

# Historians under criminal investigation in Indonesia

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**Several prominent Indonesian historians have come under criminal investigation for writing an official history textbook in 2004 in which they no longer insisted that the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) was the mastermind of an attempted left-wing coup in September 1965.**

In October 1965, General Mohammad Suharto used chaotic circumstances created by a pro-left colonels' revolt to lead a right-wing military coup and initiate a wave of terror against the Indonesian left in which at least 1 million people were murdered and all leftist organisations were outlawed. Mass organisations such as trade unions were also banned or ordered to stop their activity.

For 40 years after the 1965 coup, Suharto's "New Order" regime pursued a deliberate policy of re-writing Indonesian history in accordance with aims of the military-dominated political and business elite that it fostered.

There were many aspects to this, but a key issue was how the September 30, 1965, colonels' revolt was portrayed. Suharto's official propaganda depicted the colonels' actions — the arrest and execution of several top army officers — as a coup attempt organised by the PKI. The colonels' themselves called their movement the September 30 Movement. The official version always referred to this "movement" as the Gerakan 30 September/Partai Komunis Indonesia (G30S/PKI).

From 1965 onwards the writing of history textbooks for use in schools and universities was undertaken under the supervision, either directly or indirectly, of the History Centre of the Armed Forces. These textbooks taught as the sole permitted version of history that the 1965 colonels' mutiny was a PKI coup attempt. They also taught that PKI women activists mutilated the genitalia of the generals whom the colonels' had detained before they were executed — despite the fact that the army hospital autopsy showed that no torture of any kind had taken place.

After Suharto was forced out of power by the student-led mass protests in 1998 there was an immediate call by many Indonesian historians for a review of the official histories. In 2004, a new textbook was issued, written by a committee of prominent historians, which no longer referred to the G30S/PKI but just to the G30S. After the book was published, organised anti-communist groups forced its withdrawn by the education ministry.

On September 19, education minister Bambang Sudibyo told journalists that the government of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a former Suharto-era general, had decided to abandon the 2004 curriculum. The September 19 London Financial Times reported that "Sudibyo said he had also asked the country's attorney-general to investigate the historians and other officials responsible for textbooks derived from the 2004 curriculum that failed to blame the PKI for the coup.

"A spokesman for the attorney-general's office confirmed an investigation was under way into the publication of the history books, saying they had caused 'restlessness amongst the people'."

The September 20 Jakarta Post reported: "Education ministry curriculum center head Diah Harianti had argued that the 2004 curriculum more comprehensively explained the events surrounding Sept. 30, 1965. Instead of associating the tragedy only with the PKI, it blamed the social conflicts on ideological and political differences among citizens. Now, with no explanation, the education ministry had decided to reinstate the PKI as the main culprit, he said.

"Members of the police, attorney general's office (AGO) and State Intelligence Agency questioned Diah and one other official at the curriculum center recently about why 12<sup>th</sup>-grade history books based on the 2004 curriculum did not blame the PKI for the violence...

"A historian with the Indonesian Institute of Sciences, Asvi Warman Adam, said the AGO was trying to intimidate the people who were trying to understand what really happened in 1965 and the subsequent political events leading to *Suharto's* rise to power. *'The AGO is not supposed to do that, since we [historians] haven't even agreed on what actually happened (in 1965)', he said.*"

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