

“Recovering class consciousness after total defeat: Memory, street protest, and Soekarnoism in contemporary Indonesia.”

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The use of any kind of class analysis, let alone the struggle for power among classes, as a starting point or a general analytical framework for the study of Indonesian history, has nor been common among Western scholars. This has been especially the case since World War II and Indonesian independence. There is almost no school of Marxist analysis of Indonesia among Western scholarship. This scholarship has been dominated by variants of mainstream American political science, cultural studies or anthropology. Of course, within Indonesia, up until 1965, Marxist analysis was very strong. It was crushed in 1965.

There was a brief period in the 1970s when a discussion began among Australian scholars promoted by the Australian Indonesianist, the late Herb Feith. By the mid-1970s the dictatorship of General Suharto had been established for ten years. Illusions that General Suharto, having ended the so-called authoritarian rule of President Sukarno, would usher in some kind of liberal democratic order and increasing prosperity for the country's people were diminishing. There were a number of post-graduate students working with Professor Feith who did not share these illusions at all and there was one, the late Rex Mortimer, who brought with him an interest in the peasantry as a class. Mortimer had been a member of the Communist Party of Australia, with sympathies for the peasantry of China had achieved in the 1950s and 1960s. He wrote his theses on Indonesian communism. In this period Feith took the initiatives to organise seminars and a conference on issues related to class.

However, nothing came of this brief flurry of interest. By the 1980s, this trend had died away altogether. Partly it may have been due to the death through illness of Mortimer. At the same time, Feith moved away from Indonesian studies to peace studies. The stability of the Suharto dictatorship was perceived as proof of the arguments being presented by the political science orthodoxy that Indonesia was entering an era of political stability and economic development. The experimental class analysis of the 70s, including that of Feith, had all predicted imminent instability, even peasant rebellion. An eclectic sympathizer with this sentiment, Ben Anderson, wrote an article in 1978: “The Last Days of Suharto?”

Since the 1980s, class analysis, and especially class analysis that puts struggle between classes at the center of things, has more-or-less died out. One school of analysis that has developed is that pioneered by Richard Robison, author of *The Rise of Capital*. However, Robison's work has very little to do with uncovering the class structures and dynamics of struggle between classes. In fact, his general thesis, manifested again in his most recent book written together with Vedi Hadiz, is that the struggle between classes has become more-or-less irrelevant in explaining modern

Indonesian history. *The Rise of Capital* documented the process whereby powerful political figures in the newly created dictatorship used their influence to turn themselves into large capitalists, the owners or joint owners of major firms. This emergence of a larger group of wealthy Indonesian capitalists in the wake of the violent suppression of the Indonesian socialist movement is posited as a “capitalist revolution”. Indonesian politics since then is seen as a reflection of the political struggles among factions of that capitalist class as this revolution unfolds. Political initiatives, or pressures, from outside this class are seen as insignificant factors in determining the course of political struggle. The only changes taking place are changes in the relations between factions. Changes in the relations, or balance of forces, between classes is only ever discussed briefly, usually to determine such issues as not significant. A shallow tautology is operating. Under capitalism, almost by definition, political power is in the hands of capitalists. There can be no meaningful change in the political situation until power is no longer in the hands of capitalists. This negates the whole area of the history of class struggle, as power will obviously not shift from one class to another without a struggle for power, where the relations between classes undergo all kinds of changes.

In Indonesia itself, the issue of class has always dominated the discussion of politics. Marxist and socialist ideas found fertile soil in the archipelago right from the beginning of the 20th century. Indeed, there is even evidence that the remarkable young Javanese princess, Kartini, who wrote about women and their rights had begun to be influenced by or at least read Marx or of Marx even before the beginning of the 20th century. In any case, by 1920 there was a rich literature of socialist literature in the Netherlands Indies. The first communist party in Asia developed before 1920 and had grown so confident by 1926 that it launched an armed uprising – which proved premature and was crushed by Dutch colonialism.

The discussion of Marxist class analysis in Indonesia has been driven always by directly political rather than academic concerns. All of the major intellectuals attempting to use Marxist class analysis have been political leaders or people directly involved in political struggle. This is also the case today. In attempting to analyse Indonesian history and politics in this way, most of the thinkers who have had a major impact on politics and ideas in Indonesia have had to grapple with a particular huge fact of Indonesian social reality.

From the beginning of the 20th century, indeed until today, the proletariat – the class of wage labourers – has been divided into a small section of relatively stably employed workers and a massive ocean of casual workers, many of whom sometimes also earned their living as peddlers of some kind of other. There is a massive *semi-proletariat*. This remains true today. At the beginning of the 20th century this phenomenon was also more-or-less reflected in the rural areas also. There was a mass of casual farm labourers, who also owned their own small plot of land, or even a buffalo, but were still paupers.

The modern, (relatively) stably employed proletariat existed in the midst of an ocean of poor semi-proletarians and pauperized petty bourgeoisie. This remains a key feature of Indonesian society today also.

Class consciousness and political struggles in Indonesia

Indonesian workers very quickly formed trade unions even under the dictatorship of Dutch colonial rule. Sugar plantation and sugar mill workers, railway workers and pawnshop employees were among the first to organise. Trade union struggle was a basic feature of proletarian political activity as early as the 1920s. This activity was, however, always subsumed within a broader political struggle for political power. The depth of integration of trade union members into political struggle was, of course, uneven and changed over time. However, this trade union activity could never be severed from the general political struggle.

From the 1920s until 1949, the fundamental framework for this political struggle was that against colonial rule. A series of mass organizations, including the massive Sarekat Islam reaching perhaps 2 million members after WWI, and then berak away groups, such as the Peoples Sarekat and then the Indonesian Communist Party were mass organizations. After 1926, Soekarno emerged as the most effective popularizer of anti-colonial ideas and of socialist ideas. His organisation, the PNI, also had a mass following, until it was suppressed. After the collapse of the Japanese military occupation at the end of WWII, organizations drawing in workers and peasants mushroomed. Among these were many that specifically presented themselves as organisations struggling for the interests of workers and peasants and for a government of workers and peasants. Almost all political parties espoused some form of socialism.

After independence, the integration of trade union (and peasant union) struggle with the generalized struggle for state power was manifested in the fact that every single significant union in Indonesia was affiliated to a political party. The largest of these was SOBSI, affiliated to the communist party. This situation prevailed until 1965 when the military backed Suharto dictatorship took power.

Between the years 1960-60, the numbers of workers (including semi-proletarians), peasants and pauperized petty bourgeois drawn into daily political activity through organizations or campaigns associated under the ideological leadership of Soekarno, probably reached close to 30 million people. Many of these were organized in the PKI or its mass affiliated organizations or the Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI). In 1964, the PNI Congress issued the Marhaen Declaration, which called for the purging of all capitalist, high bureaucratic and landlord members of the party. The PNI more and more became a party based on workers, semi-proletarians, and pauperized petty bourgeois, including peasants. The two parties, although drawing on different ideological heritages, were the pillars of united mobilizations following Soekarno's ideological leadership.

In trying to trace the course of changes in class consciousness among the popular classes in Indonesia, a crucial determining factor has been shared experience in political struggle on a national scale. There are studies of individual factories, villages and so on which attempt to describe the nature of class consciousness on the basis of a localized description of workers', peasants' and informal sector workers' daily experiences. In the field of peasant studies, there is quite an enormous body of literature along these lines, pioneered by people such as James Scott, with his *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*.

However, studies such as this are totally inadequate for drawing any conclusions regarding the development of class consciousness. Consciousness flows out of social experience, which includes experience of collective political activity and struggle, not just shared experience at the location of production. In the case of Indonesia, participation in national scale political struggle was a fundamental shared experience of all the exploited classes from the beginning of the 20th century until 1965. This experience peaked in the early sixties with at least half the adult population, and big sections of the child population, mobilized. During the last part of 1965 through to 1968, another shared experience flowing from political activity was the brutal and murderous suppression of all such mobilisational political activity.

The ideological content of class consciousness until 1965

The dominant ideology among the mobilized popular classes, from at least the 1920s, was Soekarnoism. Soekarno held overwhelming ideological sway over all open political discourse that took place among the popular classes, with only small pockets quarantined from this who were under the influence of one other Islamic fundamentalist groups. Soekarno wrote hundreds of articles and gave even more speeches during this whole period. After independence these speeches were often broadcast over the radio as well.

During this period there were a number of basic ideas that he popularized.

Unity of the impoverished

First there was the idea of the existence of a fundamental unity among the impoverished masses of Indonesia. In scores of speeches he explained the existence of three basic social components among these impoverished masses. These were the proletariat, the peasants and other impoverished people (peddlers, other ekers out of a livelihood). In the 1920s, he also formulated the concept of the *Marhaen* (the name of a poor farmer he had spoken with). Originally, the Marhaen referred to that layer of people who owned some instrument of production (e.g. a buffalo) and worked for themselves but were just as impoverished as the factory worker or plantation worker. Soekarno was identifying the reality of the existence of the country's huge semi-proletarian and pauperized petty bourgeoisie.

In the 1960s, the term "Marhaen" began to be used interchangeably to refer to the workers, proletarians and others combined, as well as to the specific Marhaen category.

Even though the PKI did not officially adopt Marhaenism, preferring to use a typology of classes taken from Mao's writings, the regular speeches by Soekarno in all avenues, including at PKI rallies helped solidify this concept – which also emphasized unity of interest among these components.

But it was not just the incredibly effective techniques of explaining this idea by Soekarno that gave it power, but also the fact that on a daily basis political discussion and activity at the mass base took place among workers, semi-proletarians, poor peddlers, stall-owners, mechanics, etc etc in a socio-cultural framework that was only minimally differentiated. First, the semi-proletarians and impoverished petty

bourgeois were the overwhelming majority and this huge size provided the material base for the cultural life that developed. Second, in both town and country, all these components lived together in the same neighborhoods. Third, most of the stabilized proletariat was very new and young and had most of their family still in the village or surviving as part of the semi-proletariat.

Another manifestation of this component of class-consciousness during this whole period was the emergence of a very specific term and concept, i.e. the *rakyat*. *Rakyat* literally means people. But the word cannot be used for “people” in every context. You could not use *rakyat*, for example, “There are many rakyat at the opera today”. You could not even use *rakyat* in the sentence: “There are 500 people as members of parliament”. Everybody knows that the members of parliament are not “*rakyat*”. The very word for “people” has been given class content. It refers only to that mass of Marhaen, the impoverished.

Unity of interest and action

Both the speeches and writings of Soekarno and those of the PKI and other Left leaders and activists also stressed that the immiseration of the *rakyat* or Marhaen can specific causes. Soekarno used the word *melarat*, which is worse than poor, it is to live in misery. But he would always repeat a formulation along the lines: “or more precisely these are masses made impoverished by capitalism, colonialism and imperialism.” The misery was result of a system, which had to be overthrown. Being victims of this system was a part of the very definition of “people”.

One misunderstanding about Soekarno relates to his emphasis on unity. He is seen as the archetypical 3rd world, non-block nationalist who valued national unity above all else. This is a very careless reading, indeed misreading, of Soekarnoism and carries with it the danger of not understanding fully the way class-consciousness among the popular classes has developed.

To start with, there is the fact that must be noted of the very class character of the word for “people”. “*Rakyat*” is an anti-unity word, when viewed in a national framework. Those who are not being impoverished, i.e. exploited by capitalism, colonialism and imperialism are not part of “the people”! This in itself points to a process of ideological formation that underscores contradiction in society, not unity throughout it.

In addition, the whole history of Soekarno’s political life also underscores his emphasis on drawing out of contradictions. During the colonial period, he fought those Indonesians supporting cooperation with the Dutch, resulting in the ideological institutionalization of “Non-co” and “co”, and of “*sana*” and “*sini*”. After independence, the *rakyat* and Marhaen were not pitted against capitalism, colonialism and imperialism as “concepts” or systems in the abstract. Dutch, and then British companies were nationalized. As a layer of corrupt bureaucratic managers developed, these were identified as “*kabir*” (bureaucratic capitalists) and there were campaigns to have them dismissed and for workers representation in managements councils. Soekarno supported the campaign for land reform taking land from large landowners. The political party most attached to domestic capital, the MASYUMI, was banned after it supported an armed rightist mutiny. The political party most aggressive in its

support for economic cooperation with the West, the Indonesian Socialist Party (PSI) was banned after supporting the same rightist mutiny. The Indonesian National Party (PNI), which had heavy representation of business and landlord interests, came under heavy campaigning pressure to purge the party of these elements, which began to be implemented in 1964. Even internationally, Soekarno began to break from the Non-Aligned Bloc camp, which divided the world into three blocks, and began advocating an analysis which saw only two blocks, which he popularized under the terms OLD ESTABLISHED FORCES and NEW EMERGING FORCES. The latter included both the socialist countries, growing socialist movements, anti-Western third world governments as well as movements such as the civil rights movement in the US and so on.

Soekarnoism thus contributed to an ideological content to the collective political life of the popular classes which emphasized unity of interest and action among their component parts, and helped locate their identity in a specific contradiction with other classes in society, namely, capitalists, landlords and cooperators with colonialism and imperialism.

Personality and class consciousness

Probably the most fundamental contradiction in Soekarno's role was connected to how he related to this only weakly differentiated popular mass. The socio-cultural life of the urban and rural poor existed in an environment that had not undergone the kind of tumultuous overturning of feudal, rural society as happened in Europe. There had been no enclosures and industrial revolution. The Dutch modernized the economy only in so far as it was necessary to get the exports from its colony that it needed. At the end of Dutch rule no more than 10% of the population had any kind of high school education. The country was still overwhelmingly rural, with the largest city still only around 100,000 people. Religion had not been challenged by the cultural changes that flowed from an indigenously grown scientific establishment nor from the secular routine of industrial society. Most people who were in the towns worked for small enterprises where a feudal-like kind of personal relationship often still existed.

People still lived in *kampung*, whether rural or urban, where – while more and more dominated by a money economy – still retained many elements from pre-industrial society. Patron-client relations, of one kind or another, were prevalent. Whether organized through a workplace, networks of debt within extended families, other forms of debt, through a mosque or religious network, or friendships, this was still the dominant form of social relationship, overarching the capitalist-worker relationship, for many people. In this environment, a popular culture developed where the role of the individual figure – leader – loomed larger than or equal to disciplined organization and division of labour. The “modernizing” impact of modern proletarian life was ameliorated by this ongoing pattern of patron-client relations that permeated this social environment, dominated as it was by millions of semi-proletarians and pauperized petty bourgeois.

Furthermore, the continuing influence of religion and traditional beliefs stirred into the ideological pot, all kinds of concepts linked to the pre-capitalist past. In Indonesia, the pre-capitalist past across the archipelago had been very culturally diverse so that the cultural vocabulary of these masses of people was also diverse.

It was these conditions that provided the basis for somebody like Soekarno to play the role of popularize of the ideas of the modern revolutions: the bourgeois, proletarian and anti-colonial revolutions. He quoted from the political thinkers and leaders of all these revolutions, from Rousseau to Lenin. He sought out metaphors from the Indonesian peoples' own experience to try to explain these ideas. It is simply a fact that nobody else had the skills to do this. His personal role in the spread of these ideas was enormous. Given the psychology of patron-client culture, this tended to put Soekarno into a "patron" like role. A major limitation in his politics was that rather than working to stop this happening, he agreed to policies that reinforced this role, such as the acceptance of various extravagant titles, such as Great Leader of the Revolution. He did emphasize the need for the masses to organize themselves, which is why he supported the role of the Left political parties and their mass organizations, but his tendency towards allowing a cult of the personality develop, counteracted against this.

It is very difficult to underestimate the weight of the presence of Soekarno in mass consciousness, especially in the years leading up to 1965. Soekarnoism did provide ideological framework in which the class-consciousness of tens of millions of people developed. It gave a class struggle, radicalizing and unifying content to that consciousness, which was reinforced by the mobilization in campaigns of these millions of people around demands such as land reform, nationalization of foreign companies, worker representations in management councils of state enterprises and free education.

The development of political consciousness was also constrained by the fact these mobilizations did not develop to the stage of preparing the popular classes to organize for power, before they were suppressed. In the period 1960-65, when mass mobilizations increased in size and frequency, their role was primarily to bring public opinion behind Soekarno's attempts to remove the right wing parties and military officers, who dominated the government, and move in more politicians, officials and military officers sympathetic to the left. In this sense, the mass mobilizations were playing the role of back-up to maneuverings within the state apparatus. A great deal of hope was being invested in Soekarno being able to use his position as President to change the balance of forces within the state apparatus. This also coincided with the way his role was being emphasized to the people.

The New Order and its consequences for class-consciousness

(a) ending the shared experience of collective political action; suppressing Soekarnoism

Starting from October, 1965, General Suharto, backed by an alliance of conservative military, religious and business figures and by Washington, London and Canberra, launched a murderous purge of Indonesian society in order to smash any prospect of Soekarnoism coming to power. The increasing popularity of Soekarno's ideas made it appear more and more likely that there would be pressure for a government of the Left, rather than the prevailing situation of Sukarno sitting as president over a government made up mainly of people from the right. At least 1 million people were killed. Tens of thousands were detained for up to a year, and another 20,000 detained

for 14 years. All left organizations were banned or purged, as were all left newspapers, magazines and books.

Trade unions ceased to operate at all for at least seven years. After that a government-controlled union was established, that allowed for very little independent organizational life for its members. This occurred only in a few pockets.

Soekarno was arrested and a gradual campaign of black propaganda began against him. His speeches were no longer broadcast or published. His writings were withdrawn from libraries and bookshops.

The Suharto government instituted a policy of total suppression of all independent, popular political activity combined with a systematic wiping clean of all remnants of Soekarnoist ideas, including the whole history of the role of popular struggle in achieving independence. The mass murders of 1965-68 were necessary in order to provide a foundation for such a total suppression.

It was not until 1996, when the first large scale anti-Suharto demonstrations took place, that any kind of mass participation in independent political activity was possible.

This situation reversed some of the key conditions under which the strong popular class-consciousness of the majority of the masses had developed, namely, a shared political and ideological experience. For thirty years, political life for the mass of the urban and rural poor – the *rakyat* or Marhaen – was atomized, and separated from any real ideological life, apart from that being provided through mass entertainment, pop culture, the mosque or advertising. Political parties were reduced to three and strictly controlled by the government.

(b) the resilience of some ideas: Soekarno

During these thirty years, the ideological life of Indonesia has been subject to a real counter-revolution. Indonesian cultural life from the beginning of the 20th century up until 1965 was a cultural life born, first and foremost, out of revolution, specifically national revolution, which then began to develop in the direction of social revolution. Its vocabulary drew from the immediate struggles of the peoples of Indonesia against colonialism, but also from all previous and concurrent revolutions, including the French Revolution, the American revolution, the Russian revolution, and the first Chinese revolution. The vocabulary of processes which had aimed at overturning old, corrupt systems and unleashing new energies in the name of justice and equality, both individual and national equality, supplied the vocabulary also of the newly, emerging Indonesian national culture. This while cultural fabric, emerging over 60 years, was destroyed, and wiped away. School and university curricula were re-written by the Armed Forces History Centre. Feature films were produced to remove popular struggle from the popular memory of history, and replace it with a series of generals as heroes. This was a systematic and ruthless campaign carried out after the killing of a million people – so there were absolutely no alternatives raised during this thirty years. This was a kind of a counter-revolutionary version of Year Zero.

Despite this both murderous and systematic suppression and ideological management, the appeal of Soekarno, however vaguely felt, could not be eradicated. There are a number of reasons for this. First, there could be no removal of the historical fact that it had been Soekarno who had proclaimed Indonesian independence on August 17, 1945 and that he was able to do so because he was the most popular nationalist leader at the time. His photos and biographies remained available, even if most of the biographies avoided the 60s. Second, much of the black propaganda against him that continued after the first round of mass murders concentrated on allegations about his personal life, namely, that he had many lovers. There was never any propaganda against his ideas, as the government wanted no discussion of these. Neither was there any black propaganda against him as being corrupt as there was no evidence of any corruption – he died poor. The “black” propaganda did more to strengthen his popularity. Third, major international historical events, such as the Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung, Indonesia 1955 and which is considered to have started the Non-Aligned Movement has made it difficult to erase from the national psyche his standing as an international figure.

So the figure of Soekarno, the fighter against the Dutch, proclaimer of Independence, Indonesia’s most important international figure and with a certain charisma and sex appeal, has not been able to be erased, even if most of his ideas have been so erased.

The continuing resonance of Soekarno as a symbol of closeness to the popular classes was so visibly manifest in the rapid rise in popularity of Megawati Sukarnoputri, chairperson of the Indonesian Democratic Party, between 1990 and 2000. By simply adopting the Soekarnoist policy of “non-cooperation” with the Suharto regime in the 1990s, and with no other policies or achievements to recommend her to the people, her name alone was enough to make her the pre-eminent symbol of opposition to the dictatorship in that period among the mass of urban and rural poor. This popularity declined dramatically when she was in power, 2001-2004, and was seen increasingly not to be a part of the *rakyat*.

(c) *rakyat*

Probably the most resilient component of the class consciousness that developed between 1910 and 1965 was the concept of the “*rakyat*”, the definition of the “people” as the exploited and oppressed, implying the existence of a “non-people” part of society. Other words with a class connotation, such as (*buruh*) (worker/labourer), were removed from use in the political sphere for at least 25 years. “*Buruh*”, for example, was replaced with “*karyawan*” (a class free term for anybody who works, including a manager or capitalist).

But “*rakyat*” could not be eliminated. It was in the name of the parliament: Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat (Council of Peoples Representatives) and in the names of many other institutions. It is impossible for politicians – essentially non *rakyat* elements – to continue to try to speak in the name of the *rakyat*. It is word that cannot be eliminated.

Neither could “*rakyat*” easily be given another, less class-consciousness meaning. The reason for this was that the whole socio-economic strategy of the New Order was reinforcing a divide between rich and poor, between the rulers and the middle class and “*rakyat*”. The huge gap between rich and poor has grown steadily, in fact in leaps

and bounds, and has been institutionalized in a whole range of various obvious items of material culture: for example, luxury malls, condominiums, luxury cars, and international shopping. All these are depicted daily on national television. In the latter period of the New Order, the word “elit” entered the common day political vocabulary as the opposite of *rakyat*. The widespread use of the word “elit” or “elit politik” actually reflects a new, heightened ideological institutionalisation of the class content of *rakyat*. While it had always had this specific exclusionary content, it has been the New Order period that has finally produced a word that labels those excluded from the *rakyat*.

Rakyat is as real today as a concept among the *rakyat* as it ever was. Political actions and ad hoc organizations emerging out of the direct actions of workers, peasants, and other elements of the popular classes, almost inevitable appeal to this word in their propaganda materials or names of their organisations. They almost always speak in the name of the *rakyat* or in defence of the *rakyat*'s interests. Among the most conscious attempts to establish opposition or radical political groups, the word *rakyat* is used. The most stable of the radical parties, the Peoples Democratic Party, used *rakyat* in its name, and defines its ideology as “*socio-demokrasi kerakyatan*”. Other groups also do the same. Perhaps the most vivid of the expressions of this was the huge sympathetic response to the hundreds of thousands of “*mega-bintang-rakyat*” leaflets, demanding an end to Suharto and the Army's rule, during the massive 1 million strong mobilizations against Suharto during the May, 1997 general elections. The urban poor mobilized in their hundreds and thousands, against the instructions of the government, the army, the police and their own leaders, carrying spontaneously created placards calling for an alliance between Megawati Sukarnoputri (MEGA) and the Islamic opposition (BINTANG, the star) against Suharto and GOLKAR. When leaflets appeared calling for a MEGA-BINTANG-*rakyat* alliance, they were extremely popular and created great concern among the mainstream party leaders and government.

However, those who make up the *rakyat*: proletarians, semi-proletarians, pauperized petty bourgeoisie, including farmers, did not have access to the organization and ideas that gave the concept form and power before 1965.

Class consciousness and mass action under Suharto

(i) Riots

The suppression of mass organizations and the pursuit of an economic strategy accentuating the rich-poor dual economy strengthened the material underpinnings of the strong self-awareness among workers, peasants and other poor of their exploited status. The suppression of mass organization and of ideological life among this huge section of the population laid the grounds for the rapid manifestation of disorganized displays of popular resentment and anger. The first socio-political rioting took place in Jakarta in January, 1974, nine years after Suharto seized power.

Student protests occurred with increasing frequency throughout the latter half of 1973. These were protests over various corruption issues and the increasingly extravagant luxury lifestyles of the Suharto family and Jakarta elite. Connected to this were criticisms of the government's economic strategy and its reliance on foreign capital,

especially Japanese capital. These demonstrations were usually quite small and there were no connections with social groups outside the students. Although almost all their demonstrations were carried out under the banner of defending the interests of the *rakyat*. The largest of these occurred during the visit to Jakarta of Japanese Prime Minister, Tanaka, in January 1974.

The heated atmosphere created by a period of almost daily student demonstrations around these issues, followed by this large demonstration, provided the stimulation that led to large scale rioting by the urban poor throughout Jakarta. Tens of thousands, possibly hundreds of thousands, of urban poor joined these demonstrations. They burned down or vandalized government offices and shops and showrooms selling cars, luxury goods or other locations associated with the emergence of a more visible non-rakyat urban middle class. As Chinese Indonesians owned many of these shops, the riots took on a partially anti-Chinese aspect.

Throughout the next 25 years, this became a regular pattern: a heated up political atmosphere, usually following on from student protests, leading into parallel student political demonstrations and urban poor rioting. Sometimes these events took place at the same time, or just one after the other. Sometimes, when tensions had been stretched out, there was an extended time space. Riots targeting government offices, showrooms and shops selling items to the middle class (which were usually, not only, Chinese owned) took place several times between 1974 and 1998, both in Jakarta and in other cities. The most widespread were in 1981, when such rioting hit scores of towns in Java. The most infamous occurred in May, 1998, where it appears that agents of one military faction intervened to stir up racist sentiment, leading to violent attacks, including murder and rape, against Chinese.

(ii) Spontaneous mass protest

Later, after 1996, these two phenomena intermingled more as conscious efforts were made to draw in the urban poor, proletarian and semi-proletarian, into mass action. Perhaps the most vivid example of this was at the time of the May 1997 general election campaign. Three parties were permitted to participate in the elections, and each party was allocated three days in which it was allowed to campaign – although campaigning was supposed to be confined to indoor meetings. The three parties were the government party GOLKAR, the PPP, an Islamic party allowed by the government, and the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI). However, by 1997, a split had occurred in the PDI, and most of its supporters and members supported the split that was not allowed to run in the elections, headed by Megawati Sukarnoputri. As a result, campaign activities on the PDI day were almost non-existent. GOLKAR campaign days were occupied by pro-government rallies based on attendees being paid.

What nobody predicted were the huge, militant mobilisations that occurred spontaneously on all the days set aside for PPP campaigning in Jakarta, as well as in several other cities. In Jakarta on the days set aside for PPP campaigning, the PPP had several activities planned for different parts of the Jakarta. Tens of thousands of people streamed out of the densely populated *kampung* areas to make their way to the sites of PPP activities. These were, however, not actual PPP mobilisations but spontaneous mobilisations by the Jakarta poor giving vent to their anger. They did not

carry placards and banners provided by the PPP or calling for support for the PPP, as would be usually the case. Instead, surprising everybody, they carried their own banners proclaiming their support for “Mega Bintang”, literally “Mega Star”. The “Mega” referred to Megawati and the “Star” was the star and crescent of Islam. Jakarta’s urban poor, whether practicing Moslems or more secular Moslems, united in an angry rejection of GOLKAR and the New Order. Banners read “A Coalition of Mega-Bintang-People for Democracy”, “A Coalition of Mega-Bintang-People to Refuse Absolute Majority for Golkar” and “A Coalition of Mega-Bintang-People for Change” as well as “GOLKAR is corrupt”, “GOLKAR cheats” and other anti-government slogans.

Neither the PPP national leadership nor Megawati had promoted the idea of such a coalition or battle cry. The idea appeared to be first raised in the Central Javanese city of Solo where the chairperson of the local PPP branch, a maverick by the name of Mudrick Setiawan Sangidoe, announced that Megawati’s PDI were giving its votes to PPP. In early May Mudrick also met with Megawati, who did not state any support for such a coalition either. The PPP national leadership also made it clear that it was opposed to such an idea – which would have been tantamount to supporting an alliance with an outlaw, outside the electoral system. The issue was not raised again by any of the leadership.

The masses had adopted their own political line, calling on the two major camps in the mainstream opposition to unite against the government. The election campaign was organised so that each party had a day where it alone could hold activities – although not rallies and marches. There were four rounds of a day each for the three parties. By the fourth round, the scale of mobilisations on the street – defying the government ban on outdoor rallies and defying the urgings and cancellations of events by the PPP itself – had grown enormously and had become increasingly angry and militant. It is difficult to make an exact estimation of the number of people on the streets on May 14, one of the later days set aside for campaigning for the PPP. Calculations by PRD leaders put the figure at over one million mobilised throughout the city in different locations.¹ There is no consolidated listing of the mobilisations that took place throughout the city as people poured out of the *kampung* heading for different meeting points. However, all descriptions of the campaign point in the direction of massive and extensive mobilisations. Academician Syamsudin Harris referred to the “teeming campaigns of the PPP, which had ‘greened’ the whole city of Jakarta”.² Eyewitness accounts and newspaper reports all underline the massive scale of the PPP day turnout in Jakarta, of people “berjubal-jubal” – massing out in crowds – onto the main roads..

The dynamic of this mass initiated new political line – calling for a united opposition to oust GOLKAR – not only startled, but also frightened the regime and the elite. Immediately after the first round of PPP day demonstrations when the Mega-Bintang phenomenon appeared, the government banned the use of any placards which used the “Mega-Bintang” term, and any other paraphernalia related to Megawati, including any

¹ Commentary by Peoples Democratic Party. Mega-Bintang-the People: A broad mass coalition against the Soeharto dictatorship, typscript statement

² Hans Antlov and Sven Cederroth, *Elections in Indonesia: The New Order and Beyond*, p. 29.

pictures of her or her father, former president Sukarno. These bans, which came on top of the most heavy handed pre-election pro-GOLKAR manoeuvring ever implemented by the government, only further infuriated an already mobilised and angry population. The bans tested the militancy of the popular mood. The results of this challenge to the Mega-Bintang masses was an escalation of mobilisation and defiance of all attempts to prevent the carrying of Mega-Bintang paraphernalia. This was despite the chairperson of the Jakarta branch of the PPP issuing instructions for PPP members not to take part in any marches or rallies. His instructions held no sway over any significant section of the previously 'floating' masses. The acts of defiance by marching crowds of kampong dwellers included attacking and burning down police stations when the police tried to order the handing over of placards or posters, and chasing away the police or military. Other government offices were also attacked and ransacked. Military and police barricades attempting to stop were illegal open door rallies and marches were stoned and attempts were made to break through. In many cases, the police and military personnel used force to disperse these marches. Street skirmishes were common throughout Jakarta. The report by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Jakarta described it well:

As an example of the disaffection of the masses, which directly or indirectly reflected the 'rejection' by the masses of the "leadership" of the parties, of the "legal competency" of the election authorities and the "authority" of the security apparatus was the case of the explosion onto the streets of the greater Jakarta area on the PPP campaign days during the last three rounds of campaigning. Even though the Jakarta regional Council of the PPP stated that they would not carry out any campaigning on those days and the election authority had banned rallies and motorcades and the security apparatus declared that they would take harsh action against anybody violating the campaign rules, the masses and sympathisers still came out onto the streets to rally, and in motorcades [with motor bikes], shouting banned slogans and ignoring all calls from the security apparatus and the PPP officials for them to stop their activities, and indeed resisting these authorities in increasingly "violent" ways.³

This report also gave some statistics pointing to the level of physical clashes:

Up until and including the final round of campaigning there were more than 200 people who died (mostly in crashes or burned alive in buildings during riots as in Banjarmasin), more than 100 seriously injured and 400 with lesser injuries. There were 4 policeman seriously injured and 15 with lesser injuries; and 3 members of the other branches of the Armed Forces who lost their lives; as well as 3 seriously injured and 6 with lesser injuries. There were 5 police stations, 1 district military headquarters, 26 civil district government offices, 110 houses, 6 political party offices, 4 mosques, and 3 churches damaged as a result of actions by the masses. There were 208 vehicles, including 18 government service vehicles damaged.⁴

³ J Kristiadi, T.a. Legowo, Nt Budi Harjanto, p. 98

⁴ J Kristiadi, T.a. Legowo, Nt Budi Harjanto, p. 99-100

Another writer, Kees van Dijk, in his book, *Country in Despair, Indonesia between 1997 and 2000*, using newspaper reports to put together a picture, described the atmosphere in his chapter “Violent Campaigns”:

Not a day passed without crowds somewhere running amuck and taking possession of the streets, fights erupting between groups of supporters of the different parties, and individuals being beaten up. All over Indonesia mobs turned violent. Barricades appeared in the streets where people were urged to resist the security troops or to prevent gangs supporting another party entering their neighbourhoods, and shops remained closed. Stalls selling food or drinks were plundered, and free petrol was demanded at petrol stations. Drivers and passengers of passing cars were forced to hand over money and cigarettes, or had stones and bottles hurtled at them if they did not make the appropriate sign: one, two or three fingers in the air, to indicate their support of, respectively, PPP, Golkar or PDI.⁵

Van Dijk’s vivid description presents a picture of a society descending into anarchy, which certainly seemed to be the case for a while. But his description also reveals the political nature of the unrest and the role that the PPP campaign days played:

... most clashes broke out around the PPP campaign, which appeared to have turned into rallying points to unleash slumbering hostility against the government and all that it represented. For ordinary citizens, PPP campaign days became days to dread.⁶

Of course, it was mostly “ordinary citizens” that were in fact mobilising and they had been awakening from the “slumber”, or their “floating” for some time beforehand.

Similar mobilisations – almost always outside the control of the PPP – took place in many other cities, especially on Java, in both the Sundanese and Javanese ethnic areas. By the last day of campaigning, the 1974 MALARI syndrome took over. Mega-Bintang mobilisations voicing their clear political line, demanding a democratic coalition against GOLKAR, were being accompanied by out breaks of rioting. As one group of Indonesian researchers described in their report: “There is no other word to describe the PPP campaign at the end of the campaign period (Friday May 23 1977): RIOTS. The rioting spread from the tip of west Java [Sunda] to East Java.”⁷ This one report, for example, describes how “hundreds” of people were beaten down by rifle butts until tear gas was used on the Javanese town of Tegal, how police stations were burned down in the large city of Cirebon, of mass street fighting with GOLKAR members in Semarang, of attacks on the police and government offices in Tangerang, and several other examples. In some cities, even military posts were attacked. In the CSIS report, the writers include figures showing that just six of the Jakarta dailies carried reports of at least 250 incidents of so-called violent clashes during the 27 day

⁵ Kees van Dijk, *Country in Despair, Indonesia between 1997 and 2001*, 2002, pp 32-33. Kees van Dijk’s book provides the most detailed digest of political developments during the 1997-2000 period available in English.

⁶ Kees van Dijk, p. 33

⁷ H.A.Adiasyah, Boykee Soekapjo, Dana k. Anwari SB, Riyanto DW, p77.

campaign period.⁸ Their report emphasises that even these figures are an underestimation, as many incidents went unreported.

(iii) *Aksi*

These 1997 mobilisations had been preceded by a range of different protest actions followed by riots throughout 1996. They were followed by more protests later in 1997 and then a rapid acceleration of student protests that continued into 1998, culminating in the occupations of the grounds of the national parliament in Jakarta and several big mobilizations in other cities, including an estimated 1 million strong mobilization in the city of Jogjakarta. In Jakarta, after a majority of student groups decided against calling on the Jakarta poor to join the student demonstrations, an undirected and unorganized popular anger boiled over into rioting throughout the city. Where students and others did call on the population at large to join such demonstrations no rioting took place.

Bringing elements of the popular classes into organized mobilized action required a conscious movement to break from the straightjacket of New Order ideology and the popularization of a “new” idea. This old, new idea was “aksi”, mass action: protest actions that would draw in participation from the popular classes. This arose as a conscious movement driven, at first by a very small group of activists, after they made an assessment of the repeated failure of student protest movements that had not mobilized people outside the student sector. This assessment took place after 1978, after the suppression of a wave of student protests that year. During the next ten years several of these activists traveled to the Philippines to study how mass organizing was carried out there. Between 1988 and 1996, they worked to organize an escalating number of student-peasant and then student-worker protests aimed at popularizing and re-winning legitimacy for protest mobilizations.

Some of their actions mobilized up to 30,000 people, but calculated over the 1989-1996 period, as a portion of the population, only a tiny percentage were involved in their actions. However, the mode of activity – mass protest mobilizations – very quickly re-won legitimacy. By the early 1990s even middle class and elite groups were copying the forms of actions used by the student-peasant and student worker actions. The speed with which mass action – *actie massa*, as Soekarno called it and as he named his first anti-Dutch publication in the 20s – re-win legitimacy can, I think, be best explained with reference to the history of the development of class consciousness in Indonesia. After 1996, this was further re-inforced when many mass actions were able to be carried out under the banner of support for Megawati Sukarnoputri.

After Suharto

Since the fall of Suharto, protest mobilizations have become part of daily life. As one Indonesian researcher, Munafrizal Manan wrote in 2005:

In a book published in 2005, the Indonesian analysts Munafrizal Manan described the situation like this:

⁸ J Kristiadi, T.a. Legowo, Nt Budi Harjanto , p. 93

The era of transition, followed by political liberalization, changed Indonesian society very drastically. This society, where for thirty decades freedom and political participation had been blocked, changed to a society free and with the courage to articulate its political participation. The great fear of articulating the demands that existed under Suharto, disappeared completely as soon as the transition began.

Since the beginning of mid-1998, the daring of society increased in a very impressive manner. Voices of protest and demands that would have seemed absurd to imagine occurring openly before became a part of the reality of contemporary Indonesian political life. Protests, demonstrations, rallies, and mass actions of different kinds, became normal political activities. Even before the year [1998] had ended there had been almost 3,000 demonstrations carried out by almost every social layer.”⁹

Most of these *aksi*, of one kind or another, have not been documented systematically but it still possible to identify the main trends and limitations. Probably the most immediate and dramatic wave of *aksi* after the resignation of Suharto were *aksi* at the village and *kabupaten* level to force the resignation of village heads or *bupatis*, and even governors, who were considered by large sections of the local population to be either corrupt or oppressive. Manan, in his book, notes the forced resignation of the Bupati of Langkat in North Sumatra; the Lampung Regional Secretary in South Sumatra; the Banten Bupati, the Bupati of Maros in South Sulawesi as well as the Bupati of Banyuwangi as examples where local protest movements forced the resignation of *bupati*.¹⁰ There were many more of such cases, including at the village level.

There are estimates that more than 300 government officials, mostly village heads, were forced to leave their posts during the May-July period in 1998. In some villages, they were physically chased out of the village or their offices attacked, stoned or burned. The magazine *Pembebasan*, for example, reported that the inhabitants of 41 villages in the central Javanese *kabupaten* of Klaten mobilized in a coordinated fashion to remove all 41 of their village heads. In Tuban, East Java, hundreds of villagers forced the local district head (*camat*) to resign and smashed up his office. In a village near Palembang in South Sumatra a village head considered corrupt was attacked and an acid used in rubber production was doused over him.¹¹

These village *aksi* were not confined to protests demanding the resignation of officials. There were also many occupations of production sites, such as coffee, cacao, palm oil, and sugar plantations as well as prawn farms. Such actions occurred in Jember, Tuban and Gresik, for example in East Java as well as in Tangerang, Tapos, and Indramayu in West Java. In fact, there were examples of this all throughout the country. Land also became a major issue, with increasing examples of land occupations by farmers reclaiming their land from private developers or local government projects. Manan, in his book cites several cases taken from reports in the daily newspaper, *Kompas*, between May, 1998 and November, 2001

⁹ Translated from Munafrizal Manan, *Gerakan Rakyat Melawan Elit*, Resist Book, Jogjakarta, 2005 pp. 151-152.

¹⁰ Op cit., p. 152

¹¹ *Pembebasan*, 1-15 September, 1998, p. 6.

Because these *aksi* are small, localised and not part of any national movement, it is very difficult to quantify them. As they are not organised under any one, or under a few centralising banners, they have little immediate political impact and are subsumed into a kind of background noise. However, it is important to note that in 2001 when a struggle developed between the Presidency of Abdurahman Wahid and GOLKAR, a coalition of Wahid's traditional rural support base and anti-GOLKAR forces based on democratic groups and social movements was able to mobilise more than 1 million people in the city of Surabaya. This also had a touch of the riot element as a section of the masses attacked and burned down the provincial GOLKAR offices.

Since then, these *aksi* have remained very widespread but still mainly localised at the site of grievance and with little immediate political impact. At the same time, however, all the elite political actors are sensitive to the potential for riots to re-occur if public sentiment on social justice, corruption or democratic issues is provoked.

Mass mobilisation reached its largest and most widespread form when the re-won legitimacy of *aksi* combined with the banner of Megawati Sukarnoputri. During the Megawati Sukarnoputri presidency from 2001 until 2004, her "Soekarnoism" was exposed as being devoid of any progressive content. Her policies were more conservative than her predecessor Wahid and she oversaw the implementation of agreements with the *International Monetary Fund* which virtually ended protection for Indonesian industry and agriculture and increased the cost of living for the urban and rural poor dramatically. Her popularity collapsed and she lost the next election.

Since that period, there has been a total absence of any link between the persistent and widespread discontent and *aksi* any form of popular ideology reflecting that discontent or protest.

There are a number of political parties attempting to use Sukarnoist terminology and symbols, including some with personalities with access to the mass media. However, none have been successful in winning any popular support. None have attempted to give any concrete policy content to their Soekarnoism. There are at least four small cadre-based parties with left-wing or socialist platforms, the largest of which is the PRD. However, to date at least, they have lacked a platform to reach a large mass base.

Furthermore, their political vocabulary is still developing out of their fundamentally student movement origins and an engagement with the popular classes which has been separated from any mass discussion of the history of the popular classes. In this respect, one important development is the political movement among intellectuals to recover Indonesian history from the falsifications of the Suharto period and of Western orientalist scholarship. There are the very early signs in this of radicalizing intellectuals re-studying the ideas and debates among the pre-1965 Left, including the ideas of Soekarno.

Some concluding reflections

The formation of classes must always be located in the development of the relations of production, by looking at the relationship of different sections of the population to

the means of production and the relations between and among these classes. The precise nature of life at the site of production sets a certain foundation for the way class-consciousness can develop. In Indonesia, for example, the daily life of a proletariat living in and among a massive ocean of semi-proletariat and pauperised petty bourgeois provides the basis for a political culture heavily influenced by patron-client relations, even among the stable proletariat. The further development of class-consciousness, however, does not place at the site of production but in the context of expanding collective political action and experience. In Indonesia's case the framework for this up until 1965 was the national revolution, both in the phase of struggle against colonialism and then neo-colonialism. The dominant ideological content of the class-consciousness that developed during this period was Soekarnoism. After 1965, collective political action by the popular classes and memory of the role of the popular classes in the national revolution was suppressed. However, not all aspects of this class conscious were destroyed. It resurfaced in the disorganized form of rioting, often stimulated by student protests. A conscious campaign to re-win legitimacy for protest mobilizations began to revive further a more politically conscious form of mobilization in the 1990s, receiving a brief burst of extra momentum when occurring under the banner of Soekarno's daughter. As her Soekarnoism was exposed as empty, the momentum dissipated although the protest mobilizations continue in a dispersed and localized form.

The major questions that this analysis stimulates relate to the prospects of a more politically and ideologically organized form of discontent arising, i.e. a more developed form of class-consciousness among workers, semi-proletarians and pauperised petty bourgeoisie. In this respect, I suspect those key phenomenons to identify are:

- (1) struggles among the intelligentsia to rehabilitate the history and the ideas of the national revolution, especially anti-imperialist and socialist ideas. (It is interesting to note the role of such ideas in the revival of class-based movements in Cuba, Nicaragua and more recently Venezuela.)
- (2) efforts to organize protesting social sectors beyond sites of grievances and especially the formation of national organizations, which can connect the struggles of social classes to that for national development against neo-colonial policies.