Rebuilding after Madiun: The Indonesian Communist Party's Strategy of Mass Mobilization in Central Java, 1948–1955

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Abstract

The Madiun Affair of September 1948 left the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI) branded as a rebel organization, its leadership killed or imprisoned and its local networks scattered. Yet seven years later the party came fourth nationally in the 1955 general election, and Central Java delivered the largest share of its national vote. This article explains how that recovery was achieved in the province where the uprising had unfolded. It addresses two questions: what social and political conditions in Central Java between 1948 and 1952 shaped the party's revival, and which strategies the PKI used to build a mass base that it converted into electoral support in 1955. Using the historical method of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation and historiography, the study draws on PKI publications, the party press (*Harian Rakjat*, *Bintang Merah* and *Suara Tani*), regional newspapers (*Kedaulatan Rakjat* and *Suara Merdeka*), a provincial government yearbook, archival letters and the secondary literature. It interprets the evidence through Charles Tilly's mobilization model and through framing analysis. The article argues that the PKI's success was neither a simple product of organizational skill nor an automatic consequence of poverty. It resulted from a cumulative sequence: identifying a social base among the *abangan* peasantry and urban workers, framing socio-economic grievances as collective class injustice, mobilizing workers and peasants through SOBSI and BTI, and converting this organized constituency into votes through an intensive, culturally embedded campaign. The study contributes a provincial-level reconstruction of PKI mass-building that links post-Madiun reorganization to electoral outcomes. It also shows the structural limits of this strategy: the party depended on its alliance with the nationalists and on vertical village loyalties, and it remained weak among the *santri*.

Keywords: Indonesian Communist Party; Central Java; mass mobilization; Madiun Affair; 1955 general election; SOBSI; BTI; aliran politics

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Introduction

The Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI) was founded on 23 May 1920, and its roots in Central Java reach back further still.[1] Sarekat Islam, founded in Surakarta in 1912 as the successor to Haji Samanhudi's Sarekat Dagang Islam, grew into a vehicle of native solidarity widely regarded as representing the common people.[2] In Semarang, the young activist Semaoen of the Indische Sociaal-Democratische Vereeniging (ISDV), the Marxist association that Henk Sneevliet had founded in 1914, came to lead both the local Sarekat Islam branch and the railway workers' union VSTP.[3] Ideological tension between Tjokroaminoto's Islamic leadership and Semaoen's socialist orientation split the movement in 1920, the year in which the ISDV renamed itself the Perserikatan Kommunist di Hindia.[4] By mid-1924 the PKI had outgrown Sarekat Islam and was the only party that could honestly claim a mass following.[5] The revolts of November 1926 in West Java and January 1927 on the west coast of Sumatra were crushed. Some 13,000 people were arrested, 4,508 imprisoned and 1,308 sent to the camp at Boven Digul, and the party was outlawed.[6]

The party re-emerged publicly on 21 October 1945. During the revolution many communists worked through the Socialist Party, the Indonesian Labour Party and the socialist youth organization Pesindo, as well as through mass organizations such as the labour federation SOBSI and the peasant union BTI.[7] After the Renville Agreement brought down Amir Sjarifuddin's cabinet in January 1948, Amir formed the People's Democratic Front (Front Demokrasi Rakjat, FDR) on 26 February 1948 to unite the left in opposition to the Hatta cabinet.[8] In August 1948 the veteran communist Musso returned from the Soviet Union with Suripno, landing at Bukittinggi, and brought with him the resolution *Djalan Baru untuk Republik Indonesia* (A New Road for the Indonesian Republic).[9] The seizure of Madiun on 18 September 1948 and the proclamation of a revolutionary government there turned a political crisis into armed confrontation. Within two weeks government troops had retaken Madiun, and within two months the revolt had been suppressed. Musso was killed at the end of October, around 36,000 party members and sympathizers were imprisoned, and Amir Sjarifuddin and other leaders were executed.[10]

The outcome seven years later is therefore striking. In the parliamentary election of September 1955 the PKI came fourth nationally with 6,179,914 votes (16.36 percent)

[1] Donald Hindley, *The Communist Party of Indonesia, 1951–1963* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964), 18.

[2] Takashi Shiraishi, *Zaman Bergerak: Radikalisme Rakyat di Jawa 1912–1926* (Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti, 1997), 55, 103.

[3] Shiraishi, *Zaman Bergerak*, 123, 133; Ruth T. McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965), 14.

[4] Shiraishi, *Zaman Bergerak*, 296, 312.

[5] Shiraishi, *Zaman Bergerak*, 337.

[6] Hindley, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 18.

[7] Hindley, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 19.

[8] Hindley, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 20.

[9] Maksum, Agus Sunyoto, and A. Zainuddin, *Lubang-Lubang Pembantaian: Petualangan PKI di Madiun* (Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti, 1990), 6; D. N. Aidit, *Lahirnja PKI dan Perkembangannja* (Jakarta: Jajasan Pembaruan, 1955), 32.

[10] Hindley, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 21.

and thirty-nine seats, and fourth again in the Constituent Assembly election with 6,232,512 votes (16.47 percent) and eighty seats.[11] Central Java gave the party 2,326,108 votes, or 25.8 percent of the provincial total, more than any other province.[12] In the province the PKI finished second only to the Indonesian National Party (PNI), polling more than two million votes for both parliament and the Constituent Assembly.[13] A party that had been stigmatized as a rebel organization in 1948 thus became, by 1955, the second political force in the region where much of that rebellion had unfolded. How this recovery was achieved is the problem this article addresses.

The PKI of the 1950s has a substantial historiography, but most of it works at the national level. Donald Hindley's study of the party between 1951 and 1963 remains the most detailed account of its organization, mass organizations and electoral machinery. Justus M. van der Kroef traced the party's history, programme and tactics from a Cold War perspective, while Ruth McVey reconstructed its origins.[14] Later scholarship by Rex Mortimer and Olle Törnquist explained the party's growth and destruction through its relationship with nationalist patrons and the vertical structure of Javanese rural society.[15] Indonesian studies have narrowed the focus to particular groups or regions. They include Ahmad Fathul Bari on the PKI's peasant strategy in East Java, Risdha Budiyanto Nugroho on Gerwani in Semarang, Uno Ekowati on the PKI's national strategy for the 1955 election, and Barep Rifaldi Chandra Perdana on the party's campaign in Yogyakarta.[16] Others have examined the propaganda of Lekra short stories in *Harian Rakjat*, the party's general development from 1948 to 1965, and its ties with SOBSI.[17] Tsabit Azinar Ahmad has analysed the discursive contest among all the major parties in Central Java before the 1955 election.[18]

These studies leave a gap. National accounts describe the PKI's recovery but do not trace how it worked in a specific provincial society. Regional studies isolate one constituency, such as peasants, women or campaign discourse, or one moment, such

[11] Komisi Pemilihan Umum, "Pemilu 1955," https://www.kpu.go.id/page/read/8/pemilu-1955.

[12] Hindley, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 223.

[13] Badan Kesatuan Bangsa dan Politik Kabupaten Cilacap, "Hasil Pemilihan Umum 1955 Daerah Pemilihan Jawa Tengah," bakesbangpol.cilacapkab.go.id, citing *Antara*, 25 December 1955.

[14] Justus M. van der Kroef, *The Communist Party of Indonesia: Its History, Program and Tactics* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1965); McVey, *Rise of Indonesian Communism*.

[15] Rex Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism under Soekarno: Ideology and Politics, 1959–1965* (Jakarta: Equinox Publishing, 2006); Olle Törnquist, *Dilemmas of Third World Communism: The Destruction of the PKI in Indonesia* (London: Zed Books, 1984).

[16] Ahmad Fathul Bari, "Strategi Partai Komunis Indonesia terhadap Petani dan Pengaruhnya di Jawa Timur (1953–1965)", 40; Risdha Budiyanto Nugroho, "Aktivitas Gerwani di Kota Semarang Tahun 1950–1965", 61; Uno Ekowati, "Strategi Partai Komunis Indonesia dalam Pemenangan Pemilihan Umum 1955", 54–55; Barep Rifaldi Chandra Perdana, "Strategi Pemenangan Partai Komunis Indonesia pada Pemilu Tahun 1955 di Yogyakarta," *Mozaik Sejarah Indonesia* 2, no. 1 (2016): 10.

[17] Ahmad Syafa'at et al., "Cerpen-Cerpen Lekra (1950–1965) sebagai Strategi Perjuangan Politik PKI," *Diglosia* 6, no. 4 (2023): 1055–70; Ginanjar and Runalan Soedarmo, "Perkembangan Politik Partai Komunis Indonesia (1948–1965)," *Artefak* 2, no. 1 (2014): 129–38; Ahmad Randi and Arditya Prayogi, "Simbol Palu dan Eksistensinya dalam Politik Praktis Indonesia Tahun 1955," *Journal of Education and Culture* 2, no. 3 (2022): 19–29.

[18] Tsabit Azinar Ahmad, "Kampanye dan Pertarungan Politik di Jawa Tengah Menjelang Pemilihan Umum 1955," *Paramita* 26, no. 1 (2016): 45–61.

as the 1955 campaign. No study has yet reconstructed, for Central Java, the full sequence that connects the party's collapse in 1948 and its reorganization after 1950 with its identification of a social base, its framing of grievances, its mobilization of both workers and peasants and its electoral conversion of this constituency in 1955. Nor has the evidence of the party press been systematically read against regional newspapers and archival correspondence for this purpose.

This article therefore pursues two objectives: to explain the social and political conditions in Central Java between 1948 and 1952 that shaped the PKI's revival, and to analyse the strategies through which the party built a mass base and converted it into electoral support in 1955. It argues that the PKI's success in Central Java resulted from the convergence of an adaptive political strategy with a social structure that was unusually receptive to it. The strategy unfolded in four mutually reinforcing stages: social-base identification, issue framing, organizational mobilization and electoral conversion. Its contribution is twofold. Empirically, it offers a provincial-level reconstruction of PKI mass-building that draws on local reporting of strikes, cadre courses and rallies. Analytically, it uses Tilly's mobilization model to show why organization, rather than ideology alone, turned diffuse grievance into collective political behaviour, and why the same strategy reached its limits among the *santri* and in districts where religious networks were dense. The novelty of the study lies in treating the PKI's post-Madiun recovery as a single, staged process of mobilization within one province, rather than as a narrative of national leadership politics.

Method

The study employs the historical method in four stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation and historiography.[19] At the heuristic stage, sources were gathered from the National Library of Indonesia in Jakarta, including microfilm holdings at its Salemba branch and its digitized newspaper collection, from the Regional Library of West Java, and from digital repositories including the Internet Archive and the CIA Reading Room. Primary sources fall into four groups. The first comprises contemporary PKI publications: works by D. N. Aidit published between 1952 and 1964, the party constitution of 1954, the party's *Buku Putih tentang Peristiwa Madiun* (White Book on the Madiun Affair, 1954), *ABC Politik* (1958) and the proceedings of the second PKI national peasant conference. The second comprises periodicals: the PKI theoretical journal *Bintang Merah* (1950–1951) and the BTI magazine *Suara Tani* (November 1950). The third comprises newspapers: the PKI daily *Harian Rakjat* (1952 and January–July 1955), the Yogyakarta daily *Kedaulatan Rakjat* (1951–1952) and the Semarang daily *Suara Merdeka* (June 1955). The fourth comprises official and archival documents: the Ministry of Information's provincial yearbook *Republik Indonesia: Propinsi Djawa Tengah* (1953), a PKI letter to Ki Hadjar Dewantara dated 12 July 1954, and a SARBUPRI letter of 22 September 1952 concerning the Kemuning tea estate, held in the National Archives of Indonesia (ANRI). No oral testimony was used.

[19] Kuntowijoyo, *Pengantar Ilmu Sejarah* (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 2018), 69; Sulasman, *Metodologi Penelitian Sejarah* (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2014), 74.

Source criticism was applied both externally and internally.[20] Externally, most newspapers were consulted as digitized images or microfilm. Several issues of *Harian Rakjat* and both issues of *Suara Merdeka* are faded, torn or legible only under magnification, so only passages that could be read with confidence were used. The ANRI letter was consulted as a photographic reproduction published by the archive itself. Internally, three problems required particular care. First, PKI publications and the party press are partisan: they reported rallies, strikes and recruitment in order to mobilize, and attendance figures in *Harian Rakjat* are therefore treated as party claims indicating the scale and geography of mobilization rather than as precise counts. Second, several of Aidit's texts and the peasant conference proceedings date from 1957 to 1964. They are used to reconstruct the analytical categories, such as class strata in the village and the "seven village devils," that the party had begun developing through rural research in the early 1950s. They are not used as evidence of conditions in 1948–1955, and later political vocabulary in them is excluded. Third, accounts of the Madiun Affair are sharply polarized. The PKI's *Buku Putih* presents the affair as provoked self-defence. The armed forces' official history and the Nahdlatul Ulama account emphasize communist violence. These perspectives were read against one another and against scholarly accounts by Hindley, Swift and Soe Hok Gie.

At the interpretive stage the study uses Charles Tilly's mobilization model, which treats organization as the principal determinant of a group's capacity for collective action.[21] Tilly holds that mobilization depends on the quantity of resources a group controls and the probability that these can be delivered, that mobilization is a function of organization, and that organization itself is the product of "catness," a shared categorical identity, and "netness," the density of the social networks linking members.[22] His polity model distinguishes a government, which controls the concentrated means of coercion, from contenders who apply pooled resources to influence it. Members of the polity enjoy routine, low-cost access to government resources, while challengers lack it; coalitions coordinate the collective action of contenders and governments. In this framework the PKI's resources included party branches, mass organizations, newspapers and cadres, while its rehabilitation after 1950 can be read as a passage from excluded challenger toward polity membership. To analyse the party's use of the press, the study draws on framing theory, which examines how communicators select and emphasize aspects of reality so as to define problems, attribute causes and suggest remedies.[23] At the final stage, the findings are presented first chronologically and then thematically.

Results

[20] Sulasman, *Metodologi Penelitian Sejarah*, 101–4.

[21] Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: Newbery Award Records, 1978), 54–56.

[22] Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*. The formula "organization = catness × netness" belongs to Tilly's discussion of organization in the same work.

[23] Stephen D. Reese, Oscar H. Gandy Jr., and August E. Grant, eds., *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001; Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2008), 106; Eriyanto, *Analisis Framing: Konstruksi, Ideologi, dan Politik Media* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2002), 77–83.

Society and Economy in Central Java, 1948–1950

Central Java had been a densely populated agrarian region since the colonial period. Its fertile lowlands were turned into wet-rice fields, and most of its inhabitants lived from farming, crafts, petty trade or minor government employment.[24] Yet landholding was highly unequal. Owners of extensive fields could rent or sell them, while many villagers owned no land and survived as agricultural labourers, tenants, sharecroppers or holders of pawned land. Javanese social thought distinguished the *priyayi*, the educated officials and civil servants, from the *wong cilik*, the "little people" of peasants, artisans and manual labourers.[25]

Overlaying this hierarchy was the cultural-religious division that Clifford Geertz described as the trichotomy of *santri*, *priyayi* and *abangan*.[26] The *santri* were observant Muslims whose piety was transmitted through *pesantren* and *madrasah* and reinforced by commerce in local markets and small towns; they regarded Islam as a total system of belief that admitted no syncretic compromise.[27] The *priyayi* were largely urban officials, clerks and teachers. The term originally denoted descendants of the precolonial courts, but it widened to include commoners drawn into the colonial bureaucracy as the supply of genuine aristocrats ran short.[28] The *abangan*, the most numerous group in the countryside and especially in the former court regions of Surakarta and Yogyakarta and the villages of the Solo river basin, practised a village religion that blended animist, Hindu-Buddhist and Islamic elements, centred on ritual feasts (*slametan*) rather than doctrine. As Törnquist observes, the Muslim commercial leadership that developed alongside the Islamic courts and the *priyayi* gave rise to a distinct *santri* culture, while those who absorbed Islam only partially remained *abangan*.[29] This was a cultural fault line as much as an economic one, and it would shape the political choices of the 1950s.

The province took its administrative form during the revolution. Article 18 of the 1945 Constitution and Law No. 22 of 1948 on regional government provided the framework, and Law No. 10 of 1950 defined Central Java as six residencies: Semarang, Pekalongan, Pati, Banyumas and Kedu, together with Surakarta, which incorporated the former Kasunanan and Mangkunegaran principalities.[30] The province counted roughly 18.4 million inhabitants in 1961, and fewer at the end of the 1940s.[31] Revolution and Dutch military aggression made Central Java a battlefield. Housing, infrastructure and farmland had to be rebuilt, while the provincial government sought to raise rice output and promote commercial crops. Industry remained small and

[24] Thomas Stamford Raffles, *The History of Java*, trans. Eko Prasetyaningrum, Nuryati Agustin, and Idda Qoryati Mahbubah (Yogyakarta: Narasi, 2019), 71.

[25] Koentjaraningrat, *Manusia dan Kebudayaan di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Djambatan, 1984), 337.

[26] Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 7.

[27] Geertz, *Religion of Java*, 121, 123, 178.

[28] Geertz, *Religion of Java*, 229.

[29] Törnquist, *Dilemmas of Third World Communism*, 134.

[30] Wiyono et al., *Sejarah Revolusi Kemerdekaan (1945–1949) Daerah Jawa Tengah* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1991), 13–14.

[31] Widjojo Nitisastro, *Population Trends in Indonesia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1970), 174.

dependent on imported inputs. Among the larger concentrations of wage labour were the oil fields of Cepu, where workers were organized in the SOBSI-affiliated Persatuan Buruh Minjak (PERBUM).[32]

Formal independence did not resolve rural inequality or the vulnerability of urban labour. Agus Suwignyo and Rhoma Dwi Aria Yuliantri note that most Indonesians of the 1950s still struggled to understand what citizenship in a modern independent state meant, having lived for centuries within the hierarchical *kawula–gusti* (servant–master) relationship.[33] The combination of material hardship, weak state mediation in agrarian disputes and an unformed civic identity created the social space in which the PKI would later operate.

The PKI in Central Java and the Road to Madiun, 1946–1948

The PKI's organization in Central Java followed the pattern set by the party centre, with regional committees directing branches at regency, sub-district and village level, all bound by the decisions of the central committee.[34] Before Aidit's leadership, however, this structure rarely reached the villages. The party's leadership was strengthened from 1946, when Sardjono returned from Australia, Aidit arrived in Solo after his release from Onrust, and Lukman and Alimin returned in August. The fourth congress elected Sardjono chairman and appointed Moh. Senan as regional commissioner for Central Java.[35]

Surakarta became the party's political centre in the region. In August 1947 the Amir cabinet created the Special Military Region of Surakarta under the Pesindo leader Wikana. Alimin, Aidit, Ngadiman Hardjosubroto and Sardjono took up residence there, and leftist irregular forces moved into the city. Nineteen irregular formations in Solo were consolidated into Brigade XXIV under Colonel Iskandar.[36] According to the armed forces' official history, communist civilians such as Alimin regularly attended military briefings at the Loji Gandrung, and the party's influence over the Fourth Division (Panembahan Senopati) grew.[37]

The year 1948 brought the conflict into the open. The Hatta cabinet, formed on 29 January 1948, pledged to implement the Renville Agreement and to rationalize and reorganize the armed forces (Rera).[38] The FDR opposed rationalization through street demonstrations and the press. The Fourth Division refused reorganization and held a large demonstration in Solo on 20 May 1948.[39] Labour conflict compounded the crisis.

[32] Departemen Penerangan, *Republik Indonesia: Propinsi Djawa Tengah* (Semarang, 1953), 234.

[33] Agus Suwignyo and Rhoma Dwi Aria Yuliantri, "Praktik Kewargaan Sehari-hari sebagai Ketahanan Sosial Masyarakat Tahun 1950-an (Sebuah Tinjauan Sejarah)," *Jurnal Ketahanan Nasional* 24, no. 1 (2018): 90.

[34] Central Comite Partai Komunis Indonesia, *Konstitusi Partai Komunis Indonesia (P.K.I.)* (Jakarta: Jajasan Pembaruan, 1954), 17, 31–32.

[35] Soe Hok Gie, *Orang-Orang di Persimpangan Kiri Jalan* (Yogyakarta: Bentang Budaya, 1997), 106–9.

[36] Saleh As'ad Djamhari, *Komunisme di Indonesia, Jilid II: Penumpasan Pemberontakan PKI 1948* (Jakarta: Pusjarah TNI, 2009), 5–6.

[37] Djamhari, *Komunisme di Indonesia II*, 7–8.

[38] Departemen Agitprop CC PKI, *Buku Putih tentang Peristiwa Madiun* (Jakarta, 1954), 3.

[39] Djamhari, *Komunisme di Indonesia II*, 9; Departemen Agitprop CC PKI, *Buku Putih*, 4.

In the cotton plantations and state textile works at Delanggu, workers had long complained of corruption in the State Textile Board (BTN). In May 1948 thousands of workers and cotton farmers from Klaten marched on the BTN office in Solo to demand wages and cloth rations. A local strike that began on 26 May was taken over by the SOBSI centre under Maruto Darusman on 19 June. Ann Swift notes that almost everyone acknowledged the strikers' grievances were genuine. Once SOBSI assumed control, however, the Masyumi minister Sjafruddin Prawiranegara denounced the strike as political, and Delanggu became a national contest between the FDR and the government.[40] Delanggu is significant for this article because it showed, three years before the party's revival, both the mobilizing potential of real labour grievances in Central Java and the political cost of their capture by a party apparatus.

Musso's arrival in August 1948 gave the party a more aggressive line. His resolution called for the reorganization of communist forces into a single open party and proposed a new formula for the national united front, while rejecting compromise with the Dutch.[41] Younger leaders such as Aidit, Lukman, Njoto and Peris Pardede welcomed the resolution, and the pro-PKI Socialist and Labour parties fused with the PKI at the end of August.[42] Solo meanwhile descended into kidnappings and clashes between Fourth Division units and the Siliwangi Division. On 16 and 17 September 1948 General Sudirman declared the Surakarta area to be in danger and ordered troops from Magelang to separate the combatants.[43] On 18 September Pesindo-led forces under Sumarsono seized Madiun, and a National Front government was announced at the residency office.[44] Musso's broadcast denounced Sukarno and Hatta as collaborators; Sukarno replied by asking the people to choose between "Musso and his PKI" and "Sukarno–Hatta."[45]

The suppression was swift. FDR forces withdrew to Dungus on 28 September. Retreating units killed prisoners at Kresek and Soco, and Musso was shot near Ponorogo on 31 October.[46] In Central Java, purges followed in Yogyakarta, Kedu, Magelang, Banyumas and Kebumen. Party leaders including Tan Ling Djie, Sakirman and Ngadiman were arrested, and the party papers *Patriot*, *Buruh*, *Bintang Merah* and *Revolusioner* were banned.[47] The PKI's own *Buku Putih* insisted that the central leadership had been unprepared for revolt and that Madiun had begun as a local disarmament incident followed by armed self-defence.[48] Whatever the merits of that claim, Hindley concludes that the uprising was premature and left the leadership with no good options.[49]

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[40] Ann Swift, *The Road to Madiun: The Indonesian Communist Uprising of 1948* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1989), 41–42.

[41] Hindley, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 20.

[42] Van der Kroef, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 33.

[43] Djamhari, *Komunisme di Indonesia II*, 18; Departemen Agitprop CC PKI, *Buku Putih*, 9–10.

[44] Djamhari, *Komunisme di Indonesia II*, 22.

[45] Tim PBNU, *Benturan NU-PKI 1948–1965* (Jakarta, 2013), 48–49.

[46] Soetoyo N. K., *Fellow Traveller: Peranan Palu Arit dalam Kehidupan Bangsa* (Jakarta: Yayasan Kajian Citra Bangsa, 2010), 67–68.

[47] Djamhari, *Komunisme di Indonesia II*, 157–61.

[48] Departemen Agitprop CC PKI, *Buku Putih*, 28–29.

[49] Hindley, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 21.

Survival, Factional Struggle and Reorganization, 1949–1952

After Madiun the PKI was leaderless and disorganized. Many cadres had been killed or jailed in Surakarta, Yogyakarta and elsewhere in Central Java, while Aidit and Lukman reportedly went abroad to Vietnam.[50] During the second Dutch aggression from December 1948, the party played little part in the fighting. Its offices were closed, its meetings banned, and stories of the Madiun killings circulated widely in the villages, leaving former sympathizers afraid of being associated with it. A party leaflet distributed in Yogyakarta at the end of January 1949 called for anti-colonial unity and guerrilla struggle, but the party in fact confined itself mainly to pamphleteering, pleading that it had not yet recovered from Madiun.[51] Under Alimin's nominal leadership the party drew on the Chinese example to distinguish foreign from domestic capital and to embrace a four-class coalition of peasants, workers, intellectuals and the national bourgeoisie.[52] During most of 1950 the PKI operated simultaneously at three levels: a legal party in Yogyakarta, revived Socialist and Labour parties, and an illegal party that steered both.[53]

The return of Aidit and Lukman in July 1950 opened a factional struggle. The Alimin–Tan Ling Djie group wished to keep the party small, elitist and inconspicuous, to work within the Socialist Party and to concentrate on parliament. The Aidit group insisted that the party must not "sleep, submerge or retreat." In their view it had to build its own front, communicate with the masses and implement the *Djalan Baru* in full.[54] After the Alimin–Tan leadership issued an unauthorized statement on West New Guinea in December 1950, a plenary session of the central committee in January 1951 sided with Aidit and Lukman. A new politburo of Alimin, Aidit, Lukman, Njoto and Sudisman was elected, and the Leninist wing took over the editorial boards of *Bintang Merah* and *Harian Rakjat*.[55] The editors of *Bintang Merah* reported in January 1951 that demand had pushed the print run from 3,000 to 5,000 and then to 10,000 copies.[56] The Provisional Constitution of 1950, which imposed few restrictions on political activity, gave the reconstituted party the legal space it needed.[57]

Reorganization followed immediately. Regional leaderships were re-elected in line with the new centre. In March 1951 Aidit warned against both "left" adventurism and right-wing capitulation, as well as sectarianism that ignored the masses.[58] The central committee established a commission to translate Marxist-Leninist classics into Indonesian.[59] The draft constitution adopted in April 1951 was put into practice before

[50] Saleh As'ad Djamhari, *Komunisme di Indonesia, Jilid III: Konsolidasi dan Infiltrasi PKI (1950–1959)* (Jakarta: Pusjarah TNI, 2009), 5.

[51] Arnold C. Brackman, *Indonesian Communism: A History* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), 114.

[52] Brackman, *Indonesian Communism*, 125–26.

[53] Hindley, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 22.

[54] Van der Kroef, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 45–46.

[55] Van der Kroef, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 47–48.

[56] *Bintang Merah*, no. 1–2, 1–15 January 1951, 4.

[57] Sunarso, *Membedah Demokrasi: Sejarah, Konsep, dan Implementasinya di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: UNY Press, 2015), 56.

[58] Hindley, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 70–71.

[59] Hindley, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 71.

a congress had ratified it, and Aidit later wrote that discussion of the draft had "greatly encouraged the development of the party."[60] A clear hierarchy took shape: a Central Committee, provincial committees (Provcom), section committees at regency level (Secom), sub-section committees at sub-district level (Subsecom) and resort committees in factories, mines, villages, offices and schools.[61] *Harian Rakjat*, issued from 1 July 1951 with an initial print run of only 2,000 copies, became the chief channel for party instructions.[62] When the Sukiman cabinet ordered mass arrests of communists in 1951, Aidit combined open, legal activity with closed organizational work.[63] By the national party conference of early 1952 the party counted some 7,910 members and candidate members. After a six-month recruitment campaign it claimed more than 126,000, and it worked hard to dispel the conspiratorial aura that Madiun had attached to it.[64] The national front strategy now required a simultaneous appeal to four classes: workers, peasants, the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie.[65]

Identifying the Social Base

The first element of the new strategy was a careful reading of the society the party sought to organize. In a province divided among *santri*, *priyayi* and *abangan*, no single political approach would work. For the *santri*, communism's materialist philosophy was equated with atheism. Its confrontational style also clashed with a political culture that regarded open mutual attack as taboo, and pious Muslims gravitated to parties with an Islamic identity.[66] The *priyayi*, whose status derived from the bureaucracy, had little to gain from agrarian reform or labour militancy and inclined towards the PNI, although some teachers, officials and intellectuals of *priyayi* background did join the PKI or its affiliates. The *abangan* were different. Predominantly peasants, agricultural labourers and economically vulnerable villagers, they were not bound by doctrinal objections to a party denounced as atheistic, and they were receptive to messages delivered through folk art, peasant associations and everyday language. Aidit formulated the party's twin tasks as building an anti-imperialist national front "based on the alliance of workers and peasants" and building a party "with a broad mass character."[67]

Within the village the party drew a sharp line between friends and enemies. Landlords, moneylenders, *ijon* buyers of standing crops, middlemen (*tengkulak*), bureaucratic capitalists and rich peasants were identified as obstacles; landlords who controlled anything from a few to thousands of hectares worked by others were singled out.[68] The working peasantry was divided into rich, middle and poor peasants

[60] Aidit, *Lahirnja PKI*, 40–41.
[61] Central Comite PKI, *Konstitusi*, 31–32.
[62] Van der Kroef, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 48.
[63] Soetoyo, *Fellow Traveller*, 77.
[64] Van der Kroef, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 49–50.
[65] Van der Kroef, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 51.
[66] Tim PBNU, *Benturan NU-PKI*, 23–24, 32.
[67] D. N. Aidit, *Djalan ke Demokrasi Rakjat bagi Indonesia* (Jakarta: Jajasan Pembaruan, 1955), 49.
[68] D. N. Aidit, *Kaum Tani Mengganjang Setan-Setan Desa* (Jakarta: Jajasan Pembaruan, 1964), 19–20.

and landless labourers. Poor peasants, whose plots could not feed their families, and the rural proletariat, who sold their labour by the day and in the lean season survived by gathering firewood, were designated the backbone of rural mobilization.[69] These conditions were found across the fertile plantation and rice districts of Surakarta, Semarang, Banyumas, Kedu, Kudus and Pati.[70] The same analysis was extended to coastal fishing communities, where boat owners took the place of landlords, and to secondary village groups such as teachers, smiths, artisans, petty traders and forestry and plantation workers.[71]

Political alliances shaped where this analysis could be applied. Between 1952 and 1954 a working alliance formed between the PNI and the PKI. It gave the PNI the parliamentary majority it needed and gave the PKI the protection it required for grassroots expansion, but at the price of accepting the role of junior partner in a coalition dominated by the nationalist bourgeoisie.[72] As the 1955 campaign approached, cultural orientations hardened into political identities. Whole villages, or neighbourhoods within them, tended to vote alike, following religious leaders, village heads and patrons. Törnquist argues that because sharply differentiated classes had not developed in Central Javanese villages, cultural identity mattered more than class conflict. In his words, the communists "arrived among villagers stratified vertically, not horizontally": shielded by the nationalists, they followed them into the old Javanese and *abangan* milieu, and found it far harder to reach the clients of orthodox Muslim patrons.[73] In the cities, and above all in Semarang, the party targeted workers in transport, ports, manufacturing and energy. These workers were politically literate and spatially concentrated, so they were easy to consolidate. Port workers controlled the logistical arteries of the province, and the oil workers of Cepu were already organized in PERBUM within SOBSI.[74] In its doctrinal analysis the party named landlords and compradors as the "enemies of the people" and workers, peasants and the petty bourgeoisie as the driving forces of revolution, while treating the urban unemployed as a wavering group that could be won or lost.[75]

Framing Socio-Economic Grievances

The second element was framing. The party press did not merely report events; it selected, emphasized and connected them so as to produce a coherent moral narrative. In the countryside, landlords were cast as exploiters who opposed the revolutionary peasant movement and employed village toughs to protect themselves. Rich peasants were portrayed as moneylenders, *ijon* buyers and middlemen tending to become landlords themselves, and village bureaucratic capitalists as forcing peasants to sell their produce to urban firms.[76] In the cities, the party stressed the

[69] Aidit, *Kaum Tani Mengganjang*, 22–25.

[70] Departemen Penerangan, *Propinsi Djawa Tengah*, 254–55.

[71] Aidit, *Kaum Tani Mengganjang*, 20.

[72] Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism under Soekarno*, 198.

[73] Törnquist, *Dilemmas of Third World Communism*, 135–36.

[74] Departemen Penerangan, *Propinsi Djawa Tengah*, 234.

[75] Herbert Feith and Lance Castles, eds., *Indonesian Political Thinking, 1945–1965* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), 256–57.

[76] Aidit, *Kaum Tani Mengganjang*, 20, 23, 26.

persistence of colonial enterprise. Aidit wrote that imperialist economic policy "had not changed in principle" since colonial times: foreign firms continued to exploit Indonesian raw materials, minerals and cheap labour while suppressing national industry.[77] His earlier history of the labour movement described a national industry confined to hats, mats, baskets, batik and *kretek* cigarettes. The larger batik and *kretek* firms, he observed, were mostly owned by Arabs, Chinese and Europeans and were dependent on foreign importers.[78] Such framing produced clear protagonists and antagonists. Landlords and company owners appeared as villains, peasants and workers as victims, and the party as the champion of the people, a role that resonated with the Javanese messianic expectation of the *Ratu Adil*, the just king who restores order and prosperity.[79]

Harian Rakjat led this work in daily reporting, while *Bintang Merah* supplied theoretical depth, linking Lenin's theory of class struggle to Aidit's application of it in Indonesia.[80] In January 1951 *Bintang Merah* attributed unemployment, military demobilization, migration from land-short villages to the cities, the return of estates to foreign owners and the stagnation of national enterprises to the "colonialism" of the Round Table Conference (KMB) agreement.[81] The party press favoured stories of prominence, human interest, conflict and proximity.[82] It reported that rice shortages in Central Java were forcing families to pawn even their hoes, and that illegal pawnshops around Solo and Yogyakarta were charging nearly forty percent interest a month.[83] It also reported that 550 daily workers of the municipal and regency administrations in Magelang, organized in SEBDA, were staging three-hour sit-down strikes to demand a temporary allowance of Rp 1.25, while Governor Budiono threatened to dismiss them without pay.[84] It highlighted women textile workers in Tegal who were denied the three months' maternity leave owed to them and forced to walk more than two kilometres home after night shifts.[85]

The party also benefited from reporting it did not author. The Yogyakarta daily *Kedaulatan Rakjat* reported a motion by the PKI parliamentarian S. Oetarjo and nine colleagues urging the government to distribute rice to the whole population. The motion argued that existing distribution discriminated between civil servants, permanent and casual workers, and urban and rural people.[86] The same paper reported the shooting of Kamin, chairman of the BTI branch of Tawangaglik in western Semarang, by a small landlord, a *haji*, and his son. According to the BTI's account, Kamin had demanded that the sharecropping levy be reduced from the customary fifty percent of the harvest to fifteen percent.[87] Such reports, appearing in

[77] D. N. Aidit, *Masjarakat Indonesia dan Revolusi Indonesia* (Jakarta: Jajasan Pembaruan, 1964), 34.
[78] D. N. Aidit, *Sedjarah Gerakan Buruh Indonesia* (Jakarta: Jajasan Pembaruan, 1952), 24–25.
[79] A. Setyo Wibowo et al., *Ratu Adil: Kuasa dan Pemberontakan di Nusantara* (Jakarta: BWCF Samana Foundation, 2014), 4.
[80] *Bintang Merah*, no. 1–2, 1–15 January 1951, 6, 12.
[81] *Bintang Merah*, no. 1–2, 1–15 January 1951, 5.
[82] Eriyanto, *Analisis Framing*, 108, 125.
[83] *Harian Rakjat* (Jakarta), 26 April 1952.
[84] *Harian Rakjat*, 26 April 1952.
[85] *Harian Rakjat*, 6 March 1952.
[86] *Kedaulatan Rakjat* (Yogyakarta), 18 February 1952.
[87] *Kedaulatan Rakjat*, 15 March 1951.

a non-party paper, seemed to confirm the party's portrait of rural exploitation without the PKI having to frame them itself. The remedy was then supplied in its own press. A non-party candidate, Mr. Hamzah, declared that after studying the PKI programme and its election manifesto his doubts had turned into "complete conviction."[88] The confrontational style of the party press, which observers have characterized as a journalism of attack, reflected its Marxist orientation.[89] Through shared problems, a shared enemy and a shared champion, framing prepared the ground for mobilization.[90]

Mobilizing Workers

The third element was organizational mobilization, beginning with labour. Aidit argued that the Indonesian proletariat, oppressed by imperialism, capitalism and feudalism alike, was more resolute than any other class.[91] He pointed out that foreign corporations such as BPM, Caltex and Stanvac controlled oil, foreign estates still held plantation land, and the "Big Five" trading houses, KPM shipping and Dutch and other foreign banks dominated the economy.[92] The instrument was SOBSI, founded on 29 November 1946 by merging GASBI and GSBV. In the 1950s it claimed 2.5 million members in thirty-four unions, supported by numerous non-federated unions.[93] SOBSI's structure ran from a National Council through regional councils and branches down to base organizations in each enterprise. Its leadership overlapped with the PKI's, so that politburo decisions could become union policy. Its training programme recruited cadres from below, teaching basic unionism and negotiation at the lowest level, and leadership, mass control, Marxism and recruitment through cultural and sports cells at higher levels.[94] SARBUPRI, the plantation workers' union, grew tenfold in five years, from about 50,000 members to around half a million by 1952. Its tactics included strikes and go-slows, which kept wages flowing while production fell.[95]

In Central Java this organizational capacity produced a dense pattern of industrial action, summarized in the table below.

Table 1. Selected labour actions and labour-dispute data in Central Java, 1951–1952

Date of report	Union / location	Action and demand	Source
1951	79 cigarette firms, Solo	Closure of firms; about 3,000 workers unemployed	*Kedaulatan Rakjat*, 16 March 1951

[88] *Harian Rakjat*, 22 May 1955.

[89] Rhoma Dwi Aria Yuliantri and Muhidin M. Dahlan, *Lekra Tak Membakar Buku: Suara Senyap Lembar Kebudayaan Harian Rakjat 1950–1965* (Yogyakarta: Merakesumba, 2008), 77.

[90] Eriyanto, *Analisis Framing*, 169.

[91] Aidit, *Masjarakat Indonesia*, 52.

[92] Aidit, *Masjarakat Indonesia*, 33–34.

[93] D. S. Soegiri and Edi Cahyono, *Gerakan Serikat Buruh: Jaman Kolonial Hindia Belanda hingga Orde Baru* (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 2005), 27–28.

[94] Soegiri and Cahyono, *Gerakan Serikat Buruh*, 39–40.

[95] Soegiri and Cahyono, *Gerakan Serikat Buruh*, 40–42.

1951 (annual)	Central Java Labour Inspectorate	539 disputes involving 614 unions and about 160,000 workers; 41 strikes; 25,872 staff hours spent on mediation	*Kedaulatan Rakjat*, 18 February 1952
February 1952	SBKB Solo branch and B.O. Nusantara	Labour agreement on wages, travel allowance, overtime, sickness and death benefits, mediated by SOBSI	*Harian Rakjat*, 9 February 1952
March 1952	SBPP, Yogyakarta	Street action by 674 workers	*Kedaulatan Rakjat*, 17 March 1952
March 1952	PBSBPP, ports including Semarang	Planned action by about 27,000 port workers after failed talks with the Scheepvaartvereniging	*Harian Rakjat*, 31 March 1952
May 1952	SEBDA, Central Java	Strike demanding a rice allowance	*Harian Rakjat*, 12 May 1952
May 1952	SEBDA, Magelang	Renewed strike by about 550 workers	*Harian Rakjat*, 31 May 1952
June 1952	SB Textiel, Java Textiel Mij., Tegal	Spontaneous strike by 2,800 workers over gratuities, taken over by the union	*Harian Rakjat*, 12 June 1952

Behind the strike figures lay a concrete political agenda. The SARBUPRI branch in Surakarta demanded that the foreign-owned Kemuning tea estate in Karanganyar be managed by the state for the benefit of the people.[96] Under union pressure the government nationalized the Dutch electricity company ANIEM in Central Java, and the SBLGI branch in Cepu demanded nationalization of wholly foreign-owned subsidiaries.[97] Nationally, the period 1951–1955 saw 11,736 labour disputes and 1,787 strikes involving 918,739 workers, with plantations accounting for 31.23 percent of disputes and industry for 18.64 percent.[98] Demands for nationalization, regular wage rises, a minimum wage, a seven-hour working day and overtime pay made SOBSI far more attractive than its nationalist or Islamic rivals.[99] *Bintang Merah* observed that employers feared prolonged strikes because estate workers would leave in search of other work, which led them to concede advances.[100] The politburo resolution of March 1952 on the duties of the workers' united front, together with the party's insistence that the working class must "lead the people's struggle" and assist peasants and the

[96] Letter of SARBUPRI, Surakarta branch, concerning the Kemuning tea estate, Karanganyar, 22 September 1952, Sekretariat Negara Kabinet Perdana Menteri RI 1950–1959, Jilid II, no. 1492, Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia (ANRI), Jakarta.

[97] Arya Nabali, "Gerakan Anti-Sistemik Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia (SOBSI) dalam Nasionalisasi Perusahaan Asing pada Era Pemerintahan Presiden Sukarno 1950–1965", 65–66.

[98] Soegiri and Cahyono, *Gerakan Serikat Buruh*, 32.

[99] A. F. Sigit Rochadi, *Gerakan Buruh Indonesia: Perlawanan dan Fragmentasi* (Jakarta: Bumi Aksara, 2020), 44.

[100] *Bintang Merah*, no. 4–5, 1–15 October 1950, 143.

national bourgeoisie, bound economic struggle to the national-front strategy.[101] SOBSI's support for the party extended to electoral mobilization, to creating a favourable climate for the national front policy, and to supporting the party in conferences and government bodies.[102]

Mobilizing Peasants

Peasants were far more numerous and far harder to organize. The party acknowledged that peasants made up some seventy percent of the population. Aidit argued that feudal remnants kept agricultural technique backward, impoverished the peasantry and made industrialization impossible because the majority lacked purchasing power.[103] Sartono Kartodirdjo had shown that rural protest in Java was rooted in landholding, taxation and labour obligations. He also showed that the narrow social space of peasant communities made such movements intensely local.[104] The PKI's answer was a peasant united front with agricultural labourers and poor peasants as its backbone, middle peasants as allies and rich peasants neutralized. Its programme coupled demands for rent reduction with demands for higher wages for agricultural labour, so that the poorest would not feel excluded.[105]

The instrument was the BTI, founded on 25 November 1945, which remained weak during its first five years.[106] Branch conferences in late 1950 at Kudus, Semarang and Boyolali marked a turning point. The Kudus branch planned a marketing body for produce, a peasant credit bank, irrigation and flood control, retention of cultivated land of uncertain status for the people, and resistance to higher land tax. The Semarang branch demanded abolition of the *particuliere landerijen* (private estates) with compensation to their owners, sale of the land to cultivators in instalments, return of part of the land tax to the villages and statutory limits on landholding.[107] After Aidit took control, the PKI merged its peasant fronts into the BTI. By 1955 the BTI claimed 3,315,820 members nationally and 1,160,654 in Central Java, organized in 38 regency branches, 416 sub-district branches and 4,906 sub-branches.[108]

In July 1953 Aidit shifted the party's centre of gravity to the countryside, declaring that "the agrarian revolution is the essence of the people's democratic revolution in Indonesia." He admitted that the peasantry was indifferent and often suspicious, because no party member understood agrarian relations well, slogans about state ownership of all land had alarmed smallholders, and the party lacked a correct agrarian programme.[109] The party also purged cadres who had ties to

[101] Aidit, *Djalan ke Demokrasi Rakjat*, 32; Departemen Agitprop CC PKI, *ABC Politik* (Jakarta, 1958), 34.

[102] McVey, *Rise of Indonesian Communism*, 151.

[103] D. N. Aidit, Asmu, and Mao Tse-tung, *Untuk Bekerja Lebih Baik di Kalangan Tani* (Jakarta: Jajasan Pembaruan, 1958), 7–8.

[104] Sartono Kartodirdjo, *Protest Movements in Rural Java: A Study of Agrarian Unrest in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Selangor: Oxford University Press, 1978), 5–7.

[105] Jajasan Pembaruan, *Konfernas Tani ke-II PKI (15–16 Juli 1961)* (Jakarta, 1962), 13–14.

[106] *Suara Tani*, 25 November 1950, 3.

[107] *Suara Tani*, 25 November 1950, 4–5, 9.

[108] Hindley, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 165–66.

[109] Hindley, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 160–61.

landlords or were landlords themselves.[110] Its guidance instructed cadres to begin with small, concrete benefits: cheap fertilizer, seed and tools, repaired irrigation and roads, cooperatives, shared wells, burial societies, literacy courses and sports and cultural groups. Each service was to be linked to propaganda showing that the peasants' poor health and early deaths were the result of landlord exploitation. Direct actions against landlords, such as collective tenancy agreements and demands for lower interest, rents and higher wages, were deliberately not pursued on a large scale until after 1955. Aidit still sought the broadest anti-imperialist alliance, peasants needed preparation before confronting landlords, and capable cadres were only now emerging.[111]

This caution reflected the party's position. Lacking the independent revolutionary base that communists had built in China and Vietnam, the PKI had to work within its alliance with the nationalists. It adapted to village custom and worked through traditionally influential figures, avoiding open clashes with *santri* or with village elites linked to the PNI and NU.[112] The BTI's own criteria for a revolutionary peasant organization were recognition of working-class leadership, a radical agrarian programme and a central place in the anti-imperialist national front.[113] Hindley concludes that peasants welcomed the party's help with small but pressing problems and in return joined the BTI or voted for the PKI, but went no further. Aidit's leadership expected that years would be needed to forge a militant peasantry.[114]

The 1955 Election in Central Java

The final element was electoral conversion. The election was held under Law No. 7 of 1953, as amended by Law No. 18 of 1953, and its implementing regulations, with parliamentary voting in September and Constituent Assembly voting in December 1955.[115] Hindley judged that the PKI applied its organizational and propaganda resources with exceptional effectiveness, above all in Java.[116] The party sought to neutralize its past. Aidit's account of Madiun presented Hatta, Sukiman and Natsir as its provocateurs. He also warned the government against imitating Hatta's "iron fist," which, he claimed, had served foreign imperialism.[117] The fifth party congress of March 1954 framed the election within a line of developing the progressive forces, uniting with the middle forces and isolating the diehards.[118] Aidit's later writings codified the party's approach as the "method of combining three forms of struggle" (MKTBP): guerrilla struggle in the villages, revolutionary action by workers, especially transport workers, in the cities, and close relations with the armed forces.[119]

[110] Aidit, Asmu, and Mao, *Untuk Bekerja Lebih Baik*, 12–13.
[111] Hindley, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 174–75.
[112] Törnquist, *Dilemmas of Third World Communism*, 137.
[113] *Suara Tani*, 25 November 1950, 40.
[114] Hindley, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 180.
[115] Komisi Pemilihan Umum, "Pemilu 1955."
[116] Hindley, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 218.
[117] Soetoyo, *Fellow Traveller*, 79; D. N. Aidit, *Konfrontasi Peristiwa Madiun 1948–Peristiwa Sumatera 1956* (Jakarta: Jajasan Pembaruan, 1964), 23.
[118] D. N. Aidit, *Kibarkan Tinggi Pandji Revolusi* (Jakarta: Jajasan Pembaruan, 1964), 16.
[119] Aidit, *Kibarkan Tinggi Pandji Revolusi*, 34–35.

The combination of rural and urban work that this formula describes was already visible in the 1955 campaign.

Electoral committees were established in mid-May 1954 at every level down to the sub-district, and committees already existed in many villages. Lekra, founded on 17 August 1950, designed banners and posters and provided entertainment to draw crowds.[120] Folk theatre forms such as *ludruk* and *ketoprak* served as vehicles of propaganda.[121] By November 1954 more than a quarter of a million copies of the election manifesto had been printed in Indonesian, Javanese, Sundanese, Batak and Arabic. Local party organizations drafted their own programmes for each constituency. The hammer and sickle appeared on posters, banners, kites and billboards.[122] In Solo party symbols were pasted on walls, drains and bridges, prompting rules limiting emblems to one square metre and banning them from places of worship and government buildings.[123] *Suara Merdeka* noted that villagers, afraid to stay away from any party's meeting, attended them all, to the confusion of illiterate peasants. In Semarang, Pemuda Rakjat offered to help the authorities keep election security.[124]

The scale of the campaign is visible in local reporting, summarized in the table below. Because these figures come largely from *Harian Rakjat*, they are best read as the party's own record of mobilization.

Table 2. Selected PKI campaign activities in Central Java reported in the press, January–July 1955

Date of report	Place	Activity and reported attendance	Source
25 Jan. 1955	Karangpucung, Sidareja	BTI cadre course on organization, agrarian questions and elections	*Harian Rakjat*, 25 January 1955
1 Feb. 1955	Pemalang	Subsecom lecture on the PKI election manifesto, 300–400 attendees; Gerwani kindergarten opened	*Harian Rakjat*, 1 February 1955
19–21 Feb. 1955	Magelang; Klampok, Purwokerto	Gerwani three-month cadre course; lectures at the Klampok ketoprak hall; literacy campaign	*Harian Rakjat*, 19 and 21 February 1955
4 Mar. 1955	Semarang kampungs	Lectures in Brondongan, Batik Gedong, Pederesan, Bugangan; 114 people apply for membership	*Harian Rakjat*, 4 March 1955

[120] Hindley, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 184, 220.

[121] Yahaya Ismail, *Pertumbuhan, Perkembangan dan Kejatuhan Lekra di Indonesia* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1972), 4, 39.

[122] Hindley, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 220.

[123] *Suara Merdeka* (Semarang), 12 June 1955; *Harian Rakjat*, 9 March 1955; *Harian Rakjat*, 11 May 1955.

[124] *Suara Merdeka*, 12 June 1955.

2 Apr. 1955	Brebes	Lecture attended by about 2,000 Muslims	*Harian Rakjat*, 2 April 1955
27–28 Apr. 1955	Wonogiri; Kudus; Blora	Rallies of about 7,000 (Giriwojo), over 50,000 (Kudus) and about 60,000 (Blora)	*Harian Rakjat*, 27 and 28 April 1955
30 Apr.–5 May 1955	Pemalang; Tegal	Lecture of 2,500 and rally of 20,000 (Pemalang); rally of 10,000 with Lekra performance (Tegal)	*Harian Rakjat*, 30 April and 5 May 1955
4 June 1955	Salatiga; Magelang	Rally reported at about 155,000; dance performances reported at about 100,000	*Harian Rakjat*, 4 June 1955
13 June 1955	Wonosobo; Kendal; Sukoharjo; Cilacap	"Rapat Samudera" of about 40,000, 35,000, 80,000 and 60,000	*Harian Rakjat*, 13 June 1955
22 June 1955	Wonogiri; Cilacap	Folk festivals (about 75,000 at Wonogiri square); BTI cadre training for 34, 37 and 66 sub-branches in Cilacap, Sidareja and Kroya	*Harian Rakjat*, 22 June 1955

Alongside the mass rallies, the campaign relied on patient organizational work. SARBUKSI in Kendal trained new cadres, and its Purwodadi branch introduced union members standing on the PKI list as non-party candidates. The SBG branch at Sumberharjo held courses on elections, organization and socio-economic questions.[125] Village competitions in marching under the hammer and sickle, practising the vote for its symbol, speech-making, yard-cleaning, rat and snail extermination and latrine building fused civic improvement with partisanship.[126] Festivals lasting several nights opened with short speeches and gave political colouring to entertainment.[127]

Inclusion of non-party figures widened the appeal. In a letter of 12 July 1954 to Ki Hadjar Dewantara, the PKI explained that its list would include "the names of people who do not belong to a party, who agree with the PKI's Election Manifesto and are willing to stand on one list together with PKI members."[128] Of the fifty-seven candidates the party fielded for parliament in Central Java, the leading names combined the national leadership (Aidit, Lukman and Sakirman), the provincial committee (Siswojo, Dahono and Rewang), the SOBSI general secretary Njono, the SARBUPRI and Gerwani leaderships, and non-party figures such as Dr. A. Tjokronegoro of the BTI and Suharti Suwarto of Gerwani.[129] In the villages, Ricklefs notes, the PKI was often led by teachers, village heads, middle and rich peasants and even some landlords, who brought whole communities or groups of followers into the

[125] *Harian Rakjat*, 1 February 1955; *Harian Rakjat*, 8 March 1955; *Harian Rakjat*, 11 March 1955.

[126] *Harian Rakjat*, 22 June 1955.

[127] Hindley, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 221.

[128] Letter from the Central Committee of the PKI to Ki Hadjar Dewantara, 12 July 1954, consulted in digital reproduction.

[129] *Harian Rakjat*, 1 March 1955.

party; these communities were almost entirely *abangan*, while rural *santri* largely supported NU.[130] The PKI also reached a non-aggression understanding with PSII in Central Java. Nationally, the PKI, NU and PNI refrained from attacking one another in Java and concentrated their fire on Masyumi.[131] Masyumi's attacks were sharp. Its pamphlet *Waspadalah Menghadapi Pemilihan Umum* recounted the PKI's past and future "evil plans," and one Masyumi broadcast declared that Muslims who did not vote for Masyumi violated God's command.[132] *Harian Rakjat* was distributed free and replied by accusing Masyumi of collaboration with the Japanese and the Dutch.[133] Its circulation rose from 15,000 in February 1954 to 55,000 in January 1956, the largest of any party paper. The PKI was also the wealthiest contestant, drawing on members' dues, fund drives and, Ricklefs suggests, much from the Chinese business community.[134] Its newspaper set out a list of promises addressed to workers, peasants, soldiers and civil servants, intellectuals, youth, students, artists, women, religious believers, small and national entrepreneurs and fishermen, together with calls to defeat the "anti-democratic" Masyumi–PSI.[135]

On election day, voting in Central Java took place simultaneously in 8,919 villages, with 10,103,973 voters served by 562 polling committees at 16,617 polling stations.[136] PKI workers visited each voter to urge registration, explained procedures and maintained contact afterwards. Hindley judged the party's machine to be more extensive, efficient and personal than its rivals'. He added that personal contact counted for far more among Indonesian voters without traditional political orientations than campaigns do among committed Western electorates.[137]

Table 3. PKI results in the 1955 general election

Level	Votes	Share	Seats / rank
National, parliament (DPR)	6,179,914	16.36%	39 seats; fourth
National, Constituent Assembly	6,232,512	16.47%	80 seats; fourth
Central Java, parliament	2,326,108	25.8%	Second after PNI; largest provincial PKI vote

Within the Central Java constituency, which in 1955 also included Yogyakarta, the PKI's strength was uneven. It dominated Klaten, where it polled 204,296 votes

[130] M. C. Ricklefs, *Sejarah Indonesia Modern 1200–2004*, trans. Satrio Wahono et al. (Jakarta: Serambi Ilmu Semesta, 2007), 493.

[131] *Suara Merdeka*, 13 June 1955; Ricklefs, *Sejarah Indonesia Modern*, 493.

[132] Samsuri, *Politik Islam Anti Komunis: Pergumulan Masyumi dan PKI di Arena Demokrasi Liberal* (Yogyakarta: Safiria Insania Press, 2004), 78; *Harian Rakjat*, 20 April 1955.

[133] Herbert Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia* (Jakarta: Equinox Publishing, 2007), 427.

[134] Ricklefs, *Sejarah Indonesia Modern*, 493.

[135] *Harian Rakjat*, 28 September 1955, as reproduced in an online transcription (aku.blogspot.com).

[136] *Harian Rakjat*, 16 July 1955.

[137] Hindley, *Communist Party of Indonesia*, 221–22.

against the PNI's 100,190, and it led in Boyolali, Grobogan, the regency of Semarang, Wonogiri, Cilacap, Sukoharjo, Gunungkidul, Temanggung and the cities of Surakarta, Yogyakarta and Semarang. It trailed the PNI and NU in Pekalongan, Banyumas, Pemalang, Purworejo and Banjarnegara, and trailed NU in *santri* strongholds such as Magelang, Kudus, Jepara and Demak.[138]

Discussion

The evidence supports the argument that the PKI's revival in Central Java was neither a spontaneous expression of poverty nor the work of organization alone. It was the result of a staged process whose elements reinforced one another. Tilly's model clarifies why. Grievances were abundant in Central Java: unequal landholding, sharecropping levies of half the harvest, rice shortages, illegal pawnshops, unpaid allowances and denied maternity leave. Grievances, however, do not mobilize themselves. Mobilization depends on the resources a group controls and the likelihood of their delivery, and the determining variable is organization.[139] Between 1951 and 1955 the PKI accumulated exactly such resources: a hierarchy of committees reaching from Provcom to resort, a press that grew from a few thousand copies to tens of thousands, a training system that produced cadres from below, and mass organizations, SOBSI, BTI, Gerwani, Pemuda Rakjat and Lekra, that brought the party into factories, villages, households and leisure. Tilly suggests that mobilization can be gauged through indicators such as union membership and through a group's prior experience of collective action.[140] By both measures the PKI's labour base was strong. SARBUPRI multiplied tenfold, and Central Java's dispute and strike figures reveal a working class already practised in collective action. The memory of Delanggu shows that this experience predated Madiun and could be reactivated.

The concepts of catness and netness explain why the strategy succeeded among some groups and failed among others. Framing supplied catness. By naming landlords, moneylenders, *ijon* buyers, bureaucratic capitalists and foreign firms as a common enemy, and peasants and workers as a common victim, the party press turned scattered experiences into a shared categorical identity of the oppressed *rakjat*. The *abangan* village supplied netness: the dense ties of a communal society along which influence travelled once respected figures joined. Ricklefs's observation that in many villages the PKI was led by teachers, village heads and middle or even rich peasants who brought their followers with them shows that the party mobilized existing networks rather than creating new ones.[141] Among the *santri*, by contrast, a rival catness, Islamic identity, and rival networks of *pesantren*, *ulama* and NU or Masyumi branches blocked penetration. The district results confirm this pattern. The PKI won where *abangan* peasants and urban workers were concentrated, as in Klaten, Boyolali, Sukoharjo, Wonogiri and the cities, and lost where religious networks were dense, as in Kudus, Demak and Jepara. Even the reported rally of "over 50,000" in

[138] Badan Kesatuan Bangsa dan Politik Kabupaten Cilacap, "Hasil Pemilihan Umum 1955."
[139] Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 54–57.
[140] Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, 80.
[141] Ricklefs, *Sejarah Indonesia Modern*, 493.

Kudus did not translate into victory there, a reminder that crowds measured mobilization claims rather than loyalties.

The polity model illuminates the political side of recovery. In 1948 the PKI had acted as a challenger resorting to armed force and had suffered the full weight of state coercion. After 1950 the party pursued a different trajectory: it accepted legality, entered parliament, cultivated the PNI, and accepted the role of junior partner in a nationalist-led coalition in exchange for protection.[142] In Tilly's terms, it moved from challenger toward member of the polity, gaining routine, low-cost access to political resources, and it formed a coalition that lowered the costs of organizing. The non-aggression arrangements with the PNI, NU and PSII during the campaign extended this logic. The change was strategic rather than doctrinal. Party texts continued to speak of revolution, class enemies and the leadership of the working class, but practice became gradualist, constitutional and service-oriented.

This interpretation also clarifies continuity and change in the PKI's history in Central Java. Continuity lay in geography and constituency. Semarang and Surakarta, cradles of the ISDV, VSTP and Sarekat Islam radicalism of the 1910s and 1920s, again became centres of communist strength, and labour on the railways, ports, estates and oil fields remained the party's urban core. Change lay in method. The confrontational vanguardism of 1926 and 1948 gave way to a mass party that recruited broadly, educated systematically, worked through cultural forms familiar to the *abangan* and deferred direct class conflict in the villages. The Aidit leadership's insistence on a mass character, against the Alimin–Tan preference for a small elite party, was the decisive turning point.

These findings refine the existing historiography. Hindley and Van der Kroef described the PKI's national machinery and tactical flexibility. This study shows how that machinery operated on the ground in one province, through cadre courses at Karangpucung, kindergartens at Pemalang, literacy work at Klampok and strike mediation in Solo. Törnquist's argument that communists entered a vertically stratified village society under nationalist protection is borne out by the Central Javanese evidence. That evidence also indicates that vertical penetration was the condition of the party's electoral success, not merely a weakness. The analysis also qualifies regional studies that concentrate on one constituency. Bari's emphasis on peasants and Nugroho's on Gerwani each capture part of a system whose effectiveness lay in the interlocking of labour, peasant, women's, youth and cultural organizations. Finally, the study shows the value of reading polarized narratives against one another. The PKI's *Buku Putih* and the anti-communist accounts of the armed forces and NU disagree about Madiun. Both, however, confirm the depth of the party's defeat in 1948 and therefore the scale of its recovery.

The limits of the strategy are equally evident. Hindley's judgement that peasant support went no further than membership and votes indicates that electoral support did not equal revolutionary commitment. The deferral of anti-landlord action until after 1955, the dependence on nationalist patrons, and the failure among the *santri* meant that the PKI's mass base in Central Java was broad but shallow. It was also cast

[142] Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism under Soekarno*, 198.

in the mould of *aliran* politics, which sharpened social cleavages by politicizing them. The framing that made the party attractive to *abangan* villagers, including Lekra's mockery of *haji* landlords, deepened the hostility of the *santri* community.[143] The success of 1955 thus contained the tensions that later contributed to the party's destruction, although tracing that outcome lies beyond the scope of this article.

Conclusion

This article set out to explain the social and political conditions that shaped the PKI's revival in Central Java between 1948 and 1952 and the strategies by which the party built a mass base culminating in the 1955 election. After Madiun the PKI was leaderless, stigmatized and organizationally shattered, but Central Java offered it fertile ground. It was a densely populated agrarian province marked by unequal landholding, rural poverty, a vulnerable urban working class and a large *abangan* population without doctrinal objections to communism. Reorganization under Aidit from January 1951 transformed the party from a small cadre organization into a mass party committed to legality, parliamentary participation and a national front.

The party then built its base in four stages. It identified the *abangan* peasantry and urban workers as its natural constituency and avoided costly confrontation with *santri* and *priyayi*. It framed poverty, low wages, high taxes and unequal landholding as collective class injustice through *Harian Rakjat*, *Bintang Merah* and the wider press. It mobilized workers through SOBSI and peasants through BTI by offering concrete services and leadership in strikes and agrarian demands. Finally, it converted this organized constituency into votes through a campaign that fused mass rallies, folk culture, cadre training, personal canvassing and the inclusion of non-party figures. The result was 2,326,108 votes in Central Java, the party's largest provincial total and second place in the province behind the PNI.

The study contributes a provincial reconstruction of PKI mass-building that links post-Madiun reorganization to electoral results. It shows that the party's success lay in the convergence of adaptive strategy with a receptive social structure. Its novelty lies in treating this recovery as a single, staged mobilization process, explained through organization, shared identity and network density, rather than through national leadership politics alone. The same analysis also reveals the boundaries of that success: a broad but shallow base, bounded by *santri* networks and dependent on nationalist protection.

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