

Violent anti-communism is alive and well in democratic Indonesia - Victims of 1965 anti-communist purge attacked

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Anti-communist groups recently attacked victims of Indonesia's 1965 anti-communist purge, unfurling banners with violent messages.

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Gatherings of victims of Indonesia's 1965 anti-communist purge were attacked by groups of people last week in West Sumatra and Central Java.

A rampaging mob targeted around 200 victims who gathered in Bukittinggi, West Sumatra. The victims were to celebrate the 15th anniversary of YPKP 65 [1], an advocacy group demanding justice for victims of the 1965-66 killings and violence [2].

A few days later, amid protests from some Islamic groups, police in Solo, Central Java, cancelled a meeting planned by another victims' group. The Joint Secretariat on '65 had planned to talk about victims' health needs and how the state could support them. Among the speakers were representatives from the National Human Rights Commission and the Institute for the Protection of Witnesses and Victims.

The organisation has previously held a number of activities designed to promote reconciliation. But a day before the meeting Solo police told the organisers they did not have permission to go ahead.

Near the location, a banner was unfurled saying:

Muslims reject the revival of the Communist Party in whatever form.

The police seemed to tolerate the brutal actions of the mobs, which forcibly shut down these gatherings.

Cutting off community support

The Solo attack is an attempt to isolate the organisation from community support. Indonesian President Joko Widodo, who gave the green light to activities of the Joint Secretariat '65 while he was mayor of Solo, has not condemned the anti-democratic attacks.

The Secretariat has worked well with local community organisations and with Solo's mayors. After Jokowi, as the president is popularly known, his successor, F.X. Rudyatmo, had also supported the group's activities.

During the 2014 election campaign, Jokowi himself was accused of being a communist [3]. These attacks against organisations and people accused of being communist are not unprecedented. Anti-communism is alive and well in Indonesia for several reasons.

Legal ban on Marxist thought in Indonesia

A parliamentary decree banning the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and Marxism-Leninism from 1966 remains in place. The PKI was a mass party involving millions of Indonesians in 1965, but they were embroiled in a political rivalry with the Indonesian Army.

When a predominantly military grouping called the September 30th Movement [4] kidnapped and murdered the army leadership on September 30, 1965, the army blamed the killings on the PKI as a pretext to destroy the party. Suharto rose to the Indonesian presidency after the party was banned and president Sukarno deposed.

The parliamentary decree exists on paper. Yet books about Marxism and the PKI can generally be sold freely in Indonesia. To stop the arbitrary attacks against people and organisations accused of being "PKI" this decree needs to be repealed to remove the legal uncertainty.

When the late president Abdurrahman Wahid spoke of his desire to repeal the decree, he was met with fierce opposition. A source of opposition was Nahdlatul Ulama (Awakening of the Religious Scholars, or NU), Indonesia's largest Islamic organisation, of which Wahid was a leader.

NU supported the pogroms. Members of its youth wing, Ansor, were involved in the violence in East Java. Churches and Christian organisations did not categorically reject the massacres either. In some areas, Christian and Catholic youth were involved in various levels of violence or played support roles to the military.

The varying levels of civilian involvement have created additional fears in society about what could happen if the issue of 1965 were to be brought into the open.

Behind anti-communism

Just as the army succeeded in eradicating the PKI politically, some – not just the army – benefited materially from the suppression of the Left. As those accused of being communists went into detention or were killed, others took their property and sometimes even their wives in a practice called "wife taking" [5].

There are many interests that have a stake in not opening up the truth about 1965, the role of the military and the PKI. A large-scale redistribution of assets took place in Indonesia as a result of the killings. The taking of schools, hospitals, houses, other buildings and land belonging to leftists and banned organisations like the PKI has yet to be widely recognised and recompensed. The military legalised these thefts through a 1975 decree stating that all PKI assets belonged to the state.

A 2007 decision of the Indonesian Supreme Court upheld a ruling that the Udayana Military Command had unlawfully taken the land of wealthy Balinese businessman I Gde Puger, who was

murdered in 1966. That included land now occupied by the military in Denpasar. But Puger's kin had to prove that the communist accusation against him was false.

For the victims, however, what matters most is the rehabilitation of their names, not compensation. Many former political prisoners and their families have struggled to disclose their "tainted" pasts, because of their extreme marginalisation under the Suharto regime.

Many of them have worked tirelessly to gain acceptance. They will continue to do so, in spite of the anti-democratic turn that Indonesia has taken with the latest spate of attacks.

Vannessa Hearman

Lecturer in Indonesian Studies at University of Sydney

P.S.

* The Conversation. 4 March 2015, 3.26am GMT:

<https://theconversation.com/violent-anti-communism-is-alive-and-well-in-democratic-indonesia-38111>

* Vannessa Hearman has received funding from the Australian Academy of Humanities in the past. She is Southeast Asia region councillor for the Asian Studies Association of Australia, an organisation of which she is also a member.

Footnotes

[1] <http://www.insideindonesia.org/sensitive-truths>

[2] <http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:326983/UQ326983.pdf>

[3] <https://theconversation.com/spectre-of-anti-communist-smears-resurrected-against-jokowi-28730>

[4] <http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1439203/September-30th-Movement>

[5] <http://www.sponpress.com/books/details/9780415838870/>