

MILITARY RULE IN INDONESIA

Indonesia's military dictatorship, born out of the 1965/66 bloodbath that left as many as a million people dead, has greatly consolidated its power in the past year. General Suharto, the man who presided over the bloodbath and who then edged his predecessor, Sukarno, out of power with consummate cunning and trickery, was elected to a fourth term of office in March this year - by an assembly, the majority of whose members had been hand-picked by the military.

With him as vice-president another general was chosen, dispensing with the tradition since 1967 of having that post filled by a figure-head civilian politician. The new vice-president, General Umar Wirahadikusumah, has excellent credentials as a loyal supporter of General Suharto. At the time when Suharto was assuming control of the Army in October 1965, Umar was commander of the Jakarta garrison; he was the first military commander to issue his own ban against the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and left wing mass organisations, whilst launching widespread arrests and terror throughout the city.

The most significant of the new appointments announced by Suharto at the commencement of his new term was that of General Benny Murdani as commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces (ABRI) and concurrently commander of the army's all-powerful operational security command, KOPKAMTIB. Murdani is a member of ABRI's elite paracommando regiment, the RPKAD, the 'praetorian guard' of the Indonesian military regime, a troop that is loyal, ruthless and completely dedicated to the long-term preservation of military rule. Murdani is a close friend and admirer of President Chun Doo Hwan of South Korea whom he got to know during a three-year stint at the Indonesian embassy in Seoul in the early seventies. In fact, the purpose of Murdani's tour of duty in Seoul was to undertake a study of South Korea's particular brand of repression. He was recalled to Jakarta in January, 1974 to oversee the crackdown on the student movement and was then placed in charge of army intelligence.

In December 1975, Murdani commanded the 30,000 strong invasion force that launched aggression against East Timor, plunging that country into a war, still in progress, that has taken a toll of some 200,000 people, about one-third of the country's population.

The newly-appointed Minister of

Labour, Admiral Sudomo, is also a man with a long record of service to the regime. He comes to the Labour Ministry fresh from a five-year stint as commander of KOPKAMTIB. This security command was created by Suharto in October 1965 as the instrument with which to control and destroy all independent political activity. KOPKAMTIB's first victim was the three-million strong PKI and the many left wing organisations with a combined membership of some fifteen million people. KOPKAMTIB has since then wielded unlimited powers over political and social life, persecuting students, Muslim critics and other dissident groups. Under Sudomo's command, KOPKAMTIB has increasingly turned its attention to the

'early detection teams' as a way of preventing conflicts.

'Sudomo's shift to the labour ministry suggests that the regime regards labour unrest as a major threat to economic stability. Indeed, living standards have recently been badly affected again by sharp increases in kerosene, petroleum and food prices which resulted from the drastic cut in state subsidies announced in January this year. The 27.6 per cent devaluation of the rupiah in March has pushed domestic prices up even further, and a nation-wide panic, in the wake of rumours that further stringent monetary measures were to be taken in mid-April, caused a run on the banks and panic-buying that sent consumer goods prices up even further. Yet, only recently, the chairman of the army-backed trade union federation was pleading with workers to accept wage cuts in the interests of the national economy which is now being severely hit by the world recession.

Indonesia's particular brand of militarisation is called the *dwi-fungsi* or dual-function, according to which ABRI must assume a political and social function in addition to its function as a defensive (and offensive) force. This concept has been used as the undisputed justification for every encroachment by the military into all aspects of civilian life since 1965. In October last year, it was given the force of law in a new Defence Law which also invests ABRI with complete control over the country's resources and economic planning. Although the law in effect only legitimises a situation that has existed for nearly two decades, it was seen as a significant move in the direction of the further consolidation and perpetuation of military rule.

Western governments have consistently supported the Suharto regime since 1965. The international aid consortium, IGGI, which was set up in 1967, currently provides around \$2 billion annually; yet for many years the regime has enjoyed the benefit of an economic boom financed by petroleum and, more recently, liquified natural gas exports. The recent decline in world oil prices has transformed Indonesia's current account from a surplus of more than \$500 million to a deficit of \$7 billion in two years. Only recently, the president of the World Bank, who effectively represents the views of the IGGI, promised Suharto full financial support by assuring him of \$13 billion in government credit and private commercial loans for the coming four years, so that he could proceed with the economic plans mapped out for his fourth term of office.

The pledge was crucial for without it, the military would certainly have had to cut back on many of the capital-intensive investment projects that help bolster the personal fortunes of leading financial families and groups closely connected with Suharto and other generals.

As a member of the IGGI since the start, Britain has been unstinting in its support for the regime. Indeed, Britain was one of the main beneficiaries of the destruction of the PKI and the ousting of Sukarno as this put an immediate end to confrontation and secured the future of Malaysia. The then Labour government, through its ambassador in Jakarta, Sir John Gilchrist, was one of the first to publicly welcome the changeover, even as the bloodbath was still in progress in 1965. Indonesia's invasion and forced annexation of East Timor did virtually nothing to disturb the cosy relationship, although the UK was compelled on a few occasions to vote against Indonesia on the issue at the UN, and from 1977 on, to abstain. In purely diplomatic terms, the invasion caused Britain a 'problem', since it could be seen as a precedent for what Argentina was later to try to do in the Falklands.

For this reason, both Labour and Tory governments have avoided formally recognising Indonesia's annexation of East Timor, but this has not stood in the way of a substantial increase in the sale of arms to Indonesia. The first deal for the sale of Hawk ground-attack aircraft to Indonesia was concluded in April 1978, when ABRI was engaged in a ferocious campaign of aerial bombardment to end resistance in East Timor. Late last year, it came to light that the Thatcher government was negotiating new arms deals worth nearly £400 million, to supply Indonesia with one or more frigates, an additional half squadron of Hawks plus other equipment. In response to enquiries and protests about these sales, the Foreign Office declared that 'we would not grant an export licence if we thought that the equipment was likely to be used for purposes of repression'. Yet, repression is the very hallmark of the Suharto regime.

The past year's consolidation of military power in Indonesia has proceeded largely unnoticed in the rest of the world. This certainly suits the Western powers who regard the country, the fifth most populous nation in the world, as one of the most profitable and stable areas for investment now available. And men like Suharto, Murdani and Sudomo are the best possible guarantee there can be to keep it that way.

Carmel Budiardjo



General Benny Murdani makes the cover of Tempo, Indonesia's Time Magazine

labour movement, following an upsurge in workers' actions for higher wages and in defence of the right to organise. The workers' movement had taken a particularly severe beating in 1965 with the destruction of the 3 1/2-million strong SOBSI, and it was not till 1979, after a devaluation that sharply reduced living standards, that workers began to organise again. In 1981, Sudomo issued instructions to military commanders throughout the country to intervene in labour disputes and to set up