

## **Muslim Political Elite and the Revival of the Left in Indonesian Politics (1996-2001)**

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**Abstract:** Based upon elite interviews, document analysis and library research, this study analyses the responses of the Indonesian Muslim political elite to the phenomena of the emergence of the alleged communist Partai Rakyat Demokratik (People's Democratic Party) and the flourishing of the Leftist books in Indonesia during 1996-2001 which is one of the most critical historical phases in Indonesian politics that witnessed significant political changes affecting the life of Indonesians in general and Muslims in particular. The adverse responses of most Muslim political elite to the revival of the Left are basically driven by the interweaving of theological, historical and political factors as well as traumatic historical experience. With the passage of time, there have been significant changes, and strained relations between Islamic political groups and the Leftists have thawed but not eliminated.

The collapse of Soeharto's New Order regime on May 21, 1998 has given rise to two interesting political phenomena in Indonesian politics: the reemergence of political ideologies, especially Marxism and Communism that have been suppressed during the New Order era; and the rise of Muslim political elite in the new power structure of Indonesia. This study examines the responses of the Indonesian Muslim "political elite" to the phenomenon of the Leftist revival in Indonesian politics from 1996 to 2001. In particular, this study analyzes two central issues in present day Indonesian politics: the responses of the Muslim political elite, first, to the issue of Communism as reflected in the ideas and activities of the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (Indonesian Communist Party, PKI) and the

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*Partai Rakyat Demokratik* (People's Democratic Party, PRD) and, second, to the publishing of the "Leftist" books during the presidency of Abdurrahman Wahid known as Gus Dur (1998-2001).

### **Revival of the Left: The Emergence of PRD**

Shortly before the fall of the Soeharto regime, the phenomenon of the revival of the Left had become apparent which is reflected par excellence in the birth of the PRD by student activists in 1996. PRD is basically a manifestation of youth rising up against the authoritarian political system of Soeharto's New Order. PRD entered the determining moment of history after the outbreak of the "Black Saturday, July 27, 1996" incident in Jakarta. Soeharto's New Order government along with its ruling military apparatus accused PRD of masterminding large scale urban riots which took many lives and caused heavy material losses.<sup>1</sup>

The New Order government pointed the finger at PRD as a "communist wing" that mobilized masses to acts of vandalism and confrontation against the state apparatus to discredit and topple the government.<sup>2</sup> In the eyes of the ruling elite, this organization was communist and dangerous and must, therefore, be abolished.

Is PRD a communist organization as accused by the political elite and the New Order military? PRD leaders claim themselves as leftists who follow the principle of people's democratic socialism not communism. That the PRD's ideology is Leftist was admitted by its leading figure, Budiman Sudjatmiko, but by Leftist ideology, he meant the ideology of people's democratic socialism.<sup>3</sup>

As a Leftist party, PRD hopes that the management of economy and natural resources should be directed towards independence and the common people's economic bases, so that it is not dependent on *Penanaman Modal Asing* (Foreign Capital Investment, PMA), and people will have a better bargaining position when dealing with the power of international capital. PRD claims that it will be able to distribute the wealth collected by the New Order and its cronies and conglomerates and solve the problem of employment. The political platform of PRD suggests that it promotes democratization and aims at the elimination of authoritarianism and reduction of the military's role in the government and politics of the society.<sup>4</sup>

Budiman Sudjatmiko denies that PRD is a continuation of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) despite the similarity in their organizational structure. There are many political parties, he argues, bearing resemblance to the organizational structure of PKI including Golongan Karya (Functional Group, GOLKAR), Partai Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian Nationalist Party, PNI), and Partai Amanat Nasional (National Mandatory Party, PAN). Even Nahdatul Ulama (The Awakening of Ulama, NU) which is considered to be Islamic has farmers, workers, and students' wings like PKI.<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, political observer, Olle Tornquist, refutes the allegation that the PRD was communist.<sup>6</sup> He gives seven reasons to buttress his argument. First, PRD has no capability to establish a massive and strong mass movement which is sustainable as Indian communists have been able to do. The PRD has just established cadres' solidarity to mobilize farmers and workers. Second, PRD cadres may adopt one of the guidelines of struggle by Lenin, among others, which is left radicalism. But Lenin himself was of the opinion that left radicalism is an infantile disease which must be avoided by communists. Therefore, the adoption of left radicalism cannot be used as evidence that PRD is communist. Third, the "people's power" movement of PRD is significantly different from the one in the Philippines which was organized by communists. The Philippines' communists adopt Maoism which rejects any kind of collaboration or alliance with pro-democratic movements, while PRD is keen to collaborate with all pro-democratic movements.

Fourth, while it is true that the PRD is a cadre-based organization, it does not imply that this left wing party is communist. Many opposition organizations against authoritarian regimes are cadre-based. Fifth, in launching its fight against the ruling regime, communists launch underground actions or secret conspiracies and tend to be withdrawn from the existing political systems. Sixth, the PRD is still a small party and it does not yet have a strong mass base, so it focuses on developing a strong organization first. Lastly, PRD activists seem to cooperate with pro-democratic movements which are different from the old style Communism adopted by China and Eastern European countries.

The argument refuting the PRD being communist, according to Tornquist, is supported by retired generals who have assumed the

role of political analysts. Nevertheless, the accusation serves the political purpose of curbing radical political opposition to the New Order government. However, the impression that the PRD is communist or Neo-PKI has emerged not merely because of such stigmatization by the New Order regime, but also by the way PRD had expressed its ideology in the Manifesto which was unveiled on July 22, 1996, five days before the tragedy of Black Saturday.

“Manifesto” is a neutral term and it does not have any relation with left wing or right wing ideologies. But in political studies, especially related to the history of Marxism and Communism, the term “manifesto” reflects a “left” nuance. “Manifesto” reminds those who study Marxism of an influential and popular pamphlet written by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, which was published in London in 1848. The PRD uses the term “manifesto” to name the most important document it has published. If one reads the content of the PRD Manifesto, it would appear as if it subscribes to the left paradigm. The historical materialism approach, historical dialectics, class conflict and the political jargons used in the Manifesto clearly indicate that the PRD document adopts the ideology of radical Marxism, Leninism, and to a certain extent, Social Democratic paradigm.

### **Flourishing of the Leftist Literature**

The second discernible phenomenon of the “Leftist” revival in the post-Soeharto’s period was the flourishing of Marxist and other “Leftist” literature. The books that have been published were varied and large in number. Works by, and studies of, Marxist thinkers and political activists, ranging from those of classical to the contemporary, have also been translated. Much else have become available including the works by and studies of ex-PKI chairmen such as Aidit, Sudisman, Subandrio, Colonel Latief, Oei Tju Tat, Hasan Raid, and Colonel Untung.<sup>7</sup> In addition, works of the “Leftist” literary community such as those of Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Sitor Situmorang, Semaun, and many others flooded the market. The number of books published is hard to estimate because no precise survey has been conducted on this issue.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the number of the “Leftist” books published during the period of 1998-2001 far exceeded those published in the previous 30 years.

The “Leftist” books published during the 1998-2001 period fall into three categories. The first are the translations of the works of Karl Marx, Engels, Lenin, Plekhanov, Stalin and Mao Ze Dong, to name a few. These works are the primary sources of Marxism or Scientific Socialism. The works of Marx or related subjects, more than those of the others, received great attention from the progressive “Leftist” ideologically oriented publishers such as Hasta Mitra, LKiS and Teplok. The works explain almost the entire theoretical and philosophical bases of Marxism and scientific Socialism, the history of Marxism, and Marxist strategy for destroying the Capitalist class through the social revolution. Marx’s *Manuskrip Ekonomi dan Filsafat 1844* (Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844) published by Hasta Mitra in 2001, consisted of Marx’s theories of “estrangement of labour” and alienation of the labourer and was written by the Young Marx when he was 31 years old.<sup>9</sup> Translations of Marx’s *Revolusi Kontra Revolusi* (Revolution and Contra Revolution) and *Tesis Tentang Feurbach* (Thesis on Feurbach) were also published in the post-New Order era. The former is Marx’s collection of articles in the *New York Times* (1851-1852) analyzing numerous revolutionary movements in European states, while the latter is Marx’s brief critical comments on Feurbach’s philosophical thoughts. Other writings and translations of Marx’s *The Capital* and *The Communist Manifesto* have also been published during the same period.

The second category includes the books on the theme of the Left, Marxism and Communism written by Marxist or non-Marxist social scientists, intellectuals and historians. Included in these types of books are works of David Smith, Phil Evans, *Das Kapital untuk Pemula* (Das Capital for Beginners) and Anthony Brewer’s, *Das Kapital Pengantar Memahami Karya Marx Das Kapital* (Das Kapital, An Introduction to Understanding Marx’s *Das Kapital*).

In the third category are the books of ex-PKI activists. Most of the publications under this category are memoirs such as the autobiographies of Hassan Raid, Subandrio, Heru Atmojo, Colonel (Retired) Latief, Sudisman, Sulami and others. The common feature of the books of this type is the exposition of the mass killings of 1965-1967, the cold blooded military rule under Soeharto’s New Order, the political agony of the Communists following the abortive

coup of September 30, 1965, trials, imprisonment and personal “heroic” experiences of the writers. Almost all of the writers condemned Soeharto and his regime as an oppressive military-authoritarian government, inhuman and ruthless. They condemned Soeharto as the mastermind of the mass killings of the Communists and their sympathizers during the period of 1965-1967.

### **Responses of Muslim Political Elites to the Emergence of PRD**

The alleged revival of the left has drawn responses from the Muslim elites. Amien Rais, for example, identifies the indication of a Communist revival by connecting it with the emergence of the leftist-related terms in the Indonesian community after the fall of the New Order. Amien calls jargons such as *ganyang setan kota* (crush urban devils), *ganyang setan desa* (crush rural devils), *ganyang kaum borjuis* (crush the bourgeois), *ganyang kaum kapitalis* (crush the capitalists), and other words as typical PKI jargons in the past that have re-emerged in the post New Order era.<sup>10</sup> So is the term “People’s Committee” which, according to Amien, is a typical PKI terminology. Amien argues that the Leftist terminology is not just at the discourse level but also implemented through actions in the field applied in the reality of Indonesian politics. To Amien, Leftist actions are dangerous because if the People’s Committee concept is applied, it would degrade the general election and people would be urged to disrespect the democratic process and political parties would no longer be required.<sup>11</sup>

The effort to revive Sukarno’s National-Religions-Communism (NASAKOM) ideology, which has long since been dead along with the fall of the Old Order and Sukarno’s fall from power in 1966, according to Amien, is another sign of the re-emergence of communist cadres in the post New Order Indonesian politics. Amien states that reviving NASAKOM is dangerous and has to be avoided since it was the NASAKOM idea that initiated the Gestap PKI 1965 coup (September 30, 1965 PKI coup) that resulted in the biggest human tragedy in Indonesia’s post-independence history. He cautions against the destructive character of Communism and PKI. He further maintains that the destruction of PKI in the past and the collapse of Soviet Union do not automatically mean that Communism in Indonesia has been destroyed. Communism might still exist since

Indonesia's social and economic conditions are still congenial for planting Marxist-Leninist ideologies.

Hussein Umar and Z.A. Maulani share Rais' view on the danger of Communism.<sup>12</sup> Hussein sees the potential of Communist revival as relatively large. According to Hussein, millions of communist cadres (PKI) in the 1960s were not successfully eliminated after the G30S PKI tragedy in 1965. Some of them – mainly youths – that were sent to study abroad by Aidit especially to Russia, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and other Eastern European Communist countries were spared from the efforts to annihilate communism.<sup>13</sup> Many of them are still alive and retain a commitment to Communism and PKI.

Hussein observes that during the post-Soeharto era, there has been a revival of Leftist forces especially those with Marxist and Leninist lines of thinking. The re-emerging communists do not appear in communist uniform but by wearing other “uniforms” like democratic socialists. Also, “it is not impossible to wear Jesuit clothes on behalf of Liberation Theology.”<sup>14</sup> They infiltrate various sectors of community life such as the bureaucracy, political parties, military and others. The infiltration method, Hussein argues, is the specialty of the communists. He reminds the public of the infiltration of PKI into the Indonesian Air Force and the Army in the past that caused Chief Air Marshal Oemar Dhani (the Chief of Air force) and Lt. Col. Untung as well as Colonel Lathief to be successfully influenced by the communists and became PKI supporters. The communists also managed to infiltrate the navy, police, labour movement, farmers, fishermen, university students and even school teachers. Everything became “red.”<sup>15</sup> The communists did the same thing to political parties as in the case of the Indonesia National Party (PNI). The influence of communist infiltration was felt with the breaking up of PNI into PNI Osa Maliki and PNI Ali Surachman. The communists were also successful in ideologically infiltrating Marhaenism which was the ideology of the PNI, and under their influence, Marhaenism turned into “Marxism applied to Indonesia's soil.”<sup>16</sup>

Communism's revival, according to Hussein, is also made possible by the number of PKI cadres who are still active. He suspects that the act to crush the Communists after the PKI rebellion on September 30, 1965 was not successful in eliminating leftist forces. Some of

the radical left activists managed to go into hiding or went abroad. Besides this, there were also young cadres who at the time of PKI elimination were studying in communist countries like Eastern Europe, Russia and Romania. They have become doctors, engineers and scientists. Finding out that the Left had been eliminated, they did not return to Indonesia. According to Hussein, they were never captured, and now are infiltrating several sectors of community life.<sup>17</sup> On the bases of these evidences, Hussein argued that the communist (PKI) revival is real, and not just a reflection of unfounded political paranoia. Consequently, Hussein, who is a chairman of Islamic Da'wah Council of Indonesia (Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia, DDII), felt compelled to cooperate with other Islamic mass organizations in order to block the development of Marxist-Leninist schools in Indonesia.<sup>18</sup> DDII carried out several activities through various means to arrest the communist revival.<sup>19</sup>

To Maulani, the revival of Communism in Indonesia is not something that is impossible since he believes that the ideology will flourish in a country where the supremacy of law does not work and the level of poverty is high. Maulani gives a historical illustration that at present Indonesia is similar to European countries at the end of the nineteenth century. At that time Communism flourished in those European countries due to widespread poverty. Indonesia at present is a poor country with a level of poverty that has reached up to 48 percent. "Poverty," Maulani said, "is the main force in the development of a socialist movement."<sup>20</sup>

Dawam Rahardjo maintained that the views of PRD leaders are similar to the PKI's.<sup>21</sup> This left group is still like an embryo. Dawam personifies it as *wij* (*biji*, seed); if given freedom in the democratic system, it would grow into a political force like PKI in the past. Dawam maintains that at a glance it seems to be similar to Karl Marx's Communist manifesto. This can be seen from its analytical framework and historical materialism approach. The language used by PRD is so explosive and inflammatory that it gives an unscientific impression. However, according to Dawam, this makes the document special. Reading the document "will arouse the fighting spirit" unlike a scientific writing that will lead to measured actions.

Dawam analyzes other PRD documents, and forms the opinion, that such documents have been written not just by the communists



but also by Islamic groups. Similar documents were also published by Mao Ze Dong, leader of the Chinese communists, and also the PKI figures in the past. PKI created the document as the means to understand and apply Marxism-Leninism to fit the specific social environment of the Indonesian society.

As a Muslim intellectual fully conversant with Marxist literature, Dawam examined the PRD documents and, as he admitted, was taken aback with the first chapter of the Manifesto: “Indonesia in the World Capitalist System.”<sup>22</sup> In the beginning, he thought the writers of the PRD Manifesto, spirited youths, have read and referred to Andre Gunder Frank or Immanuel Wallerstein’s theory on the “World Capitalist System.” Apparently, according to Dawam, they have not, since “the concept only refers to the old PKI document, and to Lenin’s concept. This can be seen in the phrase, for example, ‘National Independence Struggle’ – a Marxist-Leninist concept that was applied to colonized nations.”<sup>23</sup>

According to Dawam, Marxist trends in the “PRD Manifesto” can also be seen through the document’s evaluation of the “national awakening movement.” In this section, they praise the emergence of labour union that was organised by Marxist-Communist groups as the pioneers of the Indonesia’s “national awakening movement.” The workers’ pioneering acts against the Dutch were inspired by class consciousness as a result of Dutch imperialism. In evaluating the New Order history, the Manifesto mentions that the New Order has delivered “*soko guru revolusi*” (the pillar of revolution) or the initiators of class struggle such as the working class, farmers, students, progressive intellectuals, artists, and the poor urban community. For Dawam, the birth of the labour class in that period (early twentieth century) when Indonesia was still an agricultural community was a strategic mistake by the PKI. In academic terms, this summary is a sweeping generalization in nature and lacks theoretical argument. This also applies to the PRD’s evaluation of the New Order. Apart from that, the Manifesto contains other weaknesses, such as the neglect of significant changes and developments that were successfully made by the New Order. In addition to the critique, Dawam admits that the PRD Manifesto has pictured negatively the realities of the New Order period such as the blooming of monopolies, oligopolies, corruption, nepotism, low labour wages,

displaced farmers, imperialistic ideas such as AFTA and APEC, and repressive military actions.

The lack of a balanced analysis in the evaluation of Indonesia's history of national awakening, the tendency to highly regard the Marxist-Communist group, and affirmation of the development achieved by the New Order makes the PRD Manifesto unscientific. This is also because lately radical Marxists have tended to "go back to Orthodox Marxist ideas."<sup>24</sup> Dawam seems to regret that in order to achieve their vision of the establishment of a "people's democratic system," the PRD has to use undemocratic means such as mass action which in fact is a form of extra-parliamentary democracy. This kind of action causes violence, and depends on physical strength, not rationale, which in the end would halt the process of democratisation and victimize people.

According to Abdul Qodir Jaelani, as an ideology, communism will never die in Indonesia, since Marxist-Leninist cadres have kept their belief although PKI has long been abolished. Jaelani states that Marxism still has two sources of latent strength. The first is the Marxist-Leninist cadres (communists). They are militant cadres and work underground and actively seek to infiltrate military and civil government organs, political parties, and mass organizations.<sup>25</sup> There are senior Marxist radicals and also youth Marxist cadres who join the PRD. According to Jaelani, these young communist cadres are generally children of ex-PKI members who are under the care of the Protestant/Catholic figures. Therefore, according to Jaelani, PRD cadres are in terms of ideology, communist; in terms of religion, Christian; and historically, they have been communist.<sup>26</sup>

The second is the Catholic Jesuit cadres. They, according to Jaelani, are the Marxist cadres who have been developing the Liberation Theology doctrine in Indonesia since the 1980s. In spreading Marxism in Indonesia, the Catholic Jesuit cadres have the belief that they can learn to adapt Marxism without having to be a communist. According to Jaelani, the Liberation Theology figures are, among others, Catholic Jesuit priests such as Romo Mangun Wijaya, Magnis Suseno, Muji Sutrisno, and Sandiawan Sj. These figures actively spread Marxism to university students. Most of those who have been recruited to the Marxist cause are not Catholic students but Muslim youths.<sup>27</sup>

Jaelani further maintains that these Marxist-Leninist cadres have strong social bases on campuses such as Atmajaya Catholic University, Tri Sakti University, and various non-governmental organizations.<sup>28</sup> They also have network ties with international Marxist forces in the Western countries especially the United States, Netherlands, and Australia. These radical Left cadres, who cooperate with international Marxist forces, are the ones who, according to Jaelani, successfully toppled Jusuf Baharuddin Habibie's government in 1999.<sup>29</sup>

The reemerging Communists, according to Jaelani, are only one of the Marxist factions. Besides them, other Marxists, not communists, have also lately shown signs of revival such as the Marhaenists and the Murbaists. The Marhaenists joined the Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDIP) led by Megawati Sukarnoputri. New Order figures such as Sarwono Kusumaatmaja, Siswono Yudhohusodo and Ginandjar Kartasmita are amongst the Marhaenists cadres. The Murbaist cadres, according to Jaelani, are affiliated to nationalist parties such as Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI). A prominent figure among them is Lt. General Kemal Idris who is the leader of Gerakan Barisan Nasional (Barnas), notorious for political stands against Habibie's government.<sup>30</sup>

A view similar to those of the above Muslim political elites was held by Ahmad Sumargono, Chairman of the Islamic World Solidarity Committee (KISDI) and a member of the Parliament from Islamic Moon and Star Party (PBB).<sup>31</sup> He thinks that the signs of communist revival, which are indicated by the increasing number of riots and communist-style slaughtering, are more evident since the initiation of the Reform movement of the fall of the New Order. Habibie's government policy that released PKI figures who were involved in the September 30, 1965 Movement such as Colonel Latief, Bungkus, Marsudi and seven other communist figures has strengthened the efforts of the communist revival. Sumargono considers the release to symbolize the freedom of PKI and the communists to come back to national political stage. They seem to have been released from the sins of their cruelty in the past. These signs are considered to be serious by Sumargono. However, this is where the political blunders of the New Order in battling Communism for a full three decades lie. To hold on to power, Soeharto always repressed the opposition

accusing them of being members of PKI. This was counter-productive for the anti-communist movement of post Soeharto's regime.<sup>32</sup>

Sumargono believes that the communists are trying to white wash their "dark historical paths" in the past, such as by "straightening out PKI history" as was done by Col. Latief, Bungkus, Subandrio and others. They attempted to build the image that PKI was not guilty in slaughtering the Generals in 1965 and stated that the September Movement was a product of internal conflict in the Army. In order to "erase the historical path" as well, the former PKI political prisoners have also joined human rights and pro-democracy activities. Sumargono assumes that the communist group is small in number, but they have managed to control Indonesian public opinion and are successful in getting public sympathy. This is the factor that, according to Sumargono, makes human rights and pro-democracy movements take the communists' side. With the same reason, they manage to create the image that questioning someone's Communism is undemocratic and violates human rights.<sup>33</sup>

For NU figures like Sholahuddin Wahid, the PRD and communists are not a threat either to Islam or to the nation. The revival of Communism, according to Wahid, should not be viewed as a threat, but a challenge. This means that people must see the recent revival of the leftists as an encouragement to find solutions. The re-emergence of PRD has to be understood as a consequence of widening of the social-economic gaps, or because of the lack of justice, and inconsistent leaders' behaviour. Characterising the revival as a threat to Islam would encourage Muslims to perpetrate destructive actions such as the burning of books by AAK in April 2003.<sup>34</sup>

### **Responses to the Burning of the Leftist Books**

The sudden growth of the Marxist-Communist literature worried the Muslim groups in the so-called *Aliansi Anti-Komunis* (the Anti-Communist Alliance, AAK). They revolted by burning leftist books on April 19, 2001 and issued a warning to sweep all Marxist-Communist literature in the bookshops throughout the country the following days. Of the anti-communist and PKI actions, the burning of the leftist books seems to be the most controversial and most widely-covered by the national media in 2001. It was Naufal Dungio

who initiated the burning,<sup>35</sup> with the entire membership of the AAK agreeing to the burning act. This was followed by the burning of the PKI emblem, the sickle and hammer flag. Franz Magnis Suseno's *Pemikiran Karl Marx, Dari Sosialisme Utopis ke Perselisihan Revisionisme* was one of the Leftist books that were thrown into the bonfire.

The question as to why Suseno's *Pemikiran Karl Marx* was chosen to be burned by the AAK is intriguing. Interviews with AAK members revealed the following reasons: first, the book was the easiest one members of the AAK could find in the bookshop nearest to the headquarter of the AAK;<sup>36</sup> second, AAK had no money to buy the more expensive books than that of Suseno; and third, the AAK members suspected that the author of the book is a Catholic priest who supports the Theology of Liberation. To AAK members, the Theology of Liberation is a political movement with strong Marxist-Communist ideological leanings, the Marxist-Communist books have distorted the "historical truth," manipulated historical facts of Indonesian history, and as Suaib Didu commented, "poisoned the young Indonesian generation."<sup>37</sup>

However, the more substantial reason for AAK to burn Suseno's books, according to Alfian Tanjung, is the ignorance of the members of the AAK of what the Left, Marxism and Communism mean.<sup>38</sup> They also did not really comprehend the differences in the nature of Marxism and Communism. They did not understand the basic ideas of these "isms" and they had no clear vision on what kinds of actions should be carried out in regard to the issue of the revival of the "Left," Communism and the PKI.<sup>39</sup> The burning of Suseno's book was, in fact, Tanjung said, a wrong decision and reflects the AAK's misperception and ignorance of the differences between Marxism and Communism.

The burning of the "Leftist" books, as discussed above, was simply a beginning since it was to be followed by other more serious actions, a plan to sweep the "Leftist" books wherever the AAK members could find them. One point is obvious, however, that the burning of the books and the perceived threat of "sweeping" the "Leftist" books by the AAK had sparked controversy and polemics within Indonesian society, which at the end, discredited the AAK as a whole. Generally, the action of the AAK in anticipating the issue of

Communist revival was due to their anxiety with regard to the “danger of Communism.” To the AAK activists, namely, Alfian Tanjung and Suaib Didu, the revival of the Communists and their ideology in the post-Soeharto era, especially during the presidency of Abdurrahman Wahid, was real and extremely dangerous. The Communists, both believed, had formed national networks by infiltrating the social, political, cultural and economic activities of the people. They also argued that the Communists influenced the labour and peasant movements and trained young people, university students in particular, as Communist cadres. Both Tanjung and Didu agreed that the training included both military instructions and intelligence gathering. This appears, for instance, to have been done in Sawangan, West Java.<sup>40</sup> They felt that a strong and deadly attack should have been undertaken before the Communists became stronger and more powerful.

The burning of the books gave rise to vigorous debates and discussions among intellectuals, academics, politicians and cultural activists. Some agreed with the ideas and actions taken against the Communists and the “Leftists,” including the burning of the “Leftist” books by the AAK members. Others agreed with the basic ideas of combating Communism and the “Leftists,” but preferred peaceful, democratic and non-violent means. The burning of the books by the AAK was not in accordance with peaceful and democratic ways of fighting Communism. The best action for combating Communism is through intellectual discourses. Some did not agree with the ideas and actions of combating Communists and Communism as they felt that any restrictions on freedom of thought would violate human rights and democratic principles. They believed that the “*Reformasi era*” necessitates resistance to restrictions on the freedom of thought.

Among those who supported the burning of the books was Abdul Qodir Jaelani, a political activist, Muslim preacher and member of the parliament.<sup>41</sup> Jaelani argued that the burning of the books was acceptable and understandable because Communism, by its natural characters tended to crush Islam and the Muslims. This is evidenced, according to Jaelani, by two rebellions and the coup of the PKI in 1948 and 1965, wherein the Muslims became the targets of Communist brutality. Thousands of Muslims, especially the *kyai* (traditional Islamic scholars) and their *santris*, were butchered by

PKI members during the two rebellions. The brutality of the communists was also seen in places like the Soviet Union, China, and Turkmenistan. In these countries, just like in Indonesia, thousands to millions of Muslims were massacred by the Communists.

The effort of writing books that counter Communism was only one way. Jaelani believed that combating Communists by destroying their power would not violate human rights because “if the Communists look at themselves as having upheld human rights, so the Muslims at the same time could also claim that they have human rights too. Moreover, if the Communists have the right to crush the Muslims, so we - the Muslims - have the right to crush them.”<sup>42</sup>

The burning of the Leftist books, Naufal maintains, is a symbol of the opposition against the Communist movement and as a reminder for people at large that the Left (Communists) still exist. Apart from that, they should also be attentive to the struggle for power among the political elite and should be conscious of the crimes of the Communists against Muslims and the nation in the past.<sup>43</sup> To Naufal, history is replete with examples of books that have caused misery to human civilization. He mentioned *Satanic Verses* of Salman Rushdie that has provoked the rage of Muslims all over the world. The book written under the spirit of freedom of expression, according to Naufal, was blasphemous to Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and his family (*ahl al-bayt*) such that Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian revolution, was compelled to issue a death sentence for Salman Rushdie.<sup>44</sup>

History bears witness that a book, Naufal argues, created tensions between Japan and South Korea. The bilateral relations of the two countries were disturbed when the Japanese government published a book on the history of Japan, which did not mention the brutality of the Japanese invaders on South Korea during the World War II. A similar strategy was adopted by the communists in Indonesia. Through the books they produced, the Leftists attempted to erase the communist brutality in 1948 and 1965 from history. Based on these missing “historical facts,” and also in the light of other evidences, Naufal questions those who criticised the burning of the “Leftist” books considering the act as undemocratic, uncivilized and unintelligent.<sup>45</sup> Naufal considers Leftist books as a poison dangerous

for Indonesians. To him, burning the Communist books is not an act of demolishing civilization but one of being defensive. Communism, Naufal asserts, “whatever its manifestation and forms, has to be exterminated from the land of Indonesia.”<sup>46</sup>

Just like other Muslims who were concerned with the re-awakening of the Left, Taufiq Ismail felt worried with the flourishing of Communist influence.<sup>47</sup> He maintains that the communist regimes all over the world are anti-democratic and against human rights. Their claim that communism is in accordance with democratic ideals and human right is, according to Taufiq, totally false. The opposite is true that they are the enemy of democracy and human rights. To masquerade their dirty propaganda and draw sympathy, the communist uses the “mask of democracy.”<sup>48</sup>

With regard to the action of AAK, Taufiq argues that based on the charter of the United Nations Organization (UN), the banning of a book or an idea is legitimate and justified if that book or idea would supposedly harm the existence of a nation. He mentions the case of Nazism and the Nazi Party in the German Federal Republic. In this democratic state, Nazism and the Nazi Party had been formally outlawed by the government since both had jeopardized the nation in the past. Many people had been the victims of Nazism. This is also the case in Indonesia. The ideology of Communism and PKI has to be formally outlawed due to the fact that PKI had assassinated thousands of Indonesians in the two communist rebellions.

Taufiq argues further that burning of books have frequently happened in human history. The most spectacular case of book burning occurred in Granada which saw the destruction of hundreds of thousands of books produced by Muslims during the Golden age of Islamic civilisation. When the Muslim rule was in decline, the Catholics attempted to conquer the country. In doing so, they also destroyed Muslim civilization by crushing the Muslim intellectual heritage. The Catholics destroyed the books by fire.<sup>49</sup> It was also the case in Indonesia during the Old Order (*Orde Lama* in the 1960s) where *Pemuda Rakyat* (People’s Youth), Lekra, Sobsi and other organizations affiliated with PKI burned books in Jakarta. The burnings were carried out twice, once in USIS office and the other on the campus of the University of Indonesia, Salemba Jakarta during the period of 1964-1965.<sup>50</sup> Whatever the reason, the burning of the



books, according to Taufiq, is uncivilized, anti-intellectual and should be avoided by Muslims. The fight against communism and PKI, Taufiq suggests, should be peaceful and non-violent. In fact, writing books that confront PKI and Communism is one of the best methods in arresting the flourishing of the Leftist discourse. Evidently, Taufiq disagrees with the action of the AAK.

The burning of the books by AAK members was also frowned upon by Franz Magnis Suseno. Contrary to the view of Jaelani, Suaib Didu and other AAK members, Magnis—the author whose book was burnt—argues that the burning of the books, whatever the reasons, had harmed people's freedom of expression and barred people from gaining information such as the case during the New Order regime in the past.<sup>51</sup> Suseno argued that the burning of the books resulted from a misperception and ignorance of the AAK members about the meaning of “Leftist” books. His *Pemikiran Karl Marx*, he suggests, is not of a Leftist, Marxist or Communist category. Suseno makes a distinction among the so-called “Leftist” books. The first are those books on the Left written by non-Leftists like himself. The second are books on the Left by the Leftists such as works of Lenin, Mao, Trotsky and Tan Malaka who subscribe to Communism. The third are books on the Left by Leftists like the members of PRD.<sup>52</sup> He says: “They are Leftists but not Communists.”<sup>53</sup> *Pemikiran Karl Marx*, Suseno claims, falls into the first category. Thus, the burning of his book demonstrated the failure of the AAK to make a distinction between the books by “Leftists” and about “Leftists.”<sup>54</sup>

Marxism, Suseno argues, was out of date and is no more relevant to the present situation. Despite the fact that Karl Marx had been successful in formulating the theory of class struggle, theory of surplus value, and theory of capitalism in its relation to social, economic and political development of society, Suseno argues that Marxism is full of academic fallacies and shortcomings.<sup>55</sup> The most serious academic fallacies of Marxism are, among others, Marx's negation of political power structure (the state) following the triumph of the proletarian revolution, his theory of classless society, and the utopianism embodied within Marxism.<sup>56</sup>

Communism, that is, the synthesis of Marxism and Leninism, had also failed and was out of date because Communism has strong ideological obsession with terrorism, violence, coercion and

assassination. According to Suseno, terrorism is something built within Communist regimes which explains why every Communist regime is barbaric. This was demonstrated by the former Soviet Union under Stalin where not less than 50 million Russians were murdered by the Stalinist regime. This was the greatest terror that ever existed in human history and “the best example of the cruelest crime in modern history.”<sup>57</sup> This is also exactly the case in other Communist states like China during Mao’s Cultural Revolution and Cambodia under Pol Pot’s rule where millions of people were massacred by the regimes.<sup>58</sup>

## Conclusion

The responses of Muslim political elite to the issue of the Left are basically driven by the interweaving of theological, historical and political factors. Theologically, Muslims generally believe that Islam is not a religion in the sense commonly understood as no more than the sum of several beliefs, rituals and sentiments, but rather a system of life that deals with all aspects of human existence and performance. The essential comprehensive characteristic of Islam and its primary basis is *tawhīd* which signifies the unity and sovereignty of Allah (SWT), the unity of life as a totality, and the unity of the temporal and the spiritual. Consequently, the Indonesian Muslim political elite believe that Islam is comprehensive and regulates all aspects of human experience. There is no area of human activity which is not addressed by Islam with specific guidance. On the contrary, Marxism-Communism is an atheistic philosophy preaching that religion is created to exploit the proletariat. Islam and communism, historically and politically, at loggerhead with each other. Their political rivalry, in the case of Indonesia, has at times degenerated into outright violence leading to countless deaths and destruction. The September 30, 1965 PKI coup, the biggest human tragedy in Indonesia’s post-independence history, is often cited as one among many examples of the ferocity resulting from the clash between Islam and communism.

The revival of the Left is exemplified by the cases of the emergence of PRD, alleged to be the reincarnation of the PKI and the flourishing of the Leftist literatures during 1998-2001 period. This could explain the strong opposition by most members of the Muslim political elite

at the time to the emergence of the PRD which was alleged to disrupt the increasingly harmonious relation between the regime and the Muslims. The issue of the PRD reflects a meeting point between the interests of the regime and the Muslims. The former attempted to strengthen its legitimacy by gaining support from the majority, while the latter supported the former to fight against its enemy in the ideological, historical and political context.

The burning of the Leftist books by the AAK in response to the flourishing of Leftist literature had triggered controversy among the academia, nationalist politicians, and leading Muslim personalities. The burning of the books is a blessing in disguise for the Leftists since the action shows a juxtaposition of intellectualism and violence that undoubtedly distorts the image of the anti-Communist movements in general. The books, whatever contents they may have, symbolize intellectual achievement, freedom of expression, enlightenment and dissemination of information, while the burning of the books signifies coercive power, curbing the freedom of expression, and an arbitrary act of confronting the problems.

There were several different responses to the action. First, some Islamic political groups, despite their agreement with the importance of combating communism and PKI, consider the action as having gone too far and unjustifiable. To this group, the fight against communism should still be done by obeying laws without using violence. Second, there are Islamic groups that approved the use of any means to prevent the development of Marxist ideology even through violence such as the burning of Leftist books by the AAK. In their opinion, what the communists had done in the past was far more barbaric and brutal. They should be stopped by any means to prevent further brutalities. Third, there were groups that were strongly opposed to the burning of the books in the context of democratization, freedom of expression and free access to information.

With the passage of time, there have been significant changes in the relations between Islamic political groups and the Leftists. There is a growing awareness of the need to put the conflict between the two groups behind. However, given the tragic historical incidents in the past, Muslims find it difficult to allow the re-emergence of the Left in Indonesia.

## NOTES

1. *Gatra*, August 10, 1990.
2. These actions, according to the government were conducted by PDI under Megawati Sukarnoputri in front of the office in Jalan Diponegoro, Jakarta.
3. Personal Communication with Budiman Sudjatmiko, December 13, 2004 in Jakarta.
4. Interview with Budiman Sudjatmiko, 6 March 2002 in Jakarta.
5. Ibid.
6. Olle Tornquist, "PRD dan Gerakan Komunis," *Pembebasan*, No. 1, October 1995, 7.
7. See Hasan Raid, *Pergulatan Muslim Komunis, Otobiografi Hasan Raid* (Yogyakarta: LKPSM Syarikat, 2001); Colonel Latief, *Memoar, Soeharto Terlibat G 30 S* (Jakarta: ISAI, 2000); Subandrio, *Kesaksianku Tentang G 30* (Jakarta, 2002); Sudisman, *Pleidoi Sudisman Kritik Oto-Kritik Seorang Politibiro CCPKI* (Jakarta: Teplok Press, 2000).
8. Interview with Stanley Adi Prasetyo Jakarta on May 22, 2003.
9. The "Young Marx" is used to refer to Marx before the writing of *Das Kapital* in 1846. Marx, then was a humanist and was highly influenced by Hegelian philosophy. The "Old Marx" refers to revolutionary Marx who became obsessed after 1846 with the idea of proletarian revolution. See Suseno, *Pemikiran Karl Marx*, 6-9; Muji Sutrisno, "Kata Pengantar" in Karl Marx, "*Revolusi dan Kontra Revolusi*," (Yogyakarta: Jendela, 2001), ix-x.
10. M. Amien Rais, "NASAKOM Sangat Berbahaya," *Sabili*, No. 6 Th.VI 30 September 1998, 19.
11. Ibid.
12. Hussein is one of the prominent figures of *Angkatan 66* who was involved in the opposition against PKI in the 1960s. Born in Bali in 1940, He was actively involved in Indonesian Muslim Students Association (PII) and Muslim University Students Association of Indonesia (HMI). He is currently one of the influential figures in *Dewan Dakwah Islamiah Indonesia* (DDII) and former legislative member. Maulani is a former director of Indonesian Intelligence Coordinating Body and former activist of PII, very closed to B.J. Habibie.
13. Husein Umar, "Komunisme Bertentangan dengan Aqidah Islam," in *Mewaspada! Bangkitnya Komunisme* (Jakarta: Dewan Dakwah Islamiah Indonesia, 2000), 17.
14. Interview with Hussein Umar in Jakarta February 24, 2005.

15. In Indonesian political history, the term “red” has strong ideological nuance similar to the colour of green. Red is, ideologically, considered as the symbol of the “Left,” especially Communists, Marxists and Socialists, whereas green symbolizes Islamic power. Ideological symbolization is still relevant in Indonesia.

16. Hussein Umar, “Komunisme itu Mudah Palsukan Sejarah,” in Hussein Umar, *Mewaspadaai Bangkitnya Komunisme*, 65.

17. Hussein admitted that not all the communist cadres retain their ideological commitment towards PKI. This is due to their good religious background. However, some of these young communists still have loyalty towards PKI. See Hussein Umar, “Komunis itu Mudah Palsukan Sejarah,” 64-65.

18. DDII is an influential Indonesian Islamic preaching organization that was founded by Muhammad Natsir, former Prime Minister of Indonesia (1950-1951) and a prominent Masyumi figure. A number of Indonesian Muslim political figures, for example, Amien Rais and Yusril Ihza Mahendra, have ideological affiliation with DDII. Some consider DDII as a manifestation of Islamic scripturalistic-formalistic power. See R. William Liddle, *Leadership and Culture in Indonesian Politics* (Sydney: Allan and Unwin, 1966).

19. A *tabligh akbar* (mass praying) that was conducted on 6 April 2000 at *Al Furqon* Mosque Kramat Raya Street. See DDII press release, signed by Hussein Umar on 6 April 2000, “Tap MPRS No. XXV/1996 Not Revoked, but Endorsed!”

20. See *Sabili*, No.19 Year VIII, March 14, 2001, 84.

21. Dawam is a former director of an influential research institute, LP3ES.

22. See his *Esay-esay Ekonomi Politik* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1983); “Mendayung di Antara Dua Karang: Sosialisme dan Kapitalisme” in Herdi Sahrasad (ed.), *Islam, Sosialisme dan Kapitalisme*, (Jakarta: Madani Press, 2000), 21-67.

23. M. Dawam Rahardjo, “Partai Rakyat Demokratik,” 83.

24. Ibid.

25. Abdul Qodir Jaelani, *Anak Rakyat Jelata Mencoba Berjuang Menegakkan Islam* (Jakarta: Yayasan Pengkajian Islam Madinah Al-Munnawwarah, 2001), 321-322. Jaelani was born in Jakarta in 1939. He was a leading figure of PII opposed to the New Order regime and served jail terms for his activities. He was a member of the legislative assembly, 1999-2004.

26. Abdul Qodir Jaelani, “Sedang Berkembang Gerakan Marxisme,” *Media Dakwah*, Rabiul Akhir 1419/April 1998, 51.

27. Abdul Qodir Jaelani, *Anak Rakyat Jelata Mencoba Berjuang Menegakkan Islam*, 322.

28. Abdul Qodir Jaelani, "Sedang Berkembang Gerakan Marxisme" 51.
29. Abdul Qodir Jaelani, *Anak Rakyat Jelata Mencoba Berjuang Menegakkan Islam*, 322.
30. Abdul Qodir Jaelani, "Sedang Berkembang Gerakan Marxisme," 51.
31. Sumargono was born on February 1, 1943 in Jakarta. He graduated from the Faculty of Economics, University of Indonesia.
32. *Media Dakwah*, April 1999, 42.
33. *Ibid.*, 45.
34. Interview with Solahuddin Wahid, 17 March 2003, in Jakarta.
35. Naufal Dungio is the Chairman of Hizbullah.
36. Interview with Alfian Tanjung, July 8, 2003 in Jakarta.
37. *Interview* with Suaib Didu, July 5, 2003 in Jakarta. Suaib Didu is presidium member of the AAK and the General Chairman of *Gerakan Pemuda Islam* (GPI, Islamic Youth Movement).
38. Alfian Tanjung is General Chairman of *PINTAR (Pembela Islam untuk Tanah Air)*, one of the presidium members of the AAK.
39. Interview with Alfian Tanjung, July 8, 2003 in Jakarta.
40. *Ibid.*
41. See Abdul Qodir Jaelani, "Kita Juga Berhak Menghancurkan Mereka," *Tempo*, 2002.
42. *Ibid.*
43. The Communists' sins, according to Naufal, are the PKI revolt in Madiun in 1948 and abortive coup in September 30, 1965.
44. To Karen Armstrong, "it seemed incredible that a novel [*Satanic Verses*] could inspire such murderous hatred, a reaction which was regarded as proof of the incurable intolerance of Islam." Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Western Attempt to Understand Islam* (London: Victor Gollanz Ltd. 1991), 21.
45. Naufal Dunggio, "Buku Antara Manfaat dan Mudharat," *paper* presented at seminar on "Censorship Buku Dalam Masyarakat," Jakarta, July 18, 2001.
46. *Ibid.*, 4.
47. Taufiq Ismail is a Muslim poet born in Bukit Tinggi West Sumatra and graduated from the Agricultural Institute of Bogor (Institute Pertanian Bogor, IPB).

48. Interview with Taufiq Ismail, in Jakarta, September 19, 2004.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Interview with Franz Magnis Suseno, October 14, 2003 in Jakarta.
52. Several activists of PRD are prolific writers such as Noor Hiqmah, *H.M Misbach, Sosok dan Kontraversi Pemikirannya* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Litera Indonesia, 2000); Faisol Reza, *Antonio Gramsci*; Ken Budha Kusumandaru, *Karl Marx, Revolusi dan Sosialisme, Sanggahan Terhadap Franz Magnis Suseno* (Yogyakarta: Insist, 2003).
53. Interview with Franz Magnis Suseno, October 14, 2003 in Jakarta.
54. Ibid.
55. On Suseno's criticism of Marx's ideas, see his *Pemikiran Karl Marx*, 1999; *Filsafat Sebagai Ilmu Kritis* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1992).
56. Franz Magnis Suseno, *Etika Politik* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1994), 271.
57. See Suseno, "Marxisme-Komunisme Sudah Finish," *Kompas*, April 17, 2000.
58. Interview with Franz Magnis Suseno, October 14, 2003 in Jakarta.