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Far Left Again in the Ascendancy in Medan: Aftermath of the Ban on MURBA & the BPS

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SUMMARY

By his outspoken public comments on the banning of the BPS and the subsequent purge of the PWI journalists association, MURBA party leader SUKARNI encouraged ex-BPS elements here to continue their effort to discredit the far left. The spirits of the former BPS members were promptly dashed, however, by the ban on MURBA and the jailing of SUKARNI himself. A second purge of the Medan PWI journalists association and the closing of a former BPS newspaper further discouraged overt resistance to the PKI and its far left allies. Leading Medan moderates now privately profess deep discouragement, and it appears unlikely that anti-PKI elements will be able to reform under another banner. Almost the only hopeful sign is the privately expressed determination of local army leaders to contain the PKI and maintain law and order.

Following the December 17 ban on the BPS, many anti-PKI elements expressed their determination to regroup in another organization and continue their effort to counter the Communists in this area. Plans to form a "religious" organization and found an anti-PKI Moslem newspaper were discussed. The ex-BPS press remained relatively aggressive, commenting in corner columns, for example, that those who demanded a purge of the PWI journalists association were looking backward from fear of their own shadows and were therefore likely to fall into the holes in front of them.

MURBA leader SUKARNI gave these elements both encouragement and ammunition. Local papers quoted SUKARNI extensively during and after his end-of-the-year visit to Medan. According to the press, SUKARNI said that the purge of BPS reporters from the PWI was a "one-sided action" and MURBA opposed such actions. Commenting directly on the ban against the BPS,



SUKARNI said that "one cannot clap with one hand", a remark which Indonesians would take to mean that the government needs the support of all groups and was therefore wrong in banning the BPS. One former BPS paper took a direct swipe at the Communists by reporting that SUKARNI often referred to the teachings of TAN MALAKA, and "Tan Malaka criticised the PKI Madiun affair as childish opportunism."

Following the SUKARNI visit, the largest Medan daily, Minbar Umum, on January 5 featured local journalists' statements to the effect that the purge of BPS reporters was a direct violation of the December 12 Bogor declaration of political parties. In the same issue, Minbar Umum gleefully reported that two PKI cadres had been sentenced to imprisonment in Atjeh for "political fraud". (According to the news story, the two cadres had induced a number of people to sign PKI membership application forms by stating that they were engaged in a campaign to restore the grave of a local hero.)

The January 6 ban on MURBA did not silence the ex-BPS papers. In a corner column Bintang Indonesia on January 8 commented: "The purpose of freezing the MURBA party is to prevent a rift among the progressive revolutionary national forces during the present BRINORA struggle. 'The man in the street' says this will also apply to other groups which intend to cause disunity. Understand?" Similarly, Waspada observed on the same day that the MURBA was suspended for the sake of national unity, and "for the sake of unity does not mean for the interest of one group."

The PKI and its supporters were not quiet during this period. On December 29 the leftist-controlled government press guidance committee publicly warned all and sundry that its November 20 ban on "unhealthy polemics" was still in force and must be observed. The Communist press continued a barrage of statements and petitions demanding the retooling of all ex-BPS elements. (Among BPS supporters, the HMI Medan student organization and SOKSI remain the principal targets.) The Communist Chinese organization BAPERKI revived its demand that the SUTOMO school facilities be turned over to its supporters (see Medan A-21, item 10). Typical of the Communist agitation was a GERWANI mother's day celebration featuring warnings against the "reactionary" BPS elements "who will never accept their punishment quietly."

On January 9, the local FWI expelled three staff members of Minbar Umum's weekly youth publication, Minbar Teruna; and on January 13 virtually all the remaining Minbar Umum staff was purged from the FWI. (These dismissals were in addition to the 12 Medan journalists purged December 23 by the MALANI conference.) Local Communist organizations are calling for the closing of all the former BPS papers, and one former BPS daily, Indonesia Baru, has in fact apparently been closed as a result of its membership in the BPS.

Although press reports indicate Indonesia Baru has been closed for only two days, January 18 and 19, AMARULLAH OMBAK LUBIS, husband of the owner, has indicated the closure is permanent. LUBIS is also Medan ANTARA branch chief, and he has told the BPAO that he expects the long standing PKI-inspired campaign to retool him



will now be successful. LUBIS is especially vulnerable because of past connections with the PSI and MANIKEBU; the far left has frequently called for his dismissal and they are now making it a major local issue because LUBIS was both a leader of the local BPS and a recent convert to the MURBA party.

Still more "discipline" for the press is in prospect. Chief of the Medan information service SUKARDI recently told the BPAO that all newspapers will be obliged to become party organs. He stated that he does not have specific instructions from Djakarta on the forthcoming reorganization of the press, but he anticipates that the leftist controlled local press guidance committee, which he chairs, will implement the reorganization under the guidance and authority of the provincial PANTJA TUNGGAL. In light of these developments, it is not surprising that the local press has now all but completely ceased its former "unhealthy polemics."

The local PKI is also dutifully echoing the Djakarta attack on Third Deputy Prime Minister CHANDUL SALEH and Trade Minister ADAM MALIK; as in Djakarta, the left is trying to use popular discontent over rising prices to unseat them. Passing through Medan on December 28, SALEH told reporters at the airport that the GOI is preparing new economic regulations. He stated that these new rules, together with drastic government economies and intensified tax collection would halt the current inflation. Returning from Atjeh, he added that price increases are due to more money in circulation than available goods. (Minister OGI TJOK TAT, accompanying SALEH, said however that a drastic retooling of government agencies in the economic field would stem price increases.)

On January 6 the Medan PKI chairman blamed price increases on counter-revolutionaries and made a veiled reference to MALIK. The next day the North Sumatran Committee for the Relief of Victims of Counter-Revolutionary Action passed a resolution urging the Minister of Trade to lower prices (presumably by magic). Also on January 9 the Communist controlled Joint Committee of North Sumatran Labor Organizations urged MALIK to resign. On January 12 the PKI women's organization, GERWANI, and the PKI youth organization, PEMUDA RAKJAT, demonstrated against high prices at the mayor's office. SOBSI held a similar demonstration at National Front headquarters on January 14.

COMMENT: The far left is again in the ascendancy in Medan. Moderates here are gloomy and disorganized; some anti-PKI contacts now go so far as to say that they hope war will come because they believe only a military disaster can bring the necessary changes in government. However, the local military leaders remain both determined and confident in the face of increasing leftist strength.

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