this renewed focus on the peasantry and the political potential evinced by successful mass mobilization of smallholders pushed the PKI leadership even further away from a violent seizure of the state. Having accumulated so much strength in unions and peasant organizations, the party now stood to lose much and gain little by arming its cadres.

Accordingly, by 1964, the PKI was remarkably explicit in its commitment to nonviolence. This was at least partially because the party encountered consistent opposition to arming cadres and never managed to penetrate the military to any substantive degree, which itself constituted a strong incentive to pursue a non-violent path to power.<sup>137</sup> The fifth PKI congress of 1954 had announced that one of the party’s basic tasks was to build the PKI into nationwide organization

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>131</sup>David Mazingo, *Chinese Policy toward Indonesia, 1949–1967* (Ithaca, 2004), 213.

<sup>132</sup>Tornquist, *Dilemmas of Third World Communism*, 188; citing Rex Mortimer, *The Indonesian Communist Party and Land Reform, 1959–1965* (Clayton, 1972), 22.

<sup>133</sup>Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism under Soekarno*, 276.

<sup>134</sup>D. N. Aidit, “PKI Program,” in Aidit, ed., *Problems of the Indonesian Revolution* (Bandung, 1963), 94.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., 5–61. This precept had first emerged in Aidit’s 1957 class analysis of Indonesian society, widely used as a training manual for party cadres. See Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism*, 142.

<sup>136</sup>Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism*, 277.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., 381.

of “a broad, mass character” without resorting to violent means, and the 1963 revisions to the conference proceedings reiterated this point.<sup>138</sup> This entailed expanding party membership from 165,000 by the 1954 congress to a “mass Party of a Lenin type” by the program’s implementation, which effectively meant that the PKI had to end its de facto urban-centrism and reach out to Indonesian peasants.<sup>139</sup>

In finally formulating plans to become a mass party of peasants and workers in the antagonistic domestic political climate of the 1960s, the PKI had to balance its forthright commitment to proletarian internationalism with maintaining its unequivocal opposition to armed struggle. Violence, its leaders held at the time, would likely trigger suppression from a reactionary, anticommunist military even in the absence of the PKI’s main Islamic parliamentary competitor, Masjumi.<sup>140</sup> This balancing act strongly incentivized the PKI to harness its cart to Soekarno, as Aidit explained:

the state power of the Republic of Indonesia is a contradiction between two opposing aspects: The first aspect is ... the interests of the people. The second aspect is ... the interests of the people’s enemies. The first aspect is embodied in the progressive attitude and policy of President Sukarno, which enjoys the support of the CPI [PKI], and other sections of the people. The second aspect is embodied in the attitude and policy of the rightists and diehards; they are the old and established forces. Today, the popular aspect has become the main aspect and plays a leading role in the state power of the Republic of Indonesia ...<sup>141</sup>

Such symbiosis with the republican icon could hardly be achieved if the PKI threatened to become an armed fifth column. In linking the PKI’s fortunes to Soekarno, Aidit demonstrated his commitment to the peaceful path to building a democratic government, while piggybacking on Soekarno’s anti-imperialist rhetoric.<sup>142</sup> For the unarmed PKI, the prevailing conditions—an anticommunist military leadership unsettled by the recent Darul Islam (1948–60) and Permesta/PRRI insurrections (1958–61)—made open class agitation a risky enterprise. By contrast, the language of nationalist agitation—the contention that Indonesia was not yet *truly* free—resonated well across social and political strata and allowed the PKI to have some say in setting the national agenda. The PKI struggle was therefore to be a “struggle *within*, not one *against*, the constituted Republic ... as the heirs of what had been accomplished, not as its destroyers.”<sup>143</sup> This remained PKI policy until its brutal evisceration in 1965.

<sup>138</sup>Aidit, “PKI Program,” 97.

<sup>139</sup>Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism*, 49. Prewar literacy rates had been very low, especially in the rural sector. The PKI’s emphasis was initially on building a smaller cadre party, as was the case for many other republican parties like the PSI.

<sup>140</sup>Masjumi had been forcibly disbanded by Soekarno in 1960 for its alleged links to the PRRI uprisings. See Kahin and Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy*, 112–18.

<sup>141</sup>Aidit, *The Indonesian Revolution and the Immediate Tasks of the Communist Party of Indonesia*, 42.

<sup>142</sup>*Ibid.*, 50, 58.

<sup>143</sup>Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism under Sukarno*, 58.



This twin focus on mass mobilization and rejecting violence was the culmination of a long process of adapting Maoist ideas dynamically, while keeping a close eye on domestic conditions. As early as 1954, the fifth PKI congress had explicitly stressed the “Indonesianization of Marxism–Leninism,” mirroring Mao’s 1938 “Sinification of Marxism” in applying general theory to concrete situation and conditions.<sup>144</sup> Aidit and his fellow PKI leaders drew from a broad swath of Communist theories and experiences, notably the Chinese example, and took those elements that it considered useful for the Indonesian situation.<sup>145</sup> Aidit acknowledges one such source in his report to the PKI’s fifth national congress (1954):

The campaign launched by our Party in 1952 to study the articles by Comrade Mao Tse-tung, “On Practice” and “*Oppose Liberalism within the Party*” and the article “*On the Mass Line*” by Comrade Liu Shao-chi, was of very great significance in the effort to raise the ideological level of our Party. The same is also true of ... the pamphlet by Lenin “Left-Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder,” ... “The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union,” “Report to the 19th Congress on the Work of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union,” and Comrade Mao Tse-tung’s “On Contradiction.” All these will raise further the ideological level of our Party.<sup>146</sup>

The PKI was effectively applying theories to specific realities without abandoning the original theory’s universality, or disregarding Indonesian conditions that they understood better than non-Indonesian Communists. Acknowledging this helps explain why the PKI, unlike so many Communist parties throughout the world, did not break into warring factions after the Sino-Soviet split (1956–66). The organizational integrity of the PKI was maintained despite Aidit’s observably Stalinist ideology of cultivating allies amongst the native bourgeoisie and political elite; at the same time, the PKI aligned itself with the CCP in the 1960s without embracing Mao or Lin Biao’s predilection for a protracted people’s war.<sup>147</sup> The PKI remained intensely focused on the domestic situation, in accord with Maoism’s theoretical suppleness: it was precisely his adaptation of Maosim that freed Aidit from having to choose between the Soviet and the CCP model.

Aidit’s engagement with Mao Zedong thought, then, was contingent, dialectical, and ever-changing as the PKI confronted new situations, not unlike the way Mao’s theory of permanent revolution (*buduan geming*) recognized the permanence of contradictions and demanded revolutionary resoluteness to address them repeatedly. “We Indonesian Communists are not dogmatic in the application of Marxist–Leninist teachings; *we are creative. Marxist–Leninist theory is only a guide, the decisive thing in our policy* [is] *the concrete situation in Indonesia*,”

<sup>144</sup>D. N. Aidit, *Perkuat Persatuan Nasional dan Persatuan Komunis!* (Jakarta, 1961), 24.

<sup>145</sup>Hindley, *The Communist Party of Indonesia*, 30. The PKI drew from Stalin’s theses on the national bourgeoisie as a domestic bourgeoisie that opposed imperialism and feudalism, and Mao’s analysis of the comprador bourgeoisie. See Tornquist, *Dilemmas of Third World Communism*, 50–51.

<sup>146</sup>D. N. Aidit, *The Road to People’s Democracy for Indonesia: General Report to the Fifth National Congress of the CPI, March 1954* (Jakarta, 1955), 54–5.

<sup>147</sup>Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism*, 339.

Aidit stated in 1957.<sup>148</sup> The concrete situation to which Aidit referred was the continued presence of imperialism and feudalism, in the form of Indonesia's static political economy and land relations, as well the continued Dutch presence in West Irian (until 1961) and the proliferation of US bases across Southeast Asia. This jeopardized true Indonesian independence and occluded the working class and peasantry from a livable wage and standard of living. To "Indonesianize" Marxism–Leninism would mean taking these realities into account; Mao could inspire but not dictate.

## Conclusion

The 30 September Movement of 1965 led Suharto and the military to blame the Communists for the six generals who perished in an abortive coup and resulted in the PKI's near-total decimation. Only thereafter did Sudisman, the lone survivor of the PKI Politburo's standing committee, propose armed struggle along Maoist lines.<sup>149</sup> Between 500,000 and 1.2 million alleged PKI sympathizers died in military-directed, civilian-on-civilian violence during the 1965–6 massacres, including most of the PKI leadership.<sup>150</sup> Aidit was arrested and executed in central Java on 22 November 1965, Lukman and Njoto thereafter.<sup>151</sup> The violent overtones of Maoist peasant insurgency only came into play after the 1965–6 massacres, although many Maoist ideas had been selectively adapted by Aidit's PKI long before then.

From 1950 to 1965, the language of Marxism–Leninism and Maoism provided a powerful vehicle for critiquing capitalism, provided it was adapted to fit Indonesian conditions. Aidit's adaptation of Marx's, Lenin's, Stalin's, or Mao's ideas was part of a tradition of PKI autodidacticism that had been evident—in Tan Malaka's work, for example—since the 1920s.<sup>152</sup> These ideologies spoke to Aidit and his comrades in ways that broad appeals to nationalism did not because it identified imperialism as the culprit for postindependence crises in the developing world. Independence was not substantive as long as global capitalism and neo-imperialism perpetuated the country's economic precariousness. This culminated in Aidit's recognition of what Rebecca Karl has identified as a "shared world stage" among Asian revolutionaries wherein his country's plight was part of a global phenomenon of capitalist exploitation.<sup>153</sup> It was insufficient, however, to imitate; ideological adaptation and

<sup>148</sup>Hindley, *The Communist Party of Indonesia*, 30, emphasis added. Mortimer describes the PKI's application as "involv[ing] curious and intricate exercises in reconciliation, but never the mechanical adoption of a course of action that appeared to be contradicted by their own requirements." Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism under Sukarno*, 52.

<sup>149</sup>Sudisman, *Tegakkan PKI Jang Marxis-Leninis Untuk Memimpin Revolusi Demokrasi Rakjat Indonesia: Lima Dokumen Penting Politburo CC PKI* (n.l., 1971). Our thanks to John Roosa for pointing us towards this source. No location was provided, since this book was clandestinely published as *samizdat*.

<sup>150</sup>Geoffrey Robinson, *The Killing Season: A History of the Indonesian Massacres, 1965–66* (Princeton, 2018), 121.

<sup>151</sup>Frank Cibulka, "The Coalition Strategies and Tactics of the Indonesian Communist Party: A Prelude to Destruction," in Trond Gilberg, ed., *Coalition Strategies of Marxist Parties* (Durham, NC, 1989), 284–303, at 299. See also Mozingo, *Chinese Policy toward Indonesia*, 255.

<sup>152</sup>Harry A. Poeze, *Tan Malaka, Gerakan Kiri, Dan Revolusi Indonesia*, vol. 2 (Jakarta, 2009).

<sup>153</sup>Rebecca Karl calls this recognition of a "shared world stage with other peoples and countries" that were dealing with a "temporal/spatial problem inherent in a modern global history." Rebecca Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC, 2002), 198.

innovation were central to the PKI's political strategy until 1965. Although the party failed to seize power and was destroyed in the wake of the 1965 massacres, it did succeed in "Indonesianizing" Marxism–Leninism, a process of which Maoism was an indispensable component.

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