Miners, managers and the state: A socio-political history of the Ombilin coal-mines, West Sumatra, 1892-1996

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CHAPTER VI

EXPOSED TO POLITICS
(1950-1960)

Introduction

During the Japanese occupation (1942-1945) and the Indonesian Revolution (1945-1949), the boundaries between the mining society and local people became ever more blurred, and the exposure of the mining society to national politics would increase in the years to come. Eric Wolf argues that the politics of the working class are not only ‘made’ in the workplace; but are also the outcome of many links that extended into society (Wolf 1982:360). Hence, an effort to understand the politics of a working class community requires a comprehensive understanding of its social, political, and cultural environments.

This chapter will elaborate on the forms of social and political relationships in the mining society (miners and managers) during the period of Liberal Democracy (1950-1959), when control of the state was weak and forces in society were strong. During the period of Liberal Democracy, the state gave society room to act and channel various kinds of grievances through formal representations like political parties and trade unions. Given these prevailing circumstances, the mining society was exposed willy-nilly to politics. Similarly, the mining society came out of its cage, making links with political leaders at regional and national levels.

The principal aim of this chapter is to show firstly that control of work and political control in the mining society was closely linked to competing political parties at regional and national levels. The prime pieces of evidence for this were the formation of trade unions, the strikes of 1953, and the involvement of the mining society in the regional rebellion or the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (the PRRI) in 1958. Secondly, class and ethnicity were intertwined in a way that was similar to that shown in Liddle’s study on the plantations in East Sumatra (Liddle 1970, 1971), because in the mine just as in plantations a class-cum-ethnic conflict emerged between Javanese foremen and miners who were members of the Communist Party (PKI) and Minangkabau managers and overseers who supported the Socialist Party (PSI) and the Masyumi.

1. Coal in Indonesian Economy and Politics

Although Indonesia gained its Independence in 1945, it was confronted with new problems emerged right away. The young Indonesian Republic not only had to maintain its Independence from the Dutch during the Revolution (1945-1949), but also had to recover vital economic sectors while facing internal political conflicts. Since the Japanese occupation (1942-1945) and the Indonesian Revolution, the Indonesian economy had been pushed into a serious condition. Therefore, the Indonesian government faced a difficult task after 1949. Not only did it have to rebuild the economy, but also to dissolve the imbalance in the economic power between

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1 See Anderson 1983. For a more detailed study on the period of Liberal Democracy of Indonesia, see Feith 1962.
different social groups of the bourgeoisie. Although the economic policy of each cabinet had different priorities, in general, they gave priority to the process of consolidation, eventually leading to building up the economy through the nationalization of the Western companies. The efforts to create an Indonesian bourgeoisie started when the Natsir cabinet (April–September 1950) launched the Benteng Programme in April 1950. The Benteng Policy was formed to give more opportunities for the indigenous entrepreneurs, both big and small. About 700 firms benefited from this programme. It resulted in the rise of the production of various export commodities such as rubber, oil, and tin. Production grew and exports increased, becoming even more profitable when the Korean War broke out in June 1950. The Natsir cabinet, a PSI-Masyumi coalition for the main, continued Hatta's economic policy. Although this cabinet also embraced a nationalist economic policy, it granted licenses to American companies to invest their capital in oil production. Therefore, apart from the Shell, American companies such as Stanvac and Caltex entrenched themselves in the oil industry in the Outer Islands. This in turn influenced the rate of coal consumption in Indonesia.

In general, until 1953 Indonesian economic conditions were fairly stable (Pluvier 1978:121). Nevertheless, the cabinet faced a recurring problem, namely the lack of financial support to carry out its policy plans. In the following years, the Wilopo and Ali cabinets faced more serious economic matters, which were affected among others by an economic crisis after the Korean War. The leading export commodities fell back sharply (for example, rubber by 71 per cent). As a result, government revenues dropped too. In order to solve this problem, the government imposed surcharges of 100 to 200 per cent on luxury imports and cut expenditure (Ricklefs 1981:233). The cutting of expenditure in the bureaucracy and the military had already been planned by the Wilopo cabinet and had created conflicts between various parties. The PNI cabinet, with its mass support from Javanese abangan rural people, maintained a close relationship with Sukarno and preferred to spend the budget on the bureaucracy rather than anything else. It also laid emphasis on extreme nationalism and encouraged anti-foreign feelings (Feith 1962: 41). This led to the collapse of the coalition cabinet of the Masyumi and the PNI, which also spelled the disappearance of Masyumi and PSI leaders from the national political arena.

Over the next few years the Indonesian economy was blighted by corruption, inflation, and the rising prices of basic commodities. Inflation was indicated by the fall of the value of the rupiah against the US dollar, and in 1954 the price of basic needs such as rice, rose by 52.3 percent in Jakarta, and in rural Java by 24.7 percent (Pluvier 1978:155). Between June 1955 and

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2 This imbalance in the economic power can be seen from the following figures. About 19 percent of the privately owned non-agricultural capital was in the hands of the indigenous Indians, while 52 percent was held by Dutch owners. Together with other foreign and Chinese capitalists, the Dutch still dominated all consumer imports, exports, banking, and shipping transportation. For more detail, see Glassburner 1971:79.

3 Basically, this programme meant that easily salable consumer goods were reserved by decree for national importers and various government-owned banks and credit agencies were directed to provide the requisite financing. See Anspach 1969:168.

4 For a deep study of the problem of Indonesian inflation especially for the period of 1957-1965, see Mackie 1967.
March 1956 the price of rice went up by 84.4 percent in Jakarta and 68 percent elsewhere in Java. The government was forced to import rice from abroad. All this contributed to a budget deficit.

The recovery of the Indonesian economy during the period of Liberal Democracy (1945-1957) was very slow and uneven. Apart from the lack of capital and a strong dependence on foreign sources of finance, the state faced internal political instability. The emergence of separatist movements such as the Darul Islam in West Java, Aceh and Makasar, followed by the PRRI and the Permesta rebellions in 1958, absorbed the attention of the government. Therefore, the development and maintenance of the infrastructure, such as roads, irrigation projects, and shipping networks were neglected (Pluvier 1978:156).

The economic conditions in the mining sector in general, and coal in particular, cannot be seen outside the context of these economic and political developments. With the exception of the oil companies that were financed and exploited by foreign private companies, the mining sector tended to be neglected. The poor financial conditions in which the state found itself, insecurity, corruption and inflation stood in the way of any possibility for the rehabilitation of the mining companies. Although some of them could still operate, others were already paralyzed, and many had been closed down. Unlike its agricultural counterpart, the mining sector required large capital and investments in technology, which carried a high risk. Handicapped by these problems, development in this sector stagnated. As seen from the list of leading export commodities, only tin and oil production were regarded as important to the state revenues.

After the revolution, the coal-mines in Indonesia went through a gloomy period for a number of reasons; firstly, much of the mining machinery broke down during the turbulent period (1942-1949); secondly, the state-owned railway companies, which were the greatest coal consumers, faced rising debt; and thirdly, the state was unable to rehabilitate or modernize the mines thoroughly. All this led to a collapse in coal production (Appendix 1). However, the production of coal at the Bukit Asam coal-mines went ahead without encountering any major difficulties, because it used easier, open-cut technology. The total production of Indonesian coal was now only sufficient to fulfil the demand for domestic consumption.

Apart from the reasons mentioned above, competition with oil as an energy source was another factor which contributed to the decline in coal marketing. This was followed by a switch in priorities of the state, favouring oil as a commodity which had become one of the most important long-term sources of state revenues. The oil production increased, especially after many foreign investors like Shell, Starvac, and Caltex, invested their capital in Indonesia (Pluvier 1978:156; Ricklefs 1981:227). By 1957 oil production was running twice the level it had been in 1940, but part of this increase was consumed domestically. Between the years 1950-1956, domestic demand for petrol rose by 64.5 percent, and for kerosene by 200.5 per cent. The increase in oil production was compatible with the increased demand for oil for domestic consumption. For example, by 1956, the total number of scooters and motorcycles had reached 20 times since 1953 (Ricklefs 1981:227). In comparison with the Bukit Asam coal-mines, the Ombilin coal-mines were in a very critical condition. Several parts of the mines, and installations such as the central electricity plant at the village of Salak, compressor machines at the Sawah Rasau V mine, and workshops at Sawahlunto had been burnt by the Indonesian Army before the Dutch returned to Sawahlunto in 1948.

Therefore, the Dutch had planned to close the mines and remove the miners to the Bukit Asam coal-mines in 1949. The Ombilin company was unable to maintain the subsidiary industries. As a result,
These conditions were harmful to the Ombilin coal-mines. The company suffered continual losses. In September 1951, the company was losing about 250,000 rupiahs per month (Haluan, 27-3-1951). The total number of labourers was reduced by 50 percent in comparison to the work force in the period before the war. In order to repair sabotaged mine galleries, the governor of the Central Sumatran province, Ruslan Muljohardjo, asked the central government for a subsidy of around 40,000,000 rupiahs (Haluan, 5-9-1951). The application was never even acknowledged by the central government.

Although the cabinet seemed willing to increase coal production, the central government intended to close the mine in October 1951 because of the total lack of financial resources. This plan to close the mine was opposed by local leaders. Their arguments were similar to those put forward in 1934, when the colonial government wanted to close the mine. The importance of the mine from a local economic perspective was the crux of the argument. The closing of the mine would bring suffering to the labourers and their families, as well as to the local people both in the town of Sawahlunto and the province of West Sumatra. It would affect the West Sumatran railways and the cement factory at Padang and other smaller industries. In the end, the plan was realized (Haluan, 5-10-1951). In order to investigate the possibility for the continuation of the mine, the Head of Jawatan Pertambangan Pusat (the Central Mining Office), the Head of Parliament, and the Minister of Finance, Sjafruddin Prawiranegara, all visited Sawahlunto in 1951-1952 (Pembangunan Masyarakat 1952:15).

However, these visits did not bring any positive effects. Therefore, Siradjuddin Abbas, a Minangkabau and member of parliament for the Indonesian Islamic Party, Perti, strongly criticized what he stigmatized the unproductive visits of government officials (Haluan, 11,12, 13-3-1953). He asked the government to make plans to put the company solidly on its fit again as soon as possible. The manager of the Ombilin, Sjahbuddin Sutan Radjo Nando had made various requests to the government in an endeavour to purchase new mine machinery. Responding to these criticisms, the Minister of Economy promised to rehabilitate and then to modernize the mine (Haluan, 5-5-1953). This actually happened after the labourers went on strike in February 1953 (Chapter VI.3).

At the beginning of 1954 plans for rehabilitation were put into practice, though not fully, since the government did not have enough budget. Therefore, the rehabilitation was carried out using second-hand machinery from mines which had already been closed. In 1954 the deputy manager, P.A. Darami, a former student of the Mijnbouw School, visited the East Borneo Company at Lua Kulu, Kalimantan and the Banten coal-mines in order to get transportation machinery, pipes, coal-trucks, tractors, and other second-hand items (Haluan, 23-2-1954). Despite of all his effort, the acquisition of such infrastructure did not have much impact, so not even the demand for coal for local consumption could be met by Ombilin. The cement factory in Padang was still forced to import coal from Kalimantan and from Bukit Asam (Haluan, 18-6-1954).

central electricity at the village of Durian in Padang was taken over by the Department of Communication, while the buildings at the harbour of Teluk Bayur were handed over to Jawatan Pelabuhan (the Harbour Office) and finally the company's hospital was taken over by the Department of Health. The role of the Ombilin coal-mines as a supplier of coal for the railway companies in Java would be taken over by the Bukit Asam coal-mines. Interviews with Prasadja S. Sugoto, 10-7-1995; Johannes Kasoepe, 10-7-1995.
Aware of these difficult conditions, the Minister for Communications, Rooseno Hadikusumo, visited the West Sumatran railways and the mine, and renewed plans to close both state-owned companies because of their extremely poor condition and low productivity (Haluan, 28, 29-7-1954; 5,10,11-8-1954). Predictably this plan was strongly opposed by the West Sumatran people. This marked the beginning smouldering of hostile sentiments between the local and the central government.

Rehabilitation without foreign capital was very difficult. Problems deteriorated seriously, and prospects seem very bleak when, under the PNI-dominated Ali cabinet, nationalist feelings flared up and anti-foreign feelings became very strong. Therefore, it is understandable that the half-hearted development planning for the Ombilin coal-mines was criticized by the leader of the Indonesian Labour Party (Partai Buruh Indonesia), Iskandar Tedjasukmana, who visited the Ombilin in June 1954. He said that the rehabilitation was doomed to failure, if it were carried out only in a flurry 'nationalist spirit', without taking account of rational considerations (Haluan, 10-6-1954).

The second-hand spare parts for mine machines, which were of poor quality, had caused a decline of about 36 percent in coal production. In order to solve this problem, in 1955 the central government intended to modernize the Bukit Asam and the Ombilin coal-mines. It was anticipated that modernization of these mines would increase Indonesian coal production from 600,000 tons to 1,500,000 tons per year. In addition the government planned to construct brick factories at Tanjung Periuk, Tanjung Enim, and Ombilin (Antara, 5-8-1955). The Head of the Mining Office, Soerodjo Ranukusumo, promised a better future for the Ombilin coal-mines (Haluan, 5-6-1956).

Whatever the central government had planned, it was never realized. The condition of the mines became more and more precarious, especially when the PRRI regional rebellion broke out in 1958. The mines became a centre for the political and economic interests of the leaders of the PRRI. The neglect of the Ombilin was used as an issue by the leaders of the PRRI to raise hostility towards the central government among local people. This began in 1954 with the publication of a set of articles about 'penganaktirian pembangunan tambang Ombilin' (The development of Ombilin as a 'stepchild') in Haluan. During the PRRI rebellion and until 1960, the economic condition of the Ombilin coal-mines worsened. In 1959 the production of coal reached a low of 36,000 tons. The mines were no longer being properly managed. The adherents of the PRRI left the mines, and joined the guerillas, especially when the central military force entered the town and took over the mines.

Coal was not as important in the Indonesian economy as it had been in the first and second decades of the twentieth century. The reasons were shifts in the use of energy resources from coal to oil, internal problems in the state-owned company, and the inability of the governing cabinets to introduce a propriate innovation in mining technology. At the local level,

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As reported by the Bank of Indonesia, see Antara 19-6-1954.

This newspaper also criticized the imbalance in central government policies aimed at developing the Ombilin coal-mines. Haluan 5-8-1954.

For an explanation of the conditions of the mines and miners during the PRRI rebellion, see Chapter VI-5.
political developments had divided the mining society between the supporters of the PRRI rebellion and the supporters of the central government. The mine became an arena for political conflicts and work discipline was overshadowed by political loyalties.

2. Trade Unions and National Politics

To what extent did national and local political developments during the period 1950-1959 influence the formation, activities, and linkages of trade unions in the Ombilin coal-mines? Some of the political parties were the successors of organizations established in the pre-war years, while others had been formed after the Independence. The political parties had their seats in parliament, or the Central Indonesian National Committee (KNIP). During the Indonesian Revolution all parties were united in their determination to win freedom from the Dutch. But after taking over sovereignty in 1949, crucial party divisions emerged. No parliamentary elections were held until September 1955, and the parliament consisted of nominated members only. In the 1955 General Elections there were twenty-six parties that submitted lists of candidates, and ten of them received significant support (Feith 1962:24).

By 1959 all the political parties of all various streams of ideology had their own trade union federations. There were twelve national trade union federations which were affiliated to either the communists or the socialist, nationalist, modernist or traditionalist Moslim, Roman Catholic or Protestant parties (Hawkins 1971:202, Tedjasukmana 1961). Until 1960, labourers were represented with twenty-five seats in parliament (Hawkins 1971:216). Politics rivalries and ideological differences heavily characterized the politics between these federations, a situation that was taken advantage of by employers as well as by the government.

Throughout most of the 1950s, the SOBSI (All Indonesian Workers' Central Organization) was the strongest and most active of the trade union federations. It was formed in 1946. Although under its constitution it was nominally a non-party organization, in fact there were nearly forty communist-dominated federations, and more than 800 associated local unions and branches (Richardson 1958:64). SOBSI unions were strong in the industrial sphere, among textile-workers (94,000 members in April 1963), oil-workers (60,000 workers in July 1950), miners (19,570 in 1962); cigarette-workers (70,000 workers in 1962); and metal-workers (10,190 in 1962) (Hindley 1964:141).

Besides SOBSI, there were various central labour organizations not associated with the Communist Party. The organizations were closely linked to one of the other political parties, such as the Nationalist, Socialist and Islamic federations, which financially assisted them (Richardson 1958:64-65). For example, Gabungan Serikat Buruh Indonesia or GSBI (the Brotherhood of United Indonesian Workers), Kesatuan Buruh Kerakyatan Indonesia or BKI (the Union of Workers of the People of Indonesia) were both associated with the Nationalist party. Serikat Buruh Islam Indonesia or SBI (the Federation of Islamic Workers of Indonesia) was established under the aegis of the Masyumi, whereas Ikatan Buruh Nahdhatul Ulama or IBNU (the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions), was linked to the NU (the orthodox Muslim party). The Kongres Buruh Sosialis Indonesia or KBSI (the All-Indonesian Congress of Workers) was formed in 1953 as a non-political union centre, though it cooperated with the Socialist Party. The parties needed unions to win supporters, money, and power.

Most unions were organized by industry, for example unions of oil-workers, coal-workers, railway-workers, and plantations-workers. The local unions were combined into
national unions, and these were then linked into multi-industry central organizations. At the beginning of 1955, there were about a thousand unaffiliated local unions, about 180 national and regional federations, and seven multi-industry central organizations (Richardson 1958:65).

Principally, the development of trade union federations in West Sumatra was not different from the development at national level. The trade union federations were formed on the basis of existing political parties in the region. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the development of political parties in the region in the first place. Of the many political parties, the Masyumi was the largest party in West Sumatra and had a deep-rooted support among the common people. Unlike the Masyumi, the PSI was not a dominant party, as support for it was limited only to the Western educated people. Nevertheless, the socialist leaders had retained the dominant power in the local government since Independence (Kahin 1981:368-9).

A group of Masyumi and socialist politicians had acted as supporters of the PRRI rebellion which was declared in Bukittinggi in 1958 as a protest against the unfair in economic policy of the central government with regard to the Outer Islands. Then the background of the protest shifted from economic to political elements, and orchestrated movement against the rising influence of the PKI on the government.9 The PRRI established the Dewan Banteng, an economic planning board which was entrusted to the task of developing the West Sumatran economy. The rebellion did not last long. It ended in 1961, after the Central Military Force or Angkatan Perang Republik Indonesia (APRI) crushed the rebellion quickly and with relatively little violence. The parties involved, the Masyumi and the PSI, were banned by a decree of President Soekarno and which had important effects on development trade union federations at Sawahlunto.

In the early 1950s in Sawahlunto, branches of political parties at the provincial level such as the Masyumi, the PSI, the Perti, the Labour Party, the PSII and the PKI had been established. But the power of these parties was not a real reflection of the political configuration in West Sumatra in general, where the Masyumi was dominant. In this town, the power of the Masyumi and the PKI was almost in balance. The Masyumi received its support from the Minangkabau people, whereas the PKI support was mostly from the Javanese. Before the first General Elections in 1955, the power of the Masyumi was strong in the local council of representatives as shown in the following table. But after the General Elections, the power of the Masyumi was almost equal to that of the PKI. In 1952, the PKI had only one seat in the local council, but by 1957 it had three seats which meant that the PKI had only one seat less than the Masyumi.

Most members of this council came from the Ombilin coal-mines, a sign that the influence of the company was strong. The Masyumi leaders and the PSI were from the middle class of the mining society, whereas the PKI leaders were from the lower class. Nevertheless, in the local council PKI leaders enjoyed the same power as the Masyumi and the PSI members. What was the influence of these political leaders on the mining society, especially in relation to the formation of trade unions?

The formation of trade unions in the Ombilin coal-mines was a product of the development of trade unions at the national level and was on the one hand based on decisions from above. On the other hand, their formation originated from political frictions within the

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9 For related sources on the regional protest, PRRI, see for example Leirissa 1991; Harvey 1977. Also at present, Audrey Kahin (Cornell University) is conducting a research on the PRRI.
mining society itself. Each of these trade unions had alliances with political leaders outside the mine, and this reflected specific political developments at Sawahlunto, taking a different course from political developments in the region.

Table VI.1: Political Composition of the Local Parliament (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah) in Sawahlunto in 1957

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Political parties</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maridin</td>
<td>Masyumi</td>
<td>Chairman</td>
<td>Ombilin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronojudo</td>
<td>PKI</td>
<td>Vice of Chairman</td>
<td>Ombilin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutan Abdullah</td>
<td>Masyumi</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamisan</td>
<td>Masyumi</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Ombilin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sutan Harun Abdullah</td>
<td>Masyumi</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Ombilin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soedono M.Wiguno</td>
<td>PSI</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Ombilin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dt. Simaradjio</td>
<td>Perti</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Outside Ombilin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Yunus</td>
<td>IPKI</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Outside Ombilin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sjarifuddin</td>
<td>PKI</td>
<td>Member</td>
<td>Ombilin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Ramali</td>
<td>PKI</td>
<td>member</td>
<td>Ombilin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Haluan*, 5-4-1957.

There were six trade unions which were formed after Independence (Scheme VI.1). The first trade union in the Ombilin coal-mines was the *Serikat Kaum Pekerja*, or SKP (Labour Union), established in 1945 on the initiative of some former students of the Mining School such as Sjahbuddin Sutan Radjo Nando and Roesli. This was a local trade union that had no vertical relationship with the Department of Mining of Jakarta. This trade union had its representative in the *Komite Nasional Indonesia Daerah* or Local Indonesian National Committee during the revolution.\(^{10}\) This trade union changed its name to the *Serikat Buruh Tambang Indonesia* or SBTI (the Indonesian Mine Worker Union) and became the branch of the SBTI established by

\(^{10}\) The representative of the *Serikat Kaum Sekerja* at the local KNI was Roesli. After 1950 he was a high official at the Mining Service in Bandung. See Kahin 1987:34.
the Department of Mining and Mineral Service in Bandung in 1947. Since then, the SBTI of the Ombilin coal-mines had a vertical channel through the mining industry. During the Revolution, this trade union was not very active. But after the mine was transferred from the Dutch to the Indonesian people, the SBTI stepped up its activities. In October 1950, it was the only trade union recognized by the manager.

The SBTI was led by former students of the Mijnbouw School and members of the PSI, consisting of different ethnic groups from the middle and higher classes of the mining society. They were A.J.L. Tobing (a Batak), J. Gultom from North Sulawesi, and Tjiang Hong Liong, a Chinese. Because the SBTI was the only recognized trade union at the mine, all labourers were counted as members. This trade union took contributions from labourers simply by cutting down on wages. This contribution system was liable to be manipulated, because there were complaints by the labourers who were not satisfied with the way things were run.

The second trade union -unrecognised by the manager though- was the Badan Persatuan Buruh Arangan (BPBA) or the Coal Miners’ Union, formed on 1 January 1951 by Sugino M. Wiguno, a leader of Indonesian Labour Political Party (PBI) branch of Sawahlunto. He was the son of a former contract labourer, born in the tangsi at Durian in 1916. He was a lucky man. After graduation from the primary school at Sawahlunto, he had the opportunity to attend the MULO with the assistance of a trader from Silungkang, his father’s boss. His father was also a petty trader and ‘penjudi ulung’ (debt gambler) selling ‘sate kambing’, and cigarette, especially on the weekends, assisted by his wife and children. In 1936, Sugino worked as a clerk at the mines, but not for long, because he was dissatisfied with his salary. After the Indonesian Revolution, he became the leader of the PBI's branch at Sawahlunto on the basis of his links with prominent figures of the PBI from Jakarta such as S. M. Abidin and Iskandar Tedjasukmana. In 1953, he came under the influence of the leaders of the local PKI and then shifted his allegiance to this party. In 1956 he was sent to the Britain in a group from the Department of Labour. From 1959 to 1965 he was appointed the district head at Palangki, in the near vicinity of Sawahlunto. During this time, he was very active in spreading communist propaganda, not confining his activities just to Palangki, but extending them to Sawahlunto (Interview with Soegino M. Wiguno, 22-3-1996). The formation of the BPBA marked the beginning of intervention of political party leaders in the mine. This trade union was led by Sugino himself and assisted by Syabirin, Salimun and Kasmadi, three coal-miners who were working in the underground mine. The members of the BPBA were drawn particularly from the rank of coal-miners who were directly related to the process of production, doing the heavy work.

The BPBA soon took action. They drew up four resolutions in which they demanded the manager to improve the following items: 1) an additional payment of about three rupiahs for those who were working underground; 2) an improvement in the system of payment based on the length of service, and experience; 3) daily labourers who did not work on Sunday should be paid; and 4) similar holiday rights for monthly and daily labourers. They gave the manager only a
limited time to respond, three months, until May 1951.\(^\text{14}\)

Scheme VI.1. Development of Trade Unions (1945-1960)

The manager paid no attention to either the resolutions or to the formation of the BPBA. In his reply to Sugino, he argued that the company did not recognize any trade union except the SBTI which had already been officially acknowledged in October 1950. His second argument was that the resolution had not followed the correct organizational procedures.\(^\text{15}\)

The fourth and five trade unions were the Serikat Buruh Tambang Indonesia or SBTI, called the SBTI-SOBSI and the Local SBTI or SBTI-KBSI. These two trade unions were splinter groups of the original SBTI. The formation of the Local SBTI had its origins at the congress of the central SBTI in Yogyakarta in May 1951 (*Ikhtisar Perburuhan* 1952:22). The congress was attended by representatives of all SBTI branches. At that congress the board of the SBTI made an announcement stating that the SBTI was no longer an independent trade union, and would affiliate with the SOBSI which had links with the PKI. This policy was rejected by the Ombilin SBTI leaders such as A.J.L.Toebing, Tjiang Hong Liong and J. Gultom, who publicly opposed this affiliation. They returned indignantly to Sawahlunto before the congress had finished. Their disagreement was understandable in terms of their membership of the PSI, which was opposed to the PKI.

The unwillingness of the leaders to affiliate with the SOBSI caused friction and conflict among the members of the SBTI in Sawahlunto, leading to the emergence of two kinds of SBTI. One was the SBTI which was affiliated with the SOBSI (the SBTI-SOBSI) on 20 October 1951. The SBTI-SOBSI was formed by Sugino M.Wiguno. The other was the independent SBTI or the Local-SBTI which, later on, was to affiliate with the KBSI. This was viewed as an illicit organization by the members of the old SBTI who supported Toebing, Gultom, and Tjiang Hong Liong. Among the protesters, were many members of the Masyumi and the PSI.\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{14}\) PTBA-UPO Archives, letter of Sugino M. Wiguno to the manager, Sjahbuddin, 1-2-1951 no.18/sekr.

\(^{15}\) PTBA-UPO Archives, letter of Sjahbuddin to Sugino, 26-2-1951/924/1130; 12-3-1951/1154.

\(^{16}\) Letter of protest was signed by twenty-two people on 1-10-1951. PTBA-UPO Archives, the letter of Tjiang Hong Liong to Sjahbuddin Sutan Radjo Nando, 30-10-1951.
In the manager's view, political intervention from outside would have an adverse affect on production. Hence, he tried to nip this in the bud by issuing an announcement that was known as *maklumat no.48* on 23 October 1951, stating that those who intended to visit the mines or the labourers at their *tangsis* in Sawahlunto, Durian, and Sikalang, had to ask permission from the manager first (*Penerangan* 23-10-1951).

The declaration brought the two trade unions into increasing conflict. Sugino protested against the declaration. Using a pseudonym *Dharma Wangsa*, he wrote an article in a local newspaper, *Penerangan*, objecting to the policy of the manager (*Penerangan* 1-11-1951). He argued that the labourers did indeed belong to the company during work-time, but outside the mine, they were as free as other common people. They were free to struggle for their rights or to be involved in whatever activities they chose outside the work place. Therefore, he argued, the manager's policy of separating labourers from politics was an act of intimidation. In view of this, Sugino suggested the manager to withdraw his announcement.

Sugino was not alone in protesting against the *maklumat* of the manager. He was backed by local figures both in Sawahlunto, Padang, and even Jakarta. The chief of Police of Sawahlunto-Sijunjung was aware that Sugino was backed by the Mayor of Sawahlunto and certain figures from Jakarta. Hence, although the chief of Police himself supported the manager, he hedged his bets and suggested the latter that he should behave more circumspectly towards Sugino and his group.  

Sugino continued to strengthen the position of the new trade union by organizing a meeting for members. That meeting issued four resolutions on 22 December 1951. The first recognized the establishment of the new SBTI organization, formed at a meeting on 20 November 1951. The second stated that since 22 December 1951, they no longer recognized the authority of the old SBTI leaders. The third was concerned with measures to prevent any re-emergence of the old SBTI branch, while the fourth formed a commission charged with the task of investigating the financial affairs of the old SBTI. Around a week later, Sugino instructed the commission to investigate the responsibility of the old SBTI's organizers in the matter of the monthly cash contribution which the members had paid since December, and of the possibility of corruption.

Sugino also asked support from the manager in his efforts to investigate the financial matters of the organization. He hoped the manager would agree with his plans to pursue the labourers into paying their monthly contributions to the new SBTI treasury as from January 1952. Sugino allowed only a limited time until 6 January 1952 for this to be arranged. The manager ignored all the warnings that Sugino had given. Nettled by this obduracy, Sugino sent a following letter warning that because of heavy pressure being exerted on him by the labourers, he would wait for the manager's response up to 12 January 1952 but no longer. Nevertheless,
the manager did not pay any attention at all to the warning.

Having made with this obdurate refusal, the activities of the new SBTI became steadily more radical. Its slogans and demands were very vocal. Posters carried slogans like "Bergeraklah! memperjuangkan kejujuran dan kebenaran!" (Move! fight for honesty and the truth) were found on the walls of every miners' tangsi, at Surian, Durian, and Sikalang. These villages were located quite a distance from the central office of the company, and so were beyond the control of the manager and his higher-ranking staff. In order to mobilize labourers, the SOBSI magazine of the Central Sumatra branch, Bebas, was distributed in the barracks of the miners. It is interesting to note here that Sugino's later articles grew more militant in tone continuing to demand the improvement of the labourers' living conditions, but now also urging for the replacement of the manager.

In the first months after its formation, the new SBTI did not affiliate with any federation. But, viewed from the background of its leaders, its strategy and politics, the new SBTI was unequivocally influenced by left wing political leaders who did not actually work in the mines. A central role in this respect was played by Sugino, the leader of the PBI, Sawahlunto branch. Later it was to be influenced by the leaders of the PKI and the SOBSI. In Sawahlunto, Sugino had a good position, because his efforts were endorsed by the mayor of Sawahlunto, Aminuddin, a person who had been keen to propagate PKI influence in that town since the beginning of 1950s. The role of some PKI leaders outside Sawahlunto, among them Datuk Mangkudum Sati, Bachtaruddin, Djoëmaralamsjah, Nursali and Mardjoko, was very prominent in encouraging the new SBTI to be more militant. Datuk Mangkudum Sati had been a member of the PKI in West Sumatra in the 1920s when he had been active as a collector of guns to be used in the Uprising of 1926/27. Since 1950, he had been a member of the SOBSI in Jakarta, while Bachtaruddin and Djoëmaralamsjah subsequently became the leaders of the Sumatra branch of the SOBSI. Nursali was the leader of the SOBSI branch at Solok, a town between Sawahlunto and Padang. He acted as mediator between the leaders of the SBTI-SOBSI in the Ombilin mines and the PKI and the SOBSI leaders in Padang and Jakarta (Interview with Sudono M. Wiguno 15-4-1995).

To what extent these connections had influenced the political activities of the leaders of

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22 His following article which also criticized the poor living conditions of the labourers in the Ombilin coal-mines, was published in Bebas, September 1952: 18-9. His criticisms were contested by A.J.L Tobing, whose reply was published in the same magazine, September 1952. See PTBA-UPO Archives, letter of Sugino to Aminoeddin, the leader of SBTI, the branch of the village of Durian, 20-8-1952.

23 Sugino said the manager was not a mining expert and hence he should be replaced. In this respect, the manager regretted wavering attitude of his superior, the Head of Mining Inspection, towards Sugino. As a result of the resolution, the Head of Mining Inspection, Roesli, a former manager of the Ombilin mines in 1945, visited Sawahlunto with the task of investigating Sugino's resolutions. See PTBA Archives, letter of Sjahbuddin to L.G. Tampubolon, 25-8-1952/3880; see also PTBA-UPO Archives, Bebas, 1952:10; Letter of Roesli 11-2-1952, 20-2-1952; Letter of the Head of Central Mining Office, 1-3-1952.
SBTI-SOBSI soon became apparent. From the end of 1952 till the beginning of 1953, the linkages between the leaders of the SBTI-SOBSI with Nursali, Mardjoko and other leaders mentioned above grew steadily. Meetings on 6-7 and 14-15 December 1952 at Sugino's father's house in the village of Surian, were attended by Nursali and Mardjoko. During the meetings they not only discussed issues such as the improvement of the living conditions of the labourers, ousting of the manager and possible strikes, they also talked about the program and results of the SOBSI congress in Jakarta. At the beginning of 1953, at Sugino's instigation, some labourers in the workshop began voicing the demands for an improvement in working conditions to Tobing, the leader of the old SBTI or the Local-SBTI. At the same time, Sugino also warned the manager, Sjahbuddin, saying that he would call a strike if their demands could not be fulfilled. But none of these demands were met with any response either from Tobing or from Sjahbuddin.

On 15 April 1953 the old SBTI officially decided to split off from the central SBTI (Haluan 25-4-1953). This split was caused by their refusal to affiliate with the SOBSI. Meanwhile, the leader of the old SBTI, Tobing, was replaced by a new leader, A Munir as the upshot of a meeting held on March 16, 1953. Another contributory cause was the fact that Tobing and his friends disagreed with the affiliation of the central SBTI in Jakarta under Mardjoko and the leaders of the Central Sumatra SOBSI with the PKI. Bachtaruddin, one of the Central Sumatra SOBSI leaders, deliberately visited Tobing and promised to join together to form a new SBTI at the mines. At the same time, Mardjoko visited Sawahlunto, officially to solve the conflicts between the leaders of the old SBTI and the new SBTI, but unofficially his arrival was intended to enforce the position of the new SBTI under Sugino. The leaders of the old SBTI like Tobing and his group hoped that the arrival of Mardjoko would end the conflict. Buoyed by this expectation, he was content to wait for Mardjoko's arrival, meanwhile preparing the formation of a new SBTI, uniting the old and new wings.

Information received from former PSI leaders intimated that before Bachtaruddin and Mardjoko came to Sawahlunto, there had been secret contacts between Sugino and Nursali at the house of the former before the next scheduled meeting with Tobing. The secret meeting basically enforced the position of the new SBTI, whereas the meeting between Tobing and Mardjoko was deadlocked, because Mardjoko recognized the right of both trade unions to seek support at the mines. Then Mardjoko called a meeting between 11-14 February 1953 to select new organizers from the SBTI. He abolished both the SBTI of Sugino and the SBTI of Tobing, and then formed the new SBTI under the leadership of Nursali on 14 February 1953 (Haluan 7-7-1953).

Soon after the formation of the new SBTI, Nursali, announced that contributions from

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24 The meeting on 6-7 December 1952 was attended by about twenty participants, while the second meeting was attended by around 150-200 people. See PTBA archives, letter of Tjiang Hong Liong to Sjahbuddin, 9-12-1952 no.101/XII a-R-org/52). Sjahbuddin replied to this letter, saying that Sugino had been supported by the leaders from Jakarta.


26 A more detailed discussion of the demands of the SBTI-SOBSI and its members can be seen in the description on strike in 1953 in Chapter VI-3.
members would no longer be collected by deducting fees directly their wages, but members had to hand them over to the new organizers of the SBTI. The new leaders of the SBTI claimed that the direct cut from wages was often used by the organizers of the old SBTI not just for the union and its affairs, but also for their own personal interests. This change in the way fees were collected triggered off a competition between the old and new SBTI leaders contesting with each other to gain financial sources from the labourers. The management and overseers wanted to maintain the old SBTI, because they had to keep the mine running and were afraid that the exorbitant demands of the new SBTI or SBTI-SOBSI would eventually destroy the mine.

The Tobing group responded to the accusation of Nursali’s group saying that those who no longer wanted their wages to be cut as payment of his SBTI fees had to give a written statement. They also had to tell to the leader of the SBTI, Tobing, if they no longer wanted to be a member of his trade union. The labourers were afraid of social sanctions which could be imposed by their overseers or the manager, so no one reacted to the announcement. This meant that the cutting of labourer’s wages continued as before and Tobing’s group won that round of the contest. But its triumph was short-lived, because by the time of the General Elections in 1955, Nursali and his group were able to attract members away from the Tobing trade union to their union.

While these two trade unions were competing and in conflict with each other to attract labourers to become members, the Sarekat Buruh Islam Indonesia or SBII which was affiliated with the Masyumi was formed in 1954. The setting up of this trade union was initiated by some former Minangkabau students of the Mijnbouw School. One of the motives behind the formation of the SBII was that it was intended to mediate between the two existing trade unions and give Masyumi people in the mine better representation. But later on good intentions were blown to the winds and heralded as a conflict of interests between the leaders of the PSI and the Masyumi, a competition to seek status and power at the mine (Interview with Sudono M. Wigoeno 15-3-1995). The PSI people who had joined up as members of the old SBTI, were still stronger than either the Masyumi or the PKI people. Using their position of strength the PSI people placed their socialist friends in good positions at the mine and stood in the way of the Masyumi supporters. Thwarted in their ambitions, the Masyumi people who were the first members of the local SBTI, left that trade union and established the SBB. The formation of the SBII was initiated, as just mentioned, by a group of Minangkabau ex-students of the Mining School like Zubir Munaf, Maridin, and Kamisan, and most of the members were active in religious associations. As it will be seen in the years thereafter, the SBII tended to be two-faced. Officially, the leaders of the SBII did not join the SBTI-SOBSI in making a statement about the replacement of the socialist Bupati of Sawahlunto and mining manager in 1954 (Haluan, 15-4-1954). Unofficially, the SBII leaders had helped the SBTI-SOBSI to effectuate the dismissal of the socialist Sjahbuddin from his function as manager.28

To get the whole picture, it is important to know about the political geography of each

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27 Contributions in cash were used by Tjiang Hong Liong for personal interests, because he was known to be a heavy gambler. Later on, he was dismissed by Tobing’s group because he no longer supported the trade union. Interview with Sudono M. Wigoeno, 15-3-1995.

28 Sjahbuddin later on was selected to work in the Dewan Banteng. He moved his allegiance from the PSI to the Masyumi. Interview with Sudono M. Wigoeno, 15-4-1995.
trade union, the background of its leaders and of members, its ethnic composition, and its relations with the social hierarchy in the mining society and the workplace. All these factors are important to grasp the complexities of the balance of power and the links with the outside world.

Most of these members of the BPBA and the SBTI-SOBSI were Javanese and lived in the barracks which were located in the villages of Surian, Durian and Sikalang. This area had been a centre of communist activities in the 1920s. As it was situated at quite a distance from the central office of the company, it was far from the direct control of the staff and the SBTI-KBSI. In terms of social hierarchy, they were drawn from the lower social group, mostly working in the underground mines and the workshop.\(^{29}\)

Consequently in every respect the leaders of the SBTI-SOBSI were in a weak position. Most of the leaders came from the second generation of labourers and they had enjoyed little education but this did not affect the shrewdness of their perception. They were aware of their status as a group being exploited by other ethnic groups. From the second generation of the Javanese contract families emerged like Sugino M.Wiguno, \(^{30}\) his brother Sujudono M Wiguno, Ronujudo, Ibnu, Sjarifuddin Pardi, and Ngadimun. As an ethnic group they were exploited by the non-Javanese overseers.

The Javanese peoples were not aware of their lot. During the colonial period, they were exploited by the Dutch. After Independence they were used by their own people.\(^{31}\) (Interview with Pak Ibnu 16-4-1996)

As foremen, they functioned as mediators bridging the gap between the overseer or the manager and the labourers. Their function was not strong in terms of social hierarchy of the mining society, because their status was lower than that of the overseers. But in fact, they had strong and deep roots among the labourers, having close contact with them not just at the workplace, but also at the barracks. This unique position allowed the foremen to control the Javanese labourers both inside and outside the mines. The position of the foremen or the leaders of the SBTI was strengthened by their connection with the PKI leaders, both from West Sumatra and Jakarta.

\(^{29}\) Before he became the manager, Sjahbuddin had worked in this workshop. According to some informants, there had already been a number of small quarrels between Sjahbuddin and his mandors and the labourers at the workshop there, occurring before the labourers from the SBTI-SOBSI demanded the replacement of the manager.

\(^{30}\) Sugino had eight brothers. Seven of them were members of the PKI, and only Sudono M.Wiguno became member of the PSI. He worked as accountant at the central office, and had many more contacts with the Minangkabau people. He was elected representative of the PSI at the local council in 1957. During the New Order Regime, he was the representative of Golkar on the local council. Interview with Sudono M.Wiguno 15-4-1995.

\(^{31}\) Original text: Si Jawa-jawa ini tidak juga menyadari nasib mereka. Waktu Belanda dulu, mereka diperas oleh Belanda. Setelah merdeka diperas oleh bangsa sendiri”. Pak Ibnu had kinship relations with Pak Sugino M.Wiguno. His wife was the sister of the wife of Sugino M.Wiguno. He worked in the workshop after Independence as mandor. Interview with Pak Ibnu 16-4-1996.
The PKI leaders trained the foremen to be cadres of the party and through them they hoped to attract the labourers. By using the slogans such as the class struggle, and holding out promises of better living conditions, the foremen were able to attract the Javanese labourers to their cause. The success of this strategy also came from the low profile of the leaders (Interview with Sudono M. Wiguno, 15-3-1995). For the Javanese labourers themselves, the slogans gave them a glimmer of hope that their poor living conditions could be improved.

The trade union channeled information from Jakarta to its members in Sawahlunto. In this respect, the distance between Sawahlunto, Padang and Jakarta became smaller, because some of the Javanese foremen had radios. Heartened by such linkages they became more vocal and determined when they faced the manager and the overseers. The presence of the figures like Sugino M. Wiguno, Nursali, Mangkudum Sati, Bachtaruddin, and Mardjoko, for instance, and the indirect support from the mayor of Sawahlunto, Aminoeddin, strengthened the role of the SBTI-SOBSI in the mines in the period leading up to 1955.

Unlike the SBTI-SOBSI, the SBTI-KBSI had no deep roots among the labourers, but conversely its leaders had decisive power in the company. This trade union was formed to answer needs from above. Its members were mostly recruited from the labourers outside the barracks, not from among the Javanese miners who worked underground. This trade union competed with the SBTI-SOBSI in attempting to win the support of the labourers. Membership in the local-SBTI or SBTI-KBSI was dominated by high and middle-ranking staff who worked mainly in the central office, especially before 1955. The members were heterogeneous in ethnicity, but were dominated by non-Javanese (Interview with Sugino M. Wiguno, 12-4-1996).

The SBn represented the Minangkabau. Both leaders and members were enlisted from among the Minangkabau and based their ideological choice on religion. Unlike the other two trade unions, recruitment of members was carried out through informal channels such as religious activities and the Sawahlunto branch sports associations like Ikatan Pencak Silat Indonesia or IPKI (the Indonesian Martial Arts Association). The leaders were Maridin, Kamisan, Zubir Munaf and P.A. Darami who were the leaders of the Masyumi party in the mining town and held power in the local parliament in 1957. Besides as political activities they were very much involved in various social fields such as in education, religion, and the IPKI. The leaders did not force their members to pay a contribution, because this was collected voluntarily outside the mine. Most of the members lived outside the barracks or were grouped together in certain gangs in the barracks. Especially in the period when the power of the SBTI-SOBSI was in the ascendant before the General Elections of 1955, some of the Minangkabau people who lived in the barracks in the villages of Durian and Sikalang, were intimidated by members of the SBTI-SOBSI. Therefore, they moved to other barracks, choosing to live collectively with other Minangkabau people in Sawahlunto (Interview with Djamaluddin Peto Basa, 12-8-1996). This shows an increasing polarization based on ethnicity.

3. Strikes and Conflicting Trade unions in 1953

In 1953 a series of strikes occurred in the Ombilin coal-mines, as shown in Table VI.2. The strikes of 1953 were not merely a protest by the labourers about the manager, but also a reflection of conflicts between the two trade unions and political parties exacerbated by ethnic and class tensions. These strikes were presaged by rumbles of conflict between the two trade unions, the SBTI-SOBSI and the SBTI-KBSI, that had been building up a head of steam since
1951. This reached a peak in early 1953. On the 2 January 1953, a series of demands about salary regulations and financial matters concerning the old trade union was put forward by Kasino, Bakri, Ronojudo, Ngatidjo, and Ramali, members of SBTI-SOBSI. This was followed by other demands on 12 and 18 January 1953 by Sugino M. Wiguno, stating that they would go on strike if the manager did not meet their demands. Basically what they were asking did not differ greatly from what they had wanted earlier. They were about the problem of the cutting of labourers' wages; the abuse of power by the manager in the mutation and dismissal of labourers; and the problem of tax collection for company's land used by labourers to construct their houses. The manager did not react to their demands. Therefore, the members of the SBTI-SOBSI finally decided to go on a series of strikes.

Table VI.2: Strikes and Strikers in 1953

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of strike</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Total Strikers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 April</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 May</td>
<td>24 hours</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-23 May</td>
<td>6 days</td>
<td>933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 May-30 May</td>
<td>8 days</td>
<td>856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 May-15 July</td>
<td>48 Days</td>
<td>760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 July</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Haluan, 8-6-1953; Sumatera Tengah 1953:17.*

On 18 April 1953, under the leadership of Ronojudo, 144 labourers who were working underground and in the workshop, went on strike for two hours, in a sit in (Sumatera Tengah, 1953: 4). The strikes were unsuccessful because the manager failed to show any reaction. Finally, the strikers went home. The next day they went to work as usual.

After the strike fizzled out, the situation inside and outside the mine became increasingly insecure. Recriminations between strikers and non-strikers frequently flew back and forth, creating heated conflicts. This became clear when the labourers celebrated Labour Day on 1 May. The celebration was divided into two styles; namely SBTI-SOBSI and non-SBTI-SOBSI-style.32

After the strike of 18 April went out with a whimper, the situation in the town seemed passive. The strikers did not issue any demands, nor did they negotiate with the manager. They seemed to gather organizational strength by issuing pamphlets and holding a meeting at the Sawahlunto cinema. The meeting was led by Nursali supported by his friends, and it issued a resolution to stop the deducting of fees automatically from the monthly salary of the labourers, and to hand the contributions already collected for February and March over to the SBTI-SOBSI (Haluan, 7-5-1953). If their demands were not fulfilled, they threatened to go on strike again.33

32 PTBA-UPO Archives, letter of the manager of the company to General Director of the Mining Office, 5-5-1953 no.56/RHS.

33 PTBA-UPO Archives, letter of Djamiun to the Head of Personnel Staff, 5-5-1953 no.56/Rhs.
The manager was pessimistic about the possibilities to do anything about the actions of the SBTI-SOBSI, because these moves were backed by the former mayor of Sawahlunto, Aminoeddin. Aminoeddin’s support came to an end when his place was taken by a new mayor, Basrah Lubis, a member of the PSI. The manager counted on support from him in order to weaken the influence of the PKI. On 9 May 1953, the SBTI-SOBSI went on strike again, this time for about twenty-four hours. The strikers demanded to negotiate, but the manager remained adamant (Haiian, 11-5-1953). This strike did not yet hamper production, because labourers who were members of the local SBTI immediately took over the work, assisted by some of the members of the SBTI-SOBSI who did not feel called to go on strike (Haiian, 11-5-1953; Keng Po, 15-5-1953).

Still led by the undefatigable Nursali, the labourers were again mobilized to go on strike. Unflagging in his enthusiasm Nursali was successful in gaining the support of almost all the labourers to begin a total strike on 17 May 1953 (Haiian, 8-6-1953). The first phase of the strike on 17 May lasted six days until 23 May with 933 strikers taking part, but production could still continue unimpeded, because the strike affected less important workplaces, and did not impinge on vital places such as the electricity plant, the air compressors, the water pomp and the phone lines. Because of its failure to affect vital areas of work this strike did not bring any positive results to their demands. The second phase of total strike was continued from 23 May until 30 May. This time production stagnated.

This strike degenerated into brutality when the strikers destroyed some of the machines at the central electricity plant. Outside the mine, in particular at the barracks, the strikers ran amuck, and stole various goods which were the property of their colleagues. The rate of criminality soared, because the strikers found it difficult to find supplies, especially when the Chinese shops in the market of Sawahlunto were no longer able to supply them with food. In order to calm down the situation in the town, the local government brought in a mobile brigade of the police force from Padang Panjang. The policemen soon took action, arresting the leaders of the strike such as Sugino M. Wiguno, Datuk Mangkudum Sati, and Ngadimun.

During the strike of 9 May 1953, the total number of strikers reached 1,200. But this was reduced to 933, on 23 May. This fell again to 856 during the strike from 23 to 30 May 1953. More than half of the strikers remained disciplined, but not for long, because on 31 May there were only 760 strikers left (Haiian 8-6-1953).

The manager took action against the strikers. He had dismissed twenty-nine labourers after the strike of 17 May. The following dismissal rose to fifty-nine labourers after the strike of 23 May (Haiian, 16-5-1953). According to Sudono M. Wiguno, this violated the regulations issued by the government (Interview with Sudono M. Wiguno 15-4-1995). The policy of the manager was no longer grounded on the economic interests of the company, but on political considerations. Manager took similar actions on following occasions. Certainly, the dismissal of the labourers raised strong objections among the leaders of the SOBSI like Mangkudum Sati and Rachmad. However, deaf to all arguments, the manager ignored their protests (Haiian, 16-5-1953). As a result, conflict which became sharper and deeper both between the management and the SOBSI and between the SBTI-SOBSI and the SBTI-KBSI.

34 PTBA-UPO Archives, letter of the manager of the company to General Director of the Mining Office, 5-5-1953/no.56/RHS.
The manager tried to threaten the strikers using other means as well. He and his staff members organized a mine co-operative called the Badan Ekonomi Kota Arang or Beka (Economic Committee of the Coal Town) which intimidated the strikers by stating that they would not receive rice, salt, and other basic goods (Haitian 8-6-1953). This also indicated how the manager and the Beka organizers, who were mostly members of the local-SBTI, used their power to repress the increasing strength of the SBTI-SOBSI. By the end of the strikes, the manager had dismissed 383 strikers, the upshot being the company was short of labour and was forced to recruit newcomers either from Java or from local people.

4. State Intervention

In June 1953, the State Mining Office sent two observers from Jakarta, Roesli and RI Subroto, to investigate labour conditions and the conflict between the trade unions (Haitian, 10-6-1953). But their investigation did not seem to have any effect on the strike. One month later (July 1953), the total number of strikers was already dropped to 400, because of the difficulty in getting food. Indeed, at the beginning, the strikers had still been able to obtain supply of food from the owner of a Chinese shop in the market of Sawahlunto (Interview with Sudono M. Wiguno, 12-5-1996). Later, this supply of food diminished until it was insufficient to feed the strikers. Finally one by one they drifted back to work. This meant that the SBTI-SOBSI was not strong enough to attract the political support of the strikers.

From the reasons given by former strikers for why they went on strike, we know that their motives varied between family and community needs, between individual and collective considerations. They were also forced to go on strike because they were afraid that they and their family members would become isolated from daily social contact with those members who had gone on strike. They were also afraid to ignore orders of their foremen, their patrons, who could protect them and secure their livelihood either in the workplace or in the barracks. Social sanctions played a large role in the involvement of the miners in the strikes. The sanctions included the fear of social isolation from their neighbours and friends at the already mentioned workplace and in the barracks. Those among them who were really convinced that improvement in wages and social benefits would be achieved after the strike, joined the strike and the SBTI-SOBSI. But, when the SBTI-SOBSI failed to deliver the goods, the labourers immediately shifted their loyalty to other trade unions and abandoned the strike.

Though there were different and contradictory considerations weighed up by the labourers before they got themselves involved in strikes, the interesting thing is that at present they all have a uniform interpretation of their political life in the past. From interviews with former strikers we know that they generally liked the right to "freedom of speech" which the state had created during that time and wanted to use it. The phrases which they always let slip are "once it was usual to criticize the bosses. Now? It is difficult". Such comments can be found anywhere at any time, in particular if we join retired miners, sitting around and drinking a cup of tea or coffee in the mornings. Their comments reflect a longing for political freedom, though they do not want to go into the turbid or even think about uncertain political situation of the past.

The strikes grew into both a local and national problem, a process which is indicated by the involvement of various trade unions and state agencies. Compared to the first and second decades of the twentieth century the problem had shifted. It was no longer just an issue of
labour control, but of political control, because competition emerged between various state agencies to win support from the miners. In other words the nation entered the state (Anderson 1983).

Trade unions affiliated with the SOBSI such as the SBTI-SOBSI from the Bangka tin-mines, the Padang branch of the weavers’ trade union or Serikat Tenun, and the Union of worker of the Semarang Autonomous Region or Serikat Buruh Daerah Otonom Semarang supported the actions of strikers and disputed with the policy pursued by the managers in dismissal of the labourers (Mining Archives, Box IX, SBTI). Protests also came from the leader of the central SBTI, Busono, in a letter to the Attorney General on June 19th, 1953 over the matter of labourers being arrested by the manager (Haluan, 26-6-1953).

The various state agencies which became involved in the strikes were not confined to local and provincial levels, but those at the national level also wanted their say. Each of the actors from the different state institutions had a political purpose behind its efforts to solve the conflicts between the two trade unions. Local and provincial officials attended the negotiations which were held at the governor’s office in Padang, and emotions ran high. In meetings, the leaders of strikes issued statements like ‘the manager of the Ombilin mines refused to be budged, he was as tough as a rock’.

Through the Panitia Penyelesaian Perselisihan Perburuhan or P4 (Board for the Settlement of Labour Disputes) at the regional level, the labour dispute in the Ombilin coal-mines was passed on to the central P4, at the request of the Ministry of Economy (Haluan, 24-7-1953). The central P4 held an investigation at the beginning of July 1953, led by Supratomo from the Ministry of Labour with a team consisting of Mr. Tio Tjong Tho from the Ministry of Justice and Kukuh Sumowidjojo from the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Sumatera Tengah, 1953:12). The P4 arranged a meeting with the manager, local government officials, and the leaders of the strike.

The committee issued an instruction that from 6 July 1953, the labourers had to go back to work as usual (Haluan, 7-7-1953). In order to regulate the work, the manager set up a registration board, where the strikers who wanted to work, had to register first. This registration board was intended to regulate the division of labour, because since May changes had been made in the shifts. The company had already recruited new labourers to be employed in certain workplaces. Registration was also intended to prevent riots, which were predicted to break out between strikers and non-strikers. This policy was supported by the leaders of the local-SBTI and local officials (Haluan, 6-7-1953).

The strikers did not obey the regulation, and showed far more inclination to follow the instructions issued by their leaders like Nursali. They did not want to register, and so returned directly to their old workplace, bypassing it completely. Of course, this created conflicts between the overseers, who had received orders from the manager, and the strikers who received orders from the leader of the SBTI-SOBSI (Haluan, 15-7-1953). The strikers failed to get back to their old workplaces, so the leaders of the PKI, Nursali and Datuk Mangkudum Sati, organized a demonstration of strikers, demanding the manager to negotiate. But the manager refused, and eventually the strikers did not go back to work (Haluan, 15-7-1953).

The second conflict emerged the following day. On 11 July 1953 two groups of the strikers arrived at the mine and started to work without registering. As a result, the quarrel between the strikers and overseers resurfaced. On the 16 July 1953, the committee of investigation from the P4 had arrived at Sawahlunto (Haluan, 22-7-1953). A series of meetings were held, and on the 17th of July 1953, there were a meeting between the committee and
Djamiun Paduko Radjo, representative of the company, Nursali with his friends from the SBTI-SOBSI, and A. Munir from the Local SBTI. The meeting produced "a cease-fire", meaning that nobody was permitted to act. The committee agreed to form a registration board which would register the labourers who had been participating in the strike in order to employ them in the mine again.

A special meeting was also held between the committee and the leader of the strike, Nursali. Finally Nursali was able to order the strikers to go back to work by making a detour through the registration board (Haluan, 23-7-1953). On 18 July 1953, 500 strikers assembled in front of the central office of the company. One hour later, the committee, the manager, and the leaders of the SBTI-SOBSI and the local SBTI, the district military commander and officials from other local state agencies arrived there as well. Then the leader of the committee, Supratomo, explained matters concerning the reciprocal obligations of labourers and the manager. Having listened to his speech, the labourers finally came forward to register (Haluan, 23-7-1953).

Various demands desired by the strikers had been concretized: the contribution which labourers gave involuntarily to the Local-SBTI should be returned to the SBTI-SOBSI, there had to be changes in the workplaces for the strikers, the reinstatement of strikers, and payment for dismissed labourers. All these demands could not be solved straightaway. The P4 promised to discuss them at the following meetings which were planned for August and September (Haluan, 2-9-1953). At the July meeting, the manager met only some of their demands, for instance, some 383 dismissed labourers were permitted to go back to work on 16 November 1953. But they were not paid for the time they had been on strike (Haluan, 2-9-1953; 21-11-1953).

The agreements reached by the P4 did not settle matters because it did not take long for conflicts between the two trade unions to resurface. This was particularly glaring when the member of parliament, Werdojo, the leader of the SOBSI at the national level, visited the mine. He came accompanied by three officials from the Mining Office to investigate the labour conditions at the Ombilin and Bukit Asam coal-mines (Haluan, 22-12-1953). Werdojo's visit was warmly welcomed by the 400 members of the SBTI-SOBSI. Joined by their families, they assembled in front of the building of the pawnshop, waving banners stating slogans relevant to their demands. They were yelling "bebas" (free). Most attention was paid to the figure of Werdojo, as the wives of the members of the SBTI-SOBSI kissed his hand and knee (Haluan, 29-12-1953). The visit of Werdojo gave fresh wind to the leaders of the SBTI-SOBSI in their efforts to gain influence. Two themes which ran like a gold thread through their demand were firstly that the socialist manager, Sjahbuddin Sutan Radjo Nando, be replaced, and, secondly that the living conditions of the miners be improved (Haluan, 22-12-1953). The latter point encompassed such social security matters as health care, housing, wages, and there was concern about the dismissal of two labourers, Naim and Ngadimun (Haluan, 29-12-1953).

A meeting was held between Werdojo and local leaders from the various state agencies including the mayor of Sawahlunto, members of the local council, the heads of the local prosecutor's and of the information office (Haluan, 31-12-1953). The meeting came to the conclusion that the labour dispute at the Ombilin mines did not boil down to a conflict between the labourers and the manager, but was a struggle for power between the two competing trade unions. The local government refused to comply with the SBTI-SOBSI demands to replace the manager, as such a move would just be window-dressing and would not solve the problem. The statement by the mayor of Sawahlunto was certainly intended to protect his ally, the manager.
Sjahbuddin Sutan Radjo Nando, as he argued that the real problem was not the manager, but the lack of the capital and mining machinery. The meeting was interrupted by members of the SBTI-KBSI who wanted to convey nine demands to the member of parliament. To underline its point, the SBTI-KBSI was successful in mobilizing 1,300 labourers in front of the office of the mayor of Sawahlunto bearing red and white flags and placards.

The SBTI-KBSI had to be heard in the investigation of the Ombilin coal-mines. The problem of the manager of Ombilin had to be solved fairly. The KBSI was a non-party trade union, and its genuine purpose was to fight for the interests of the labourers. The manager, Sjahbuddin, was still needed by the Ombilin mine. Support given by the local SBTI to facing the decline of mine had to be appreciated. The SBTI-KBSI had 1,500 members out of a total of 2,100 labourers (Haluan 31-12-1953).

The delegation was led by Gultom, Munir, and Salimun. They read aloud nine demands, concerning such matters as the problem of health care, a premium for underground miners, the need for capital for developing the mine, a dormitory for retired labourers, and matters of leisure and entertainment. As this trade union saw it, the labour dispute had to be solved on the basis of the wishes of the majority of the labourers (Haluan, 31-12-1953). After the first wave of demonstrators left the mayor's office, they returned to the mine. They were then followed by a second group from the SBTI-KBSI, which came to convey the same demands.

What we see here is in the first place, a shift of power from the SBTI-SOBSI to the SBTI-KBSI. In the strike of May 1953, the SBTI-SOBSI was able to mobilize 1,200 supporters or about 57 percent of labourers to take strike action. But within seven months, half of the labourers had shifted allegiance from the SBTI-SOBSI to the SBTI-KBSI. After the strikes were over the leaders of the SBTI-KBSI were more concerned than ever in their efforts to advocate improvements in the working and living conditions of the labourers. Their concern was indicated in their nine demands to the government. The action showed their political opponents and the labourers that the SBTI-KBSI could indeed represent the interest of labourers. “Could” is the operative word because it did not mean that the leaders of the SBTI-KBSI already had deep roots among the labourers. The process of the mobilization of the labourers to join up and become members of the SBTI-KBSI was achieved through the manipulation of their power, intimidation, and social sanctions by the leaders. As we have explained before, the SBTI-KBSI had stopped the distribution of food to the strikers from the co-operative shop. In the workplace, the overseers or the leaders of the SBTI-KBSI intimidated and used social sanctions against those labourers who were members of the SBTI-SOBSI (Sudono M. Wiguno 15-4-1996). In other words control of labour by overseers was used as political control.

The power of SBTI-SOBSI did indeed begin to weaken, because some supporters did move to the SBTI-KBSI. But outside the mine, the main support came from political leaders from Jakarta. When the members of parliament visited the mine, their visit strengthened the position of the SBTI-SOBSI. This can be seen by a big meeting that the leaders of the SBTI-SOBSI had with them. The meeting was attended by the members of the SBTI-SOBSI accompanied by their families, the Barisan Tani Indonesia, and members of the PKI from
outside the town. About 800 participants attended that meeting which bolstered the power of the PKI in Sawahlunto.35

While all this was going on, the mine itself was unsafe. In some places sabotage, like the destruction of mine tools and of the electricity plant at the village of Salak, was not infrequent (Haluan, 12-3-1954). These acts of sabotage were carried out by members of the SBTI-SOBSI, who were dissatisfied with the existing conditions. Some of the actions taken caused a stagnation in production. It was difficult for the overseers to control the labourers because the latter were influenced by their foremen who were members of the SBTI-SOBSI.36

As it wore on, the problem of the labour conflict finally became a topic of discussion at the national level. This was triggered off by a suggestion by Werdojo that the government should take action in the conflict between labourers and manager. His conclusion differed absolutely from the results of the meeting in Sawahlunto between himself, the local government officials, and the leaders of trade unions. Now he completely changed tack and said that the labour dispute was not a conflict between two trade unions, but between labourers and the manager. He claimed that the manager had violated the decision of the central P4 issued at 7 October 1953, about the reinstatement of the labourers dismissed. The manager had ordered them to work at the places which were unsuited for their skill. Therefore, what it all boiled down to was that Werdojo wanted the government to replace the manager (Haluan, 14-5-1953; Antara, 13-5-1954).

Werdojo's suggestions provoked a strong reaction from the manager himself. He rejected Werdojo's statement out of hand and explained why he did not want to negotiate with the leaders of the SBTI-SOBSI. In his secret letter to parliament, the manager explained that negotiations with the SBTI-SOBSI were too emotional, which made it impossible for them to reach any final decisions and the leaders of the SBTI-SOBSI had distributed pamphlets that had driven him into a corner.

The manager was supported by his political allies who included M. Zen Ibrahim, member of the PSI at Sawahlunto.38 Using the pseudonym "Budi Hati", he countered the comments of Werdojo in an article entitled "Tambang Ombilin: sekitar Siulan K. Werdojo (SOBSI) (The Ombilin mine: about dancing to the tune K. Werndojo) (Haluan, 28-5-1954). He also sent letters to the newspapers of the Masyumi and the PSI, Pedoman and Indonesia Raya in Jakarta, explaining the causes behind the conflict between the trade unions.39

35 In its editorial Haluan, a local newspaper which supported the Masyumi and the PSI parties, called the action of the members of parliament "hendak sepit" ('one-sided'). Haluan 31-12-1953.

36 SPL Tobing was an overseer at that time. He told me that after the strikes, he found it very difficult to keep control of the labourers, because they obeyed their mandors rather than him. Also the labourers were very daring in protesting for whatever they wanted. Interview with SPL Tobing, 8-8-1996.

37 PTBA-UPO Archives, letter of the manager Sjahbuddin to the Head of the Section F, Emon Bratawidjaja, 31-12-1953/no.141/rhs. See also Penerangan, 30-12-1953.

38 He was the head of labour of the Sawahlunto branch of the PSI. He did not work at the mine, but was an entrepreneur, running a restaurant in that town. See Haluan, 12-12-1953; 28-5-1954.

39 PTBA-UPO Archives, letter of M. Zen Ibrahim to the manager, Sjahbuddin, 26-5-1953.
In his article, he defended the manager's policy and rejected Werdojo's suggestion that the manager be replaced. He explained that the SBTI-KBSI was strong enough with its 1,500 members to maintain the position of the manager. He claimed that Werdojo had lied in order to support a small group of SOBSI leaders in Sawahlunto. Besides this, he also explained how the leaders of the SOBSI had engineered matters so that Nursali, the leaders of the PKI in the district of Solok could become the general secretary of the SBTI-SOBSI at Sawahlunto. In this respect Nursali was supported by Sugino M. Wiguno (Hatuian, 28-5-1954).

Polemics poured forth in a torrent. Nursali immediately responded to the article in Hatuian (Hatuian, 15-6-1954; 16-6-1954). He argued that the manager should be dismissed for various reasons: he had acted arbitrarily, had dismissed two labourers without due cause, had forced the labourers to pay contributions by deducting the amount of the fees from their wages for the months of February, March, and April, and had fired the 383 labourers who were on strike. The manager had not received seven labourers who wanted to return to work, but had merely assigned them to work which was unsuitable to their skills.

The replacement of the socialist manager was not the only topic of debate. The dominant role of Islamic parties in the local council and the replacement of the socialist mayor of Sawahlunto were also high on the agenda. In July 1954, the PKI leaders organized members of political parties who were opposed to the PSI, which was dominant at provincial governmental level (Hatuian, 19-7-1954). The issue now was no longer just about protests between the labourers and the manager, it had expanded to a conflict between competing political parties, between the PSI and the Masyumi versus the PKI (Hatuian, 17-7-1954).

The conflict influenced the political situation in the mining town during the run-up to the General Elections of 1955. Recriminations between members of different trade unions and political parties, both inside or outside the mine were a matter of routine, especially between the dominant parties, the Masyumi and the PKI (Interview with Pak Zulkarnain, 12-3 1996). The PKI attracted mass support from the Javanese miners, while the support for the Masyumi came from local people whether they worked at the mine or not. In the General Elections of 1955, the PKI ended second in Sawahlunto as runner-up after the Masyumi (Table VI.2).

The problem of replacing the manager, Sjahbuddin, was now back on the agenda. In 1956 a meeting was held in Bukittinggi attended by representatives from trade unions, local officials and the Minister of Mining and Industries in person (Interview with Soedono M. Wiguno, 12-5 1996). Each trade union submitted their candidate for the position of manager. But neither of them was accepted, because local officials and political leaders preferred to install a neutral person as manager. Finally Baharson was appointed, because he was seen as a person who was expected to be acceptable to all parties, including the SBTI-SOBSI. He was not active in politics and was from a rich family, so that it was considered impossible that he would be led into the temptation to be corrupt (Interview with Soedono M. Wiguno, 15-4-1996).

We have seen how the strikes and negotiations were deus ex machina which revealed the political competition between various factions in the mining society. As far as the miners were concerned, their involvement in formal politics was to fight for an improvement in their living conditions. The mandors, in addition to seeking to improve their living conditions, saw their struggle through the trade union as a protest against exploitation by non-Javanese overseers and against the corruption such as the bribing of overseers to get work overtime. In the meantime, political leaders had found their way into the mine, looking for support from the labourers to strengthen their political power. In the following section, the mining society becomes an arena in which not only political leaders, and officials, but also the military...
5. Ethnic and Political Divisions and Labour Control

After the Dutch left Sawahlunto in December 1949, the management of the Ombilin coal-mines devolved into the hands of Indonesians (Haiwan, 31-12-1949). Under Indonesian management, the system for appointing the manager was revised. Until 1960, this system was based on the recommendations from below, made by the majority of the mining community and local officials, and then legitimized from above, first by the Minister of Economy and Industry and then by the Minister of Mining and Energy (Interview with Sudono M. Wiguno 16-4-1995). During the period 1950-1960, two of the managers, namely Sjahbuddin Sutan Radjo Nando (1950-1956) and P. A. Darami (1958-1960) were appointed from the dominant political parties in West Sumatra, the PSI and the Masyumi. One other manager, Baharson (1956-1958), was not from a dominant party but was appointed on the basis of local political considerations (Appendix 2). These three managers were former students of the *Mijnbouw School*, Minangkabau, and had a long experience as mine overseers during the Dutch period and the Japanese occupation.  

The higher and middle levels of the mining society were dominated by Minangkabau. Some positions were filled by Batak and people from other ethnic groups, but they were very few in number. The high level jobs were held by former students of the *Mijnbouw School*, and the middle level by former students of the Senior Mining Technical School (*Sekolah Teknik Tambang Menengah*, STTM), which had been established at Sawahlunto in 1953. This school was the Indonesian successor of the *Mijnbouw School*. Priority in admissions was given mainly to people from Sumatra, but by chance most of its intake was Minangkabau. The curriculum of this school was not very different from that of the Dutch *Mijnbouw School*, consisting of three departments: electrical, civil, and mining engineering, and the duration of the courses was three years. The lectures were given by seniors from the *Mijnbouw School*, combining theoretical and practical subjects. Accommodation was free of charge and the students were even given pocket money for the time they were doing their practical work.

Their appointment had also been made partly because of the shortage of a skilled staff to replace the Dutch engineers. The Indonesian government had just established a mining academy in Bandung in 1949 in order to fill the vacancies in the mining companies. See Antara 18-11-1949.

Next to Sawahlunto, an STTM had also been established at Tanjung Enim to fill the vacancies for skilled labourers at the middle level at the Bukit Asam coal-mines. At Sawahlunto, this school continued to function until 1968. But it was closed during the PRRI rebellion. In 1961 it was re-opened. After the 1960s the number of children of the former Javanese contract labourers attending the school increased. Interview with Bambang Soeslistio, 20-4-1995. Most information on the STTM was obtained from interviews with former students of the STTM in Sawahlunto, Sicincin/Pariaman, and Jakarta; among other were Julius, 27-5-1995, Timbul Sidabutar 29-5-1995, Alinoer 30-5-1995; RH Smith alias Om Iyik 7-6-1995, Bulkhaimi 13-6-1995; Sjahbuddin Ali 14-6-1995. Rusli Sutan Radjo Ameh 16-6-1995, Zulkarnain 16-3-1996, and SPL Tobing 12-8-1996.

In 1956, the pocket money for the first year student was thirty rupiahs, for the second year forty rupiahs, and for the third year sixty rupiahs. Interview with Sjahbuddin Ali 14-6-1995.
Like the students of Mijnbouw School, the students were trained as miners under supervision of the foremen and the overseers. Hence, the process of introduction to the world of the mine and the world of the miners had already taken place before they were appointed as overseer. Sjahbuddin Ali, a former student of the STTM in 1957, remembered how astonished he was that he could learn so much from old mandors.

I really learned from them. I really respected the experience of the old mandors and the miners. Besides discipline, they understood all there was to know about coal and the situation in the mine. They knew how they had to cut surface of coal very quickly, although they had had little formal education and some were still illiterate. (Interview with Pak Sjahbuddin Ali 14-6-1995)

Like students from the Mijnbouw School, upon graduation they were supposed to become junior overseers (opzichter) or 'sinder' in the local terminology. This school produced fifteen students in the first graduating class in 1957 (Hatuan, 4-4-1957). This number was only 50 percent of the total number of the students who enrolled in the first year, because many of them had dropped out before finishing their study. The very strict military discipline and intensive course work were the main reasons for giving up. The lower level of the mining society was comprised mostly of Minangkabau and some of the second generation of the former Javanese, the children of contract labourers. In general, these people worked as clerks and foremen. Gradually social mobility began to make an impact among the young generation of the former contract labourers. They gained a higher social status through education. The establishment of the Javanese school or sekolah Jawa for the children of the contract labourers in the 1920s had opened the door to their advancement. Politically the Javanese clerks who had worked at the central office, had thrown in their lot with the local people during the Revolution and preferred to follow their bosses, be they Minangkabau or Batak. They became members of the PSI and Masyumi trade unions rather than the PKI trade unions. By contrast these Javanese clerks and foremen who were directly involved in production became members of the PKI trade union.

43 Original text: 'Saya betul-betul belajar dari mereka. Saya mengakui pengalaman mandor dan penambang yang sudah tua. Saya betul-betul mengakui, selain sangat disiplin, mereka mengerti seluk-beluk arang dan situasi di dalam tambang. Mereka mengerti bagaimana mendandang arang dengan cepat, walaupun pendidikan mereka rendah dan malah ada yang buta huruf'.

44 The word 'sinder' certainly derived from the Dutch language, "ziender" or from "opzichter" and "opziener" which means foremen with a task to watching, keeping an eye on things.

45 For example, Rusli Sutan Radjo Ameh said only six of the six-teenth students from the electrical department graduated in 1956, and Sjahbuddin Ali noted that five of twenty-four students from the mine department graduated in 1960. Interview with Sjahbuddin Ali 14-6-1996; Rusli Sutan Radjo Ameh 16-6-1995.

46 Interview with Pak Kasno S. Hartono, the son of a former contract labourer, 24-3-1996.
The last and most important group were the miners. They were mostly Javanese and were staunch members of the PKI. They were divided into two categories: 1) those who had been appointed as civil servants, and received a monthly salary; 2) those who received a day wage and worked under a contract for three years. The bulk of the labourers were former convicts, contract or free labourers. In the memories of their former overseers, these people worked in a highly disciplined fashion and were professional miners. Others had been recruited from Java, especially in 1953 when the company was suffering from a shortage of miners, but this group was the first to be dismissed when the strikes broke out. The company had been forced to resort to the recruitment of the labourers from Java because most of the local villagers were unwilling to commit themselves to working for a long period in the mine. They preferred to work only for a short-term, especially to earn some ready money when they were feeling the pinch economically. Therefore in 1953, the manager recruited the sons of the former Javanese contract labourers at Sawahlunto, and then about thirty unmarried and forty married labourers from Central Java through the Kantor Pengadaan Tenaga Kerja (KPT) or Labour Recruitment Office, to make up the required number.

In essence the system of labour recruitment had not changed since the colonial period. Labourers were recruited through a recruitment agency like the KPT, or through family ties, as well as through a recruitment agent sent out by the company. Those who were contracted had to undergo medical check-ups, then they signed a contract for three years. According to Pak Paidjo, a miner from Kutoarjo, Central Java, who was recruited at that time recalled that his interest in working in the Ombilin mines was motivated by the promises for a better life and high wages.

Most of the newly recruited labourers worked in the underground mine. Most of them were unable to hold out in the mine for a long period of time, because of the heavy work and low wages. Moreover, the subterranean world was still seen as unfit for human beings and provoked horrible fears.

Table VI.4 Development of Labour Force, 1949-1959

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1949 (December)</td>
<td>1,208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>1,526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>1,565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>2,001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>2,214</td>
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<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>1,371</td>
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<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>2,064</td>
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<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>2,026</td>
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<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>2,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>2,088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>1,946</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: PTBA-UPOCollection, the yearly report of the PTBA Ombilin 1995.

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47 Mining Archives, Box IX/SBTI; Interview with Pak Paidjo at the village of Durian, 12-5-1995.
These were the reasons why most of them ran away and tried to find other jobs at the plantations both in West Sumatra itself, in Riau, and in North Sumatra.  

Table VI.4 shows the total number of workers in the mine, including higher, middle, lower levels and the labourers. In 1949 there were only 1,208. With the passing of the years this number increased to 2,214 in 1953 as new labourers were recruited. After 1953, the number decreased to 1,371, because many labourers were dismissed by the manager as punishment for their involvement in the strike. Between 1955-1958 the total number of labourers remained fairly constant. But in the years 1958, 1959 and in 1960, the total number of labourers dropped each year, because many labourers, especially non-Javanese, left the mine and joined the PRRI.

The mining society was divided along ethnic and political lines, which also determined social relations and social control among its members. The natural corollary of this was a tendency to collaborate on the basis of ethnicity between the Javanese foremen and the miners from the same island. In the 1920s the foremen joined the miners and local people mount a protest against the Dutch exploitation, now they struggled jointly as a Javanese community exploited by non-Javanese overseers and managers. The PKI, and the ideology of the class struggle, served as a means to channel their grievances. The Javanese foremen cast the nets wider and made links with the leaders of the PKI to strengthen their power inside the mine. In the eyes of the labourers, the PKI was a vehicle through which they could struggle to improve their living and working conditions.

Besides having formal organizations that they could join, the labourers belong to various social and cultural associations. These associations functioned to create various forms of solidarity and more importantly, served as a medium through which to mediate the political actions of the miners, cutting right across the social hierarchy of the mining society. Important socio-cultural activities were in this respect Ketoprak, Kuda Kepcmg, Kecapi  Sunda, Randai, Perkumpulan Kesenian Tambang Arang (Peta) and a Kercong group; a sport association such as soccer club, and a Pencak Silat group. There was also an association for those with religious interests (Haluan 28-5-1954; 15, 22-2-1957; Interview with Bulkhaini 14-6-1996). Some of these had already been formed before Independence and others after.

For an example, the Pencak Silat Association of Sawahlunto was formed in 1952, and led by P.A. Darami, the deputy manager of the Ombilin mines (Sumatera Tengah 1952:17). Far from confining its activities to sport, this association also had a political purpose. Informally it was intended to be an instrument to mobilize people to become members of the Masyumi. Yet another example of an association with a dual purpose was the Peta, a musical group which was formed by the company (Haluan, 17-10-1951). The Peta was formed to channel and develop hobbies among the people from different social groups within the mining society, and functioned as a form of relaxation for them. Its activities were supported financially by the company, and it staged various activities such as drama performances (Haluan, 17-10-1951). Most members of the Peta also became members of the SBTI-KBSI.

These associations also helped to solve economic difficulties. Pak Suwardi Kisut,  

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48 For example, only ten out of forty married labourers who were recruited in 1953, still live at Sawahlunto. Interview with Pak Paidjo, 12-5-1995.

49 Pak Suwardi Kisut started working at the mine at the workshop in 1953, and was then moved to the underground mine. He has ten brothers and sisters, some of them live in Medan as workers in the plantations. This is a big family because his father, Pak Wagio, has more than sixty
of Pak Wagjo who was born at Sawahlunto in 1933, saw the benefits of the association as follows:

I was a member of the *Keroncong* musical group. Our group played either at the *Gedung Pertemuan Buruh* in Sawahlunto or was hired by people who wanted to organize an *alek* (a marriage feast), a ceremonial meal, *sunatan*, or *turun mandi* either at the *tangsi* or in the villages. Apart from making many friends, it also helped to solve the problems encountered in our lives. We accumulated capital and sometimes borrowed from *tengkulak* (money lenders), to make frying pans, knives, and tin canes. And then we would sell them. (Interview with Pak Suwardi Kisut 11-6-1995)

There were no changes in the way that work was organized after Independence. The Indonesian government simply followed the labour regulations it inherited from the Dutch period. A general regulation concerning working hours, wages, and social benefits was set up by the Hatta cabinet in 1948. This was valid for all kinds of work, in plantations, or in the manufacturing, and mining industries. There was no clear distinction made between working hours at the mines or in the factories (*Ikhtisar Perburuhan* 21-8-1956:12-7).

Within the mining industry itself, labour regulations on working hours varied. In the Ombilin coal-mines the working day was eight hours, whereas at the Bukit Asam coal-mines it was only six hours (*Ikhtisar Perburuhan* 21-8-1956:12-7). This moved a member of the parliament, K. Werdojo, who visited both mines in 1951, to say that labour conditions in the Ombilin coal-mines were far from satisfactory (*Ikhtisar Perburuhan* 21-8-1956:12-7). He said that eight hours per day was too gruelling for the Ombilin miners because they had to work underground. The government should make a distinction between miners who worked underground and those who worked in open pit mines. In the Ombilin coal-mines labourers had to walk about five kilometres from one underground corridor to another, without using masks to protect them from the omnipresent fire-damp. Those who worked underground received no extra food rations and the lack of medical care stared them in the face daily.

Bad working conditions were to be found everywhere in Indonesia. The straitened economic condition of the country, coupled with political instability, created serious problems for the people. The situation for the Ombilin coal-miners was even more complicated. The first great difficulty was that the town of Sawahlunto could not supply sufficient rice, which meant that this basic commodity had to be imported. Secondly, the local economy was on a continuous

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grandchildren and 100 great-grandchildren. At present, the members of this family live in the village of Tanjung Sari, forming a small hamlet there.

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down-slide, especially after the periods of political turbulence and unrest, and also due to the
flooding which occurred at the onset of the yearly rainy season. As the result of this, the
harvest failed. Therefore, the price of rice was usually higher than in other places in West
Sumatra. These conditions deteriorated even further, because the traders at the market of
Sawahlunto always had a free hand in setting the price of basic goods.

The poor working and living conditions were criticized by Sugino M. Wiguno in the
SOBSFs magazine, Bebas in 1952. He wrote that in 1952 a labourer received 2.70 rupiahs a
day or at the most, 3.90 rupiahs if he worked overtime. To work overtime was not easy,
because the labourers had to bribe their overseers by giving gifts such as chicken or something
similar (PTBA-UPO Archives, Bebas 1952:18). Compared to the wages paid during the
colonial period, these earnings seem rather high. But they were not hardly enough, because the
price of rice was very high, 2.45 rupiahs for one kilogram. Under the Dutch government, a
labourer received 35 cents a day, while the price of rice was only 6 cents for one kilogram.

The manager was not unaware of this state of affairs, but he was unable to solve these
problems, because he was also dependent on the policies laid down by the various state agencies
at the national level, such as the Minister of the Financial and Economic Affairs and the Head
of the Mining Office. In 1952, the manager, Sjahbuddin Sutan Radjo Nando, had warned the Head
of the Mining Office that any delay in paying wages to the labourers would lead to protests.
Whatever he may have thought personally, the Head of the Mining office in his turn depended
on the Minister of the Financial and Economic Affairs.

During the period of Liberal Democracy, control by the state and the management was
not as strict as it had been under the colonial state. There were no military patrols nor were
policemen employed, and there were no tangsi caretakers whose task was to supervise the
activities of the miners and escort them to the mine, largely to prevent them from absconding or
avoiding work. The management did impose sanctions on labourers who did not comply with
the work discipline by cutting their wages or moving them to heavier work. But in reality, the
sanctions that the management imposed were not related simply to the social relationship in
production process in the capitalist culture, they were also influenced by political and cultural
considerations. Political differences between the manager, overseers, and the miners, the
influence of local political developments, and patron-client relationships were determining
factors in imposing work discipline. Examples will be given when we discuss trade unions,
strikes, and the PRRI in the following section. Examples given here will show plainly how work
discipline and sanctions were imposed not only by management, overseers, and mandors, but
also by political leaders outside the mine, especially the communist leaders, the PRRI leaders,
and the military. Control of labour also implied political control.

However, the role of overseers and foremen played an overriding role in determining
work discipline and the attendance rate of miners. The form of work discipline they imposed
depended on a great many considerations.

\[51\] Sumatera Tengah 1954, no.125/IV: 3; Haliuan 24, 28-1-1957.

\[52\] Mining Archives, Box IX, SBTI. Letter of Sjahbuddin to the Head of Mining office, 12-8-
1952/43.
The following account given by an overseer shows us that in practice, work discipline was also based on patron-client relationships.

We had to impose discipline on them [miners]. Our target was production, wasn't it? But, how... ya... (he takes a deep breath)... We are all of us Indonesians. How could we impose discipline upon them, ordering subordinates to come on time and not to absent themselves. We could not demand too much from them, because the guaranties of a livelihood given by the company were far from adequate. Although I knew they were absent, I did not do anything about it. I even had worked my own subordinates on my dry-fields, to give them additional income. The 1950s and 1960s were very difficult. Life was very harsh. My salary as an overseer was the same as a quarter of gram of gold, how on earth could we manage to eat. 53 (Interview with Timbul Sidabutar 2-6-1995)

When economic conditions deteriorated, labour discipline and labour control became more flexible. In order to survive, the overseers had to look for additional income outside the mine. They used local economic resources, and through patron-client relationships, discipline to work in the mines was regulated to be more flexible. This social relationship benefited both overseers and the miners. However, simultaneously the overseers also controlled the miners more strictly to ensure that their attempts to produce as much coal as possible, which provided the overseers and their subordinates with a premium, were successful. Hence, working over time was essential. But working overtime was not as easy as it had been in the booming period of coal. Here, again, the role of overseers was decisive. As has been explained before, to get work overtime the miners including the foremen had to bribe the overseers by giving gifts in kind such as a chicken or other food stuffs to the overseers (Bebas, 1952:18).

Working underground was no longer a matter of dread, especially for the Javanese community who had now been resident at Sawahlunto for a long time. They were, in the eyes of their overseers, professional miners with a high work discipline (Sjahbuddin Ali, Timbul Sidabutar 1-5-1995). Their repeated statement 'How... ya, we did not feel right, if we did not go to the mine, it was just run-of-the-mill' (bagaimana ya, tidak enak kalau tidak ke tambang, sudah biasa), is an expression which demonstrates that the world of the mine was already integrated into their daily life.

The work discipline of the miners was also determined by other considerations. Because of the declining economic development of coal, low wages, irregular payment, and the insufficient guaranties of social security offered by the company, the miners were forced to look

for additional income outside the mine. Here, associations were used to solve economic problems—something to which Pak Suwardi Kisu resorted (Interview with Pak Suwardi Kisu, 14-8-1995). Members of one shift collaborated with each other, and they refused to mention who was absent.

Apart from this struggle to make ends meet, work discipline was also linked to political factors, mainly imposed by the overseers and foremen, and at a great distance by political leaders outside the mine. The Minangkabau managers and overseers did not have enough power to control the labourers completely, because they were unable to overcome the power of the Javanese foremen which was bolstered by their political allies.

From the narratives of the miners we can trace how the foremen had imposed social sanctions on the miners by isolating and repressing them both inside and outside the mine in order to reinforce their loyalty. Alliances between the foremen and the PKI leaders manipulated the miners for the sake of the economic and political interests of the former.

So what we see here is that the control of labour had many layers: managers, overseers, foremen, and, at the bottom, the miners. Besides this, control of labourers and work discipline was defined by local and national political leaders and the military, especially after the Central Military Force (APRI) arrived to the mine in order to suppress the PRRI rebellion.


The PRRI (1958-1960) or Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia was established on 15 February 1958 as a protest against domination of the regional economy by the central government by a group known as the Dewan Banteng. The Dewan Banteng emerged from the Banteng Division of the Armed Forces under the command of Colonel Ismail Lengah. It was in fact an economic planning board which aimed to develop the West Sumatran economy (Amal 1992:80). In December 1956 the Dewan Banteng took over the provincial government in West Sumatra. The transition was bloodless, largely, it seems, because the administrators had chosen not to oppose the Dewan. Many of them indeed clearly favoured its programme.

The initial aims of the Dewan Banteng had changed, shifting from economics to politics, especially after the Masyumi and the PSI had lost power in parliament after the General Elections of 1955. Since then, protests had been regularly voiced at the national level; the most frequent targets of their criticism being the central government, Sukarno and the PKI.

Alarmed by the strength of the resentment and the following war by the Dewan Banteng, the central government sent the Indonesian Republic Military Force or APRI (Angkatan Perang Republik Indonesia) under a Javanese General, Ahmad Yani, to suppress the PRRI in 1959. From the moment the army landed, the followers of the PRRI became guerrillas and took to the jungle, but this situation did not last long. Finding the lack of food and other essentials intolerable, many of its adherents were unable to stand the privation, and surrendered to APRI. By 1960 the rebellion had been completely put down.

The PRRI rebellion was a conflict in which the Masyumi and the PSI united against the PKI and Sukarno. The mining society had already compartmentalized into conflicting trade unions: with the PKI ranged against the PSI and Masyumi trade unions. But here the crucial question is, what influence did the PRRI have on the mining society?
After the General Elections of 1955, the leaders of the Dewan Banteng like Simbolon, Ahmad Husin, Ismail Lengah, and Major Karim Saleh discussed the imbalance of the economic development between Java and the Outer Islands, including the development of the Ombilin coal-mines in their considerations (Haiuan, 9,11-9-1956). After the Dewan Banteng had been established and having taken over the local government, its leaders set to work to build up the local economy and win mass sympathy.

Seen from local economic interest, the mine was very important. Therefore, the representatives of the Dewan Banteng visited the mine and encouraged the labourers to increase production (Haiuan, 9-2-1957). Their encouragement was appreciated and production of coal indeed increased from 75,319 tons in 1956 to 90,912 tons in 1957 (Appendix 1). The Dewan replaced the socialist manager Sjahbuddin Sutan Radjo Nando by Baharson, a person who was politically neutral.\(^{54}\) Sjahbuddin himself shifted his loyalties to the Dewan Banteng and was active as mediator between the leaders of the PRRI and Baharson, being especially prominent devising the strategy and tactics which would make the best use of the Ombilin coal-mines as a source of manpower and financial resources (Interview with Zulkarnain, 16-3-1996)

Under the new manager, the leaders of the Dewan Banteng began to visit the mine regularly, unflagging in their efforts to attract support from the miners. The head of the economic board of the Dewan, Major Karim Saleh, visited Sawahlunto in January 1957 to campaign for support for plans to develop the regional economy. In a meeting with 1,500 labourers, he said that the leaders at the central level robbed regional economic resources to serve central government interests (Haiuan, 2-2-1957). The meeting was successful, because it ended with a declaration in which the labourers stated that they supported the Dewan Banteng.\(^{55}\)

The Dewan Banteng gradually revealed its power in the months which followed. Support came from various sides -- not only from large political parties like the Masyumi and the PSI, but also from smaller political parties and mass organizations like the Batusangkar branch of the PNI, and the Solok branch of the PKI and its mass organizations like Lekra, Gerwani and SOBSI (Chapter VII-3; Haiuan, 9,11-2-1957). In adopting this attitude, the PKI Solok branch took its own line independently of the general policy line of the PKI in Padang (Haiuan, 8-2-1957).

The visit of the leaders of the PRRI and the Dewan Banteng consolidated the power of the leaders of the SBTI-KBSI and the SBII trade unions. With the exception of the PKI and its mass organizations, all the other political parties and their mass organizations supported the Dewan. Therefore, the PKI and its appendage the SBTI-SOBSI found themselves squeezed between the Masyumi and the PSI which were

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\(^{54}\) Baharson was a former student of the Mijnbouw School. He was a politically neutral person and a businessman. His choice was intended to remove the bad impression of corrupt managers who had been propagated by the leaders of the SBTI-SOBSI. Haiuan, 12-1-1957. Interview with Sudono M. Wiguno, 16-4-1996.

\(^{55}\) The declaration was made by the representative of the labourers, Maridin, a Minangkabau local leader of the Masyumi Party. A few days later, the same support came from the leader of the SBTI-KBSI, J. Gultom. Haiuan, 8-2-1957.
supporters of the Dewan Banteng (Huluan, 8-2-1957). To break through their isolation, they tried to make contacts with PKI leaders outside the mining town both at local, regional and national levels (Huluan, 8-2-1957). However, their efforts did not bear any fruit. Apparently thinking discretion the better part of the valour, the communist leaders kept a low profile for a while without taking any decision. Under such conditions, the communist mass organizations were practically impotent and one by one the labourers began to move their allegiance from the SBTI-SOBSI to the SBTI-KBSI.

During 1957, people at Sawahlunto had plainly announced their sympathy for the efforts being made by the Dewan. Therefore, when the PRRI rebellion broke out, most Minangkabau and Bataks who worked at the central office of the company were engaged in the rebellion. Students from the senior high school and from the STTM were drafted in for military training. They were being prepared to assist the PRRI troops. Around thirty-five students of the STTM underwent military training to become a corps in the PRRI army (Interview with Zulkarnain, 16-3-1996). Intensive contacts between the mine and the leaders of the PRRI were set in motion. The deputy manager, P.A. Darami, a member of the Masyumi, was very active in attending meetings together with the leaders of the Dewan Banteng in Padang (Interview with Zulkarnain, 16-3-1996).

Until the arrival of a central military force at the beginning of 1959, it seemed that the Dewan Banteng and the Masyumi and the PSI were dominant. The leaders of the PKI and SBTI-SOBSI had their hands ties. They found themselves in a terrible situation. When the PRRI broke out in 1958, many of them were imprisoned by the PRRI leaders in the gaol at Sawahlunto (Interview with Pak Ibnu 10-4-1995). Ronojudo, the leader of the SBTI-SOBSI, was burned alive by the PRRI army in revenge for his leading role in the strikes of 1953 (Interview with Pak Ibnu, 10-4-1995).

This situation did not last long. The communists were released when the F Company (Kompi F) took over the town and took charge of the mine till the APRI arrived. F Company was a division of the Third Regiment of the PRRI troops under the command of Ahmad Husin (Interview with Pak Hasan Basri, 16-4-1996). Its army was posted in the village of Durian, together with the members of APRI. This Company F had twenty members, consisting of men from Minangkabau, Menado, Java, and Sunda. The company had dissociated itself from the PRRI troops, because it predicted that the PRRI would fail in its endeavours. In some respects they were also disagreed with the policy of the PRRI. Some people suspected that some of the members of F Company had communist sympathies (Interview with Bulkhaini, 15-3-1995).

On March 1959, the APRI marched into the town without encountering any resistance (Interview with Zulkarnain, 16-3-1996). The supporters of the PRRI had already left the town. Compared to other towns in West Sumatra, Sawahlunto was the only place where the arrival of the APRI was warmly welcomed, in particular by the Javanese, and the members of the F Company. The Javanese saw the coming of the APRI from Java as a

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56 It was hard - going and difficult for the Javanese to leave the town and to follow the guerrillas in the jungles like other followers of the PRRI, because they had no village to fall back on and the mine was the only source of income. Therefore, they remained at Sawahlunto. Interview with Pak Rahmat, 12-5-1995.

57 A big party was organized by the Javanese leaders of the SBTI-SOBSI in the village of Durian. According to the information still recalled by local people, the Javanese bent over backward
liberation freeing them from fear of attacks by PRRI supporters (Interview with Bulkhaini, 13-3-1995).

The Javanese were particularly assiduous in putting about anti-PRRI propaganda. Soon afterwards, a big anti-PRRI rally was held which was attended by 5,000 people. They were comprised of Barisan Tani Indonesia (BTI) members, labourers, the Bupati, and socio-political organisations from both inside and outside the town (Harian Rakyat 9-1-1959). The cooperative attitude displayed by these people to the APRI calmed down the atmosphere in the town, making Sawahlunto the only town in West Sumatra without a curfew (Antara, 1-3-1959).

The arrival of the APRI weakened the power of the Masyumi, the PSI and the other parties which sympathized with the rebellion. There was not much they could do. Their strength was dwindling, because some of their members, reading the writing on the wall had already left the town. The manager, P.A.Darami, Zubir Munaf, the leader of SBII, and three other leaders of the Masyumi were arrested by the APRI. They were suspected of helping the PRRI troops in their efforts to counter the APRI advance (Interview with Zulkarnain, 16-3-1996).

The followers of the PRRI at Sawahlunto were not lying idle and were doing their best to make secret contacts with PRRI adherents outside the town. The company had given the PRRI various forms of help such as money, clothes, food, and medicines through a mediator, E. Speering. Kamisan PS, leader of the Masyumi at Sawahlunto also acted as mediator between the PRRI army in the jungle and the manager in terms of negotiating to protect the mines from any attacks by the PRRI army (Interview with Bulkhaini, 13-3-1995).

The arrival of the APRI once again led to many changes in the socio-political conditions of the mining society. Firstly, some labourers were appointed as members of the Organisasi Keamanan Rakyat, or OKR (People Security Organization), or the Organisasi Pertahanan Rakyat or OPR (People Defensive Organization) to help the APRI protect people from attacks by the PRRI army. People volunteering for this were given of absence from work, but they were still paid by the company.

The members of the OKR and the OPR were armed and trained by the members of the APRI, drawn from Battalion 439 of the Diponegoro Division that had taken over Sawahlunto. In 1959, the battalion was led by Lieutenant Djohan Rivai, who later became a
to welcome the APRI. They slaughtered a buffalo, and prepared various kinds of dishes.

E. Speering was an Indo-European who was working at the Ombilin forest exploitation in Lubuk Alung, near Padang. Interview with Zulkarnain, 16-3-1996.

Unfortunately, no information is available about exactly how many labourers were recruited to become members of these organizations. On 8 June 1959 Djohan Rivai came to an agreement with the manager to take eight miners to be members of the OKR with the task of protecting 'APRI defence posts' surrounding of the village of Sijantang. At the same time, about sixty labourers were following military training to become members of the OPR. Most of them were Javanese plus some villagers from poorer settlements like Sijantang and Kubang. Many labourers wanted to become member of the organization, but their applications were rejected by the manager because the mine was threatened by a labour shortage. PTBA-UPO Archives, Instruksi Pembentukan Organisasi Keamanan Rakyat oleh Komando Operasi 17 Agustus no. Instr, 9-7-1958.
famous communist leader in West Sumatra. Rivai made an agreement with the manager, P.A Darami, to be able to recruit labourers to become members of these organizations.60

The arrival of the APRI reinforced solidarity and bolstered power among the Javanese people of Sawahlunto. They were concentrated in the village of Durian, because the APRI predicted the PRRI would launch attacks from the village of Sikalang.61 Thus, the presence of the APRI from Java, the involvement of the Javanese miners in the OPR and OKR, and concentration of the living quarters at the village of Durian created a Javanese bastion at Sawahlunto.

The political situation in town was very precarious. Recriminations flew thick and fast and there were kidnappings of people who were regarded as ‘outsiders’ or ‘insiders’, as the case may have been, and of being supporters of the central government or of the PRRI. It goes without saying that this had a profound effect on working relations in the mine. The role of the OPR and OKR loomed very large in this configuration. They not only had defensive tasks, but they took upon themselves the job of being mediators of the PKI. Local people who worked at the mine recalled that they frequently resorted to extremely violent actions, to intimidate the non-SBTI SOBSI. They were even aggressive towards non-Javanese overseers and higher-ranking staff members of the company who were automatically regarded as pro-PRRI. The situation was frightening (Interview with Bulkhaini, 13-6-1995). This can certainly be counted the revenge of the Javanese miners and foremen exacted from their non-Javanese overseers.

Unlike other towns in West Sumatra, Sawahlunto was the scene of ruthless, hard political competition between the PRRI, the Masyumi and the PSI, opposing the APRI and the PKI. The power of the Minangkabau or the non-Javanese overseers was undermined, since the arrival of the APRI at Sawahlunto in 1959. The APRI shifted the control of labour, albeit indirectly, from the manager to itself. In practice, the recruitment of the Javanese miners to become members of the OKR and the OPR by the APRI, could be regarded as an extension of the communist influence in that town.

The PRRI rebellion had been put down. Social relations and social control within the mining society had entered a new stage, and faced new competition.

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60 PTBA-UPO Archives, Keputusan KTO, P.A.Darami, S.Lunto 10-6-1959, no.3454/6/XX-59.

61 According to Zulkarnain, when the APRI had brought the town and the mine under control, it was directed to places outside the town. Interview with Zulkarnain, 16-3-1996.