

# COVER-UP FOR SUHARTO — THE BUTCHER OF INDONESIA

Throughout history, rulers have sought to distort or deny historical facts to justify and continue their rule. They have not been shy to utilise the whole array of communications networks and media to bombard the people with falsehoods. The distortion not only takes the form of changing of facts but also of OMISSION — where pertinent facts or whole episodes in history are left out to create a false impression. This face of the ruling class we know all too well.

However, when people hailing from within the ranks of the oppressed, or worse still, members of liberatory organisations adopt a visage not unlike that of ruling class newsreporters, it is alarming and disgraceful. One cannot help but refer to Ismail Meer's\* article on his trip to Indonesia in these base terms. In an article entitled "Mandela Recalled Historic Ties on Indonesia Visit" (*Leader* — 07:02:90), Meer traces his sojourn, as part of an African National Congress delegation, to Indonesia.

This article:

1. paints Indonesia as a country of harmony, tolerance and unity;
2. presents Suharto, ruler of Indonesia, as a person committed to democracy and the preservation of human dignity;
3. brazenly describes their (Meer and company) reception by the Indonesian authorities as though they were a government in waiting.

A superficial, romantic and fraudulently false impression of Indonesia is created, interspersed with Meer's ingratiating appraisal of Suharto. Nowhere is there even a passing allusion to the horrendous events that brought Suharto to power in the mid-60s, or of the continuing injustice the people in that country suffer under his regime.

## TO SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT:

The person who ruled post-World II, "independent" Indonesia was Sukarno. He had secured a tenuous coalition of three main political trends by the mid-60s: The Nationalists under himself, the Communists and Religion supported by the military.

Sukarno's brand of nationalism failed to seriously address the economic problems Indonesia faced. His paltry attempts to introduce reform, especially in the area of land division and agriculture, to benefit the peasantry were opposed and thwarted by the military bureaucrats and conservative elements within his Nationalist bloc.

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\* Also known as I.C. Meer. Formerly, a prominent member of the Natal Indian Congress. In the 1940s he was a leading member of the Communist Party of South Africa.

To detract from the lack of domestic success Sukarno adopted an apparently 'radical' posture on international affairs. Publicly, he became a vociferous critic of imperialism and neo-colonialism. In addition he forged closer links with the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. For this reason the United States of America, and world imperialism regarded Indonesia as a threat to their regional interests.

During this period, the 1960s, the Communist Party of Indonesia (abbreviated PKI) was the largest non-ruling Communist Party in the world. The PKI had a membership of more than three million and a mass support of approximately 10 percent of the Indonesian population.

These two factors, firstly, Sukarno's 'radicalism' and, secondly, the strength of the PKI made the USA view Indonesia with extreme wariness.

The Sukarno-led coalition was rent apart on 30 September 1965 with the murder of six generals in the army. Imperialism and the military-religious bloc within Indonesia were quick to falsely brand this as a prelude to a Communist coup. Historical evidence, however, points to the fact that it was a result of a fallout between dissenting divisions within the army.

The army took over . . . What followed was a nightmare for the Indonesian people. The army went on an all-out butchering spree on the pretext of cleaning up the country of troublemakers – it was in fact an anti-left progom (organised massacre).

An obscure general, Suharto, co-ordinated the killings.

People with even the remotest links to the PKI and even those who had never heard of Marxism were murdered; people were forced to lie about friends and marauding gangs sanctioned by the army. Sukarno was increasingly isolated from the running of the country as, the army took control. He resigned in 1968 and Suharto has ruled ever since.

During that long black period between October and December 1965, 250 000 Indonesians were confirmed killed. A Sukarno-instigated commission estimated the figure to be 480 000 at least. 117 000 political prisoners were jailed for up to thirteen years each. Nor did the atrocities end there. TODAY (1991), TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER, these ex-prisoners are:—

1. not allowed to meet in groups of more than five;
2. not allowed outside Jakarta without permission;
3. banned from foreign travel;
4. required to have their identity documents stamped by the authorities.

What was the reaction of Imperialism?

1. *Time* magazine (15 July 1965) called it “The West’s best news for years in Asia.”
2. During the massacre, United States ambassador to Indonesia, Marshall Green, said he admired the work of the army.
3. United States embassy officials provided Suharto’s henchmen with a list of several thousand names of communists which they had compiled.
4. United States State Department documents covering United States assessments and policy for the entire three months preceding the Suharto ‘coup’ are either off limits to researchers or lost.

As far as Imperialism was concerned the right side had won and it did not matter at what price. Throughout this Suharto proved himself the Blue-eyed boy of Imperialism.

This is the real Suharto – Murderer and imperialist lackey – whose bloodstained hands were clasped by Meer and company.

In concluding his article, Meer writes that Suharto thanked them and handed “. . . Ten million American dollars as a gift from his people to the task of reconstructing democracy and human dignity for all in South Africa . . . We were overwhelmed and full of rich memories . . .”

The attitude of the New Unity Movement toward a foreign government stems from the latter’s treatment of its own workers and peasantry. Any respect for democracy and human dignity must be reflected in its domestic policies. Suharto’s brand of ‘democracy’ we can do without. His bloodstained ten million dollars is a small price to pay for his atrocities to be swept under the carpet by Meer and company.

What “rich” memories do the former comrades and relatives of those murdered by Suharto have of him? What do the oppressed and exploited in that country think of a foreign liberatory movement being wined and dined when their own organisations are trampled underfoot?

The New Unity Movement adopts an internationalist approach to struggle.

“We identify with the struggles of oppressed and exploited people wherever they may be. Their struggle is our struggle; their victory is our victory and their defeats are our defeats. When they get killed, we ‘are diminished’ and their mourning becomes our grief.” (APDUSA VIEWS – No. 36)

We cannot lose sight of this perspective. To do so is to cut ourselves off from the rest of humanity and by that act to betray our own people.