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

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CHAPTER VII
ENTERING NEW POLITICAL COMPETITION
(1960 - 1965)

Introduction

In the preceding chapter I have explained how the mining society was exposed to politics. Its members were mobilized by the leaders of political parties, and involved in strikes, conflicts, and competition between various actors located at different layers in political hierarchy. The involvement was very intense and took place at a time when the outlook for the economic development of coal-mines was gloomy and state control was relatively weak. The mining society walked out of the cage of production or from the mine, and started making contact and links with the leaders of local and national political parties. This was not a one-way process, because political leaders also went into the mines, evoking the collective consciousness of the mining society, and stimulating it to make its political activities to be more daring and more pronounced than ever before. Under such conditions the border between the world of politics and the world of work, between political control and labour control, grew very thin and blurred, until sometimes the two overlapped.

I have also explored the instruments used for basic mobilization such as ethnicity, class, ideology, and patron-client relationships. Sometimes those instruments were used simultaneously, and sometimes not, the choice depended on the motivations of the actors and the socio-economic and political pressures exerted by the management and the state. For example, ethnicity and class sometimes ran parallel with political streams, which is what happened at the national level, and sometimes did not, depending on the actors’ deliberations. In this chapter I want to show that ethnicity was only one of the many instruments which determined the political development in the mining society.

This chapter continues to look at how the mining society was incorporated into new political constellations, competitions, and conflicts under the economic and socio-political structures guided by the state. The formation of new political parties not only cut across the social hierarchy of particular communities as Gramsci found in Italy (Gramsci 1971), but in the Ombilin mining society also became more complicated, because it involved many actors from many layers: military managers, from both the left and the right wings of the army, and the leaders of various political parties at regional and national levels. The Ombilin mining society was transformed into an arena for competition and conflicts. These contests and frictions became more widespread, harsher, and sharper, because each of the interest groups was seeking power.

In the early 1960s, two striking changes took place in the political competition being waged in the mining society. Firstly, the Ombilin coal-mines was now managed by non-Minangkabau military officers, who were appointed by the central government. Their function was to represent national economic and political interests. Secondly, political competition emerged in the mining society between communists and non-communists. This was inextricably linked to conflicts between the left and right wings of the military group.

By 1960 the Masyumi and the PSI had become impotent, disgraced by their involvement in the PRRI rebellion. A new balance of political power emerged, born of the
fusion of three ideological streams, Nationalist, Islam, and Communist or Nasakom, which was the brainchild of Soekarno. Subsequently these streams were represented by the Indonesian Nationalist Party or PNI, the Nahdhatul Ulama or NU for religious traditionalists, and the PKI. Its main competitor was the Functional Group or Golongan Karya (Golkar). The PKI was supported by the left-wing army group, and the Functional Group by the right-wing army group. How were these new political developments and competition reflected in the smaller world of the mining society? Seen from the miners' point of view, what reasons could they adduce to persuade the miners to become involved in such political activities? The instruments used by political leaders to mobilize followers remain a mystery unless they are related to the economic development of coal and the changing composition of the mining society itself.

After exploring the economic fluctuations during a period of inflation and their impact on working and living conditions (Sections 1 and 2), Section 3 will discuss how national and regional political developments were reflected in the small town of Sawahlunto. The focus of Section 4 will shift to the formation of new trade unions in the Ombilin coal-mines, while the effects of wider economic and political developments on the mining society, and labour control will be the main themes in Section 5. Section 6 will describe the miners' experiences in the days leading to the coup of September 1965.

1. Coal and Inflation

The mismanagement, inefficiency, and corruption of retired and serving officers of the army who turned their talents to various state-owned companies undermined the national economy. This rot set in in 1957, when Dutch enterprises and business activities were initially taken over by the communist and nationalist trade unions. Subsequently, the army seized control from them and managed the enterprises, which has been sequestered. This military intervention can be regarded as a crucial step which was to affect the economic development over the next period and which would have long-lasting effects.

Falling victim to mismanagement, inefficiency, and corruption, the range of production in export commodities shrank drastically. The value of exports declined from $ 750 million in 1961 to $ 450 million in 1965. The government proved unable to replace a declining state...
export sector with any kind of national industrial capitalism. These unpromising economic conditions were inimical to encouraging any long-term investment and forestalled capital accumulation (Robison 1986:76, 93).

Another reason for the deterioration of the national economy was political. The National Planning Council that designed the Eight-Year Overall Development Plan of 1960 was a political rather than a technical body. The Plan of 1960 was based on quite fantastic assumptions to justify government expenditure of thirty billion Rupiahs per annum on development projects, hopefully to be achieved without inflation and without increased taxation (Mackie 1971:52). The plan was no more than a sign of approval from parliament and from President Sukarno for projects intended to please everyone to go ahead. It had been engineered to win consensus from all Indonesians by avoiding any painful choice of priorities. In the mining sector, the decisions were made without giving matters of priority and efficiency a second thought.

Such a catholic policy was bound to cause a further deterioration of the national economy. This started with a devaluation of the rupiah in 1959, which was followed as the night the day by inflation. In 1959 the rupiah had been devalued by 75 percent (Ricklefs 1981:255). Then, as a result of the decline in export value, the general economic situation settled into a state of permanent hyper-inflation. The hyper-inflation remained around 100 percent per annum from late 1961 till 1964. At the same time Indonesia's foreign debt had soared to over $ 2000 million and the debt servicing for 1966 was estimated to be $ 530 million (Arndt 1967:130-1).

The mining sector in general and the coal-mining industry in particular suffered from the deterioration in the national economy. In addition to having had to endure mismanagement and inefficiency ever since the late 1950s, it was also operating under difficult conditions (Sigit 1980:8; 1989: 25). The parlous economic condition of the state, particularly exigent because of the continuing inflation, meant that technological investment was out of the question. There was hardly any additional investment available for replacements or rehabilitation that seemed the only

5 President Sukarno appointed Mohammad Yamin, one of Indonesia's most prominent nationalist leaders, head of the National Planning Council in early 1960. This Planning Council was given the responsibility for producing a new 'Eight Year Overall Development Plan', which was in fact concentrated on purely economic development. It was not successful, biting the dust because of the rapid inflation, and the expenditure required for political purposes such as the military campaign to take over Irian Jaya in 1961/1962 and the subsequent 'Crush Malaysia' campaign of 1963/1966. See Higgins 1968:699.

6 For a more detailed analysis about political aspects of deterioration of Indonesian Economy during Guided Democracy see Mackie 1963, Booth 1996.

7 J.A.C Mackie divided the phases of inflation into four periods of time. The first period lasted until the end of 1956. It was a persistent and serious problem, but was largely due to abnormal circumstances (the Korea boom and the strains of reconstruction and readjustment after the Revolution). The second period was from early 1957 to late 1961, both money and prices increased at an average rate of about 30 percent per annum. The third period was 1961-1964 during which both the volume of money and the cost and living roughly doubled every twelve months. The fourth period was between December 1964-1965. This was a very dangerous phase of hyper-inflation, when the prices were doubling within a few weeks in 1965. See Mackie 1967.
ways to prevent too rapid drops in production.

The three state-owned coal-mining companies, the Ombilin, Bukit Asam, and the Mahakam coal-mines, were doomed to be equally ill-fated. The production of Indonesian coal during the 1950s never rose above 50 percent of the 1,781,000 metric tons of 1939, and by 1962 it had fallen to a mere 471,836 tons, hampered by transport problems, labour difficulties, and a lack of spare parts. In addition to this, it was continually confronted by the stiff competition from petroleum, which was perhaps the most serious problem of all. The reduction in the price of petroleum ate into the demand for coal. It was not surprising that there was a general opting for the increasing use of alternative sources of energy, such as in hydro-electric power, natural gas, as well as fuel oil (Mining Developments 1967:9). The state-owned railway companies, the greatest consumers of coal, were unable to pay their bills to the coal-mining companies, and then added insult to injury by changing their choice of fuel from coal to oil (Soehoed 1968:14; Sigit 1989:16). For Indonesia as a whole, the proportion of oil-using or diesel locomotives rose from 5 percent in 1952 to 30 percent by 1962.

The fate of the Ombilin coal-mines was even more deplorable. Apart from suffering under the general economic malaise, these mines also fell victim to political instability, being particularly vulnerable when the PRRI rebellion (Chapter VI. 5) broke out. Although they suffered no direct attacks from the PRRI army or the Central Military Army, the mines were neglected. Neither the management nor the state organized any capital investment or technological innovations for these mines. In fact, at this time the mines were being used for the political purposes by the supporters of the PRRI. The company helped to supply money, food, and clothes to the PRRI army in the jungle. So both during and after the PRRI, the exploitation of these mines was very haphazard.

Indubitably the Indonesian government did make efforts to increase Indonesian coal production in 1960. The measures taken concentrated on the building of vital state-owned heavy industries, such as the steel mills in Lampung and Cilegon. Any such metal industry required huge quantities of fuel so the government was forced to increase the production of coal to fulfil the need of the steel industries. Nurturing plans for an industrial future, the government regarded the coal-mines as an important pillar of the state economy (Antara, 21-3-1964). Determined to increase coal production, Jakarta carried out a rehabilitation programme for the Ombilin coal-mines, and repaired the infrastructure for the railway at Bukit Asam, as well as exploring new coal deposits at various places such as Labuhan Batu and Mahakam in Kalimantan.

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8 For these figures, see report of the Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Pocket of Indonesia 1963; Sigit 1989:25.
9 See for a more detailed explanation of the development of the Indonesian oil industry, Hunter 1971:251-3, 283.
10 The Minister of Mining, Chairul Saleh received credits of around US $ 250 million from the Soviet Union to develop heavy industries. See Harian Rakyat 12-5-1960.
11 Perusahaan Negara (PN or State Company) Batubara had opened new coal-mines located at Gunung Batu Belah, Loa Lopu, and Loa Bukit in 1963. This meant that the PN Batubara now had four coal-mines which are located at Mahakam, Kalimantan. See Berita Ekonomi dan Keuangan, 29-11-1963; Antara 16-3-1964.
Of the three state-owned coal-mines mentioned above, the Ombilin coal-mines received the most government support. In order to be able to carry this out the government signed a cooperation agreement with the Polish government in 1962. The signing of the contract was followed by the arrival of three Polish geologists to do a feasibility study (Antara 13-1-1962). In March 1962, the Indonesian government sent twenty-eight workers from Ombilin to the Polish coal-mines to study the use of new machines (Berita Ekonomi dan Keuangan 13-3-1963:8). Three months later the new machines arrived at Ombilin. They consisted of equipment for digging new galleries, trucks for transportation in underground mines, pump rooms, and ventilation networks, and also equipment for the central electricity plant. With the coming of the new machines the government predicted the Ombilin would produce around 300,000 tons in 1965.

Besides the lack of machines, the company was facing shortage of labour. To supply the need for white collar employees the central government posted graduates from universities such as the Institute Technology of Bandung (ITB) and the Mining Academy there. However, the most serious problem was the shortage of the key labour force for the underground mines, which had been felt most acutely after the PRRI rebellion. Many of the underground miners had asked to retire or had run away, fed up with the gruelling working conditions, the highly unsatisfactory wages, and the constant insecurity. Many Javanese miners who had acquired a wealth of expertise through long years of experience had left to look for new jobs on the plantations in West Sumatra, Riau, and in East Sumatra. The Javanese labourers who remained were old and past their physical prime. The crux of the matter was that the company lacked the money to recruit new labourers. Sjahbuddin Ali, who was an overseer in 1961, gave the following information:

In the year 1961 I encouraged mandors and labourers to work overtime. Although they were old and physically weak, I was finally able to collect ten coal trucks full weighing around twenty-five tons. We got the premium and I distributed it to my subordinates. That was enough to live on. (Interview with Sjahbuddin Ali, 14-6-1995)

Working overtime may have brought bonuses, but it did not increase coal production. The production of the Ombilin coal was 103,700 tons in 1961 (Antara 13-1-1962; Appendix 1). Though this figure was higher than that targeted by the company, the mines were still unable to

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12 The government sponsored the making of a film entitled 'Kami Membangun Hari Esok' (We are developing the future). This was a propaganda film which intended to stimulate the will to work of the miners. The script was written by Bachtiar Siagian. See Berita Ekonomi dan Keuangan, 30-7-1963:4.


supply enough coal to satisfy the demand of domestic consumers in West Sumatra. For example, the Indarung cement works in Padang could not be supplied with coal it required from the Ombilin and had to import it from Bukit Asam in 1963 (Berita Ekonomi dan Keuangan 3-3-1963:12).

The shortage of young miners was discussed at a production meeting between staff members of the company and the Minister of Mining when he visited Ombilin to set up an Enterprise Council, Dewan Perusahaan, in 1962, which was part of the plans to modernize the mines using Polish government aid. The problem of shortage of miners was finally solved by the central government. New miners were recruited from Central Java through the Kantor Penempatan Tenaga Kerja (The Office for Allocation of Labour Force) first in Yogyakarta and then by recruiting Bina Karya people from Jakarta in 1963 (Berita Ekonomi dan Keuangan, 13-3-63: 8). The latter group was called Bina Karya because they were mainly people who had volunteered for the Indonesian army to fight for the liberation of West Irian. They had received military training in Bekasi, the so-called KO.P3-TK (an acronym of Komando Penampungan Penyaluran, Penempatan Tunan Karya (The Command for Receiving, Channelling, and the Allocation of Unemployed People). Apart from this military goal, the KO.P3-TK was also given the task of looking over the labour force that presented itself and to channel it into various industries located in the Outer Islands. After following their military training, they became members of 'volunteer corps' (sukarelawan), the reserve for the liberation of West Irian. Some of these people had been to Kendari (SouthEast Sulawesi) and Irian, while others had remained at Bekasi, where they had had to wait for an indefinite period of time. Siswanto Al-Rasdjono, a Javanese miner who was sent to Sawahlunto, had followed military training at Bekasi for not less than five years. 15 Regardless of whether they had stayed at Bekasi or had already come back from Kendari or Irian, they were sent to the Outer Islands by KO.P3-TK to work in various industries. This was intended to ensure the realization of the government policy of increasing national production. They were put to work, or dikaryakan.

Most of the people who were included in the Bina Karya were either unemployed people or 'preman'. The unemployed came from various places in East and Central Java. They registered at the Kantor Penempatan Tenaga Kerja in their own region, after which they were sent also to the military training camps in Bekasi, and then to the Outer Islands. The 'preman' were 'strong men', young gangsters who lived on the streets in Jakarta and its environs. They were often involved in robberies and other criminal acts (Interview with Sudono M.Wiguno, 13-5-1995). These preman could also again be subdivided into two categories, first the criminal 'preman', and secondly, those who were regarded as 'preman' by policemen because they had no identity cards. Both these categories were recruited harshly when the central government in Jakarta mounted cleansing operations or sapu bersih. The police rounded them up from where they were hanging around in the streets or at food stalls. They were arrested, put in a truck, and taken to Bekasi. Pak Sadimin, one of the Bina Karya people, was caught in this way when he was working as a wage labourer in the rice-fields of a peasant in Krawang (Interview with Sadimin, 28-5-1966). The background and the recruitment system of Bina Karya are reminiscent of those used for the convict and contract labourers during the colonial period, not

15 PTBA-UPO Archives, interviews by the screening team, an investigation team formed after the Coup of 1965 to investigate the involvement of labourers in the communist trade union, which was banned by the New Order government. Interviews with Siswanto Al-Rasdjono, 16-7-1966.
forgetting the *romusha* (forced labour) during the Japanese occupation, when the methods of recruitment were similar.

The recruitment of *Bina Karya* was carried out in stages. The first group of 200 people was sent to Sawahlunto on 8 March 1963, under the leadership of a retired military man, Pak Sumarto (Interview with Siswanto Al-Rasdjono, 16-7-1966). Then, the second and third batches followed, 319 people in all according to Pak Amri, a *Bina Karya* and the head of the *tangsi* Karang Anyer (Interview with Pak Ampri, 28-5-1995). Generally they were unmarried men, with the exception of those who were recruited in 1964; when twenty-three people came to Sawahlunto with their families (Interview with Salim, 19-7-1970). They set up the *tangsi* of Karang Anyer, a new village that was specially prepared for the *Bina Karyas* by the management.

The new recruitment increased the total number of the labour force as shown in the following table (VII.1). In 1960, the total number of labourers including white-collar workers was 1,946, but by employing these methods this figures increased in the years which followed, and in 1965 the total number of the labour force reached 3,082.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total number of Labour Force</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>1,946</td>
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<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>2,025</td>
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<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>2,083</td>
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<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>2,269</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>2,472</td>
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<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>3,082</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


Although new labourers were recruited, the rehabilitation project failed. The blame for this failure can be laid at two doors: the unsuitability of the Polish machines to the geological conditions of the Ombilin coal-mines and the dearth of skilled labourers. The machines were unsuitable because the coal seams had a different structure. The Ombilin staff who had studied the use of these machines in the Polish coal-mines had reported this unsuitability of the machines to the manager as well as to the Department of Mining in Jakarta. But, in the process of negotiations, the officials at the Department of Mining chose to emphasize political considerations rather than the efficiency of the machines.¹⁶ Not all the Polish machines were a write-off, some could be used, but the cost of maintenance of the machines was so high the government could not afford them. The Polish mine machines remained unused and, gradually rusted away until the only thing they were good for scrap iron.

The new miners had been recruited specifically for underground work, and most of the *Bina Karya* people ran away when they had to face the harsh reality of this life. They were not up to or prepared for the hard, gruelling work or the bad, isolated living conditions. Caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, they were constantly plagued by their fear of entering the underground mines and the lack of security at their barracks (Interview with Pak Ampri, 12-

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Symptomatic of the unsafe conditions was the high degree of fighting among the Bina Karya people that broke out in their struggle to obtain the basic needs, which the company failed to provide. Those who remained working in the Ombilin mine were mostly married, they had a responsibility for a wife and children and any thought of absconding they may have fostered were banished by the thought they had no previous work experience in other places such as in the plantations of Riau and North Sumatra. Once again these circumstances are highly reminiscent of the colonial period when many labourers ran away from the mines for more or less the same reasons.

The failure of the project was reflected in the figures for coal production that did not show any significant improvement, a situation that did not begin change until 1972. The highest production from the Ombilin coal-mines was 110,037 tons in 1963 and then this decreased considerably in the following years. In 1967 the production figures were at their lowest point for the 1960s, namely 66,487 tons (Appendix 1). This was four and a half years after the company had received help from the Poles. In that year, the Ombilin company was still working the mine using the old mining machines from the Dutch colonial period.

Compared to the two other state-owned companies, the Bukit Asam and the Mahakam, the development of the Ombilin mines was very slow. This was because the technology that was needed to work this mine was different. The open cast technology in the Bukit Asam and Mahakam coal-mines was far easier and cheaper than that which was required for the underground mining at the Ombilin mines. Nevertheless, leaving this aside, on the whole the economic development of coal-mines in Indonesia during this period was very slow. The inability of the government, battling throughout the period of inflation, to build up an infrastructure such as railways and ships to transport coal was another major obstacle (Berita Ekonomi dan Keuangan, 9-8-1963).

The political slogan paraded by the state urging an increase in national production fell on deaf ears in the Indonesian mining sector, which was confronted at every turn by complicated problems. Although the Indonesian coal management had agreed in principle that it should increase coal production, this proved to be all illusion (Antara 25-1-1962:1). Hopes of a bright future for Indonesian coal and for the development of the mining town of Sawahlunto as designed by Polish experts were dashed. And so the government's prediction in 1963 that it would increase the production of Indonesian coal-mines by around 25 percent came to nought. 17

As in the 1950s, the main problems continued to be the lack of capital investment and the absence of technological innovation, in addition to the perennial problem of the shortage of skilled labour. In the 1960s national political considerations seemed more important than the improvement of efficiency.

2. Working and Living Conditions

The working and living conditions of the labourers were far from satisfactory during the years of inflation. Moreover, payment and social security inadequate to say the least. Payment in cash and in kind was insufficient to meet their basic needs. This is true not only of the labourers at the lower level of the mining society, but applied equally to the higher levels. The manager was

aware of the situation but his hands were tied and he was unable to take any steps to improve the working and living conditions of the labourers. Everything depended on the central government’s decisions, on the financial circumstances of the state, and the economic position of coal.

Some efforts were made by the manager to solve the problems by selling labourers cheaper textiles and rice and by giving them leather hats to protect their heads during their work in the mines. Another initiative was the making and selling of basic goods at the co-operative shop, Beka, at a price cheaper than at the market of Sawahlunto. But the market traders immediately lowered their prices, so the Beka shop could not compete with them (Interview with Djamaluddin Peto Basa, 14-3-1996).

The manager’s efforts were to no avail as far as any improvement in the working and living conditions of the labourers were concerned. The lack of health care, housing, clothing, food and other facilities were discussed, but these good intentions remained just words until the emergence of the New Order Regime. Interviews with former labourers reveal that many people died during this time, succumbing to malnutrition and the atrocious working conditions. As we can see on the photograph 5, dated 1964, labourers wore no shoes, so it was only natural they rapidly became infected by worms. Sukiyem, wife of a miner, whom I met at her small foodstall, told me that five of her seven children died from malnutrition during this time (Interview with Bu Sukiyem, 14-4-1996).

The barracks built to house the labourers were in very bad shape. Conditions in the tangsis were far from satisfactory making housing sub-standard. Many rooms were so dilapidated they could no longer be used. For example, in the tangsis at Sawahlunto 139 rooms were so dilapidated that they had to be written off, and about 50 percent of the tangsis in Sikalang and Durian were uninhabitable. The water supply was also inadequate, because most water pipes installed by the Dutch had decayed, and the electricity supply was highly erratic. The old barracks could no longer be used because of poor maintenance, while a new tangsi that was built in Karang Anyer was jerrybuilt. The roof was made of sago palm leaves, and was not well enough constructed to protect the inside of the house from strong winds and heavy rains. When there was a big flood after heavy rains, it was impossible for the Bina Karya people to live there. The earthen floor and wooden walls were washed away by the combined force of the wind and the flood-waters, not to mention the total collapse of the water and electricity supply which, even when functioning normally, were insufficient to meet the daily needs of the miners (PTBA-UPO Archives, Laporan R.Suotrisno).

The results of the company’s investigation showed that about 30 percent of the labourers did not live in the tangsi. The main reasons they chose to seek accommodation elsewhere were not only the ramshackle conditions of the tangsi, but the old story of the lack of privacy and security. Again, these reasons strike a chord reminding us of similar situation during the first and second decades of the twentieth century.

The following examples are chosen from among many to illustrate this lack of privacy and security. The kitchen, which was built by the Dutch in every tangsi, was open to the public and gave everybody an opportunity to steal firewood, food and other goods. This led to endless

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18 PTBA-UPO Archives, Laporan Kepala Administrasi ke Manager Tambang 26-8-1964.
19 PTBA-UPO Archives, Laporan Kelompok Kerja II; Teknik Umum PN TBO, Biro III, 1964.
squabbles among the inhabitants of the barracks. Therefore, it was understandable that many labourers preferred to build their own small kitchen near the tangsi instead of using the big one. Quite apart from these physical inconveniences, many labourers disliked and did all in their power to get away from the ceaseless envy and gossip. They looked for places to rent or they built small houses on the company's land (PTBA-UPO Archives, Laporan R. Soetrisno).

In the Karang Anyer tangsi, there were more serious problems. The lack of facilities was bad enough, but life was also coloured by violence which was already embedded in the personal cultures of some Bina Karya people with a preman background who were no strangers to criminality. Fights between them and with other labourers or local people were very frequent. They fought to get water, food, women, or entertainment. In this tangsi, unmarried labourers had food doled out to them from a big kitchen located at Sawahlunto. Food was distributed to them from there, but the labourers still went short of sustenance, because their co-workers from earlier shifts had already taken more than their fair share. According to Pak Ampri, one of the Bina Karya people, at the tangsi of Karang Anyer, the law of the jungle ruled during this time (Interview with Pak Amri 29-5-1995).

For those Bina Karya people who were not ‘strong men’, such conditions were clearly unsafe. Adopting the motto of if you can’t beat them, join them, they could remain at the tangsi, choosing to adopt that lifestyle, and become ‘strong men’ themselves in order to ensure their survival, or they could resign the struggle and run away from the mines. The presence of ‘strong men’ and criminals caused the local people and even the Javanese settled in the town many problems. No matter what their background, all Bina Karya people were tarred with the same brush and were regarded as criminals from Jakarta (Interview with Pak Djuned, 28-5-1996).

Those who found themselves unable to bear the rigours of working and living at the mines preferred to run away. The bad living conditions may have made a large contribution to this, but also the fear for working in underground mines was also a preponderant factor in prompting them to abscond. The fear they felt was understandable, because the management put them straight to work in the underground mines, without putting them through any form of adaptation process beforehand. Salim, a Bina Karya labourer from Surabaya, said that around ten days after his arrival in Sawahlunto, in February 1965, he had to go to work in the underground mine. About ten days later, ten out of twenty-three labourers ran away to Pekanbaru, where they worked as wage labourers on a rubber plantation (Interview with Salim, 19-7-1970).

There were many ways open to them to fight for survival in those years. They sought to make additional income by making illicit fields which were located on the company's land, by selling traditional food such as tempe, tahu, and gado-gado, and

Mine phobia had been very prevalent in colonial times and it still exists. It was officially discovered in 1955 when the manager was planning to move labourers from open-cast mines to underground mines, because coal reserves in the open-cast mines were almost exhausted. Interviews recorded in April 1966 reveal that most of the labourers then preferred to look for other jobs rather than work underground.

These conditions were also found in the life-history of overseers. S.P.L Tobing, who became an overseer in 1958 and who had 112 labourers working under him, said that his wage was not enough to live on. In order to survive he made squatter's fields, which he worked on his days off. He also caught fish in the Ombilin River. Interview with S.P.L. Tobing, 22-7-1996.
changing the staple of their menu from rice to cassava. Like Chinese labourers in Malaya and in Bangka, squatting was an action carried out with mates from the same shift and also involved foremen. Co-operation with the foremen or overseers was essential in order to make arrangements to divide working time between the fields and the mine (Interview with Suwardi Kisut, 12-8-1995). This practice was resorted to largely by labourers who worked in the underground and at the open-cut mines, and as a result only 78 percent of the labourers was actually present in the mines during working hours in 1961. Interviews with former miners allow the conclusion to be drawn that until 1970 most labourers did not come to work regularly.

Survival strategies adopted during the period of the national economic inflation had brought changes in the division of labour among family members of the labourers. For example, the cooking of the various kinds of traditional food involved all family members. Therefore, during the difficult years between the 1960s and 1970s, many children did not attend school because they were needed to help boost the family income. To make a little profit, the children pilfered coal from the mines to use as fuel in the houses or to cook various kinds of traditional foods. The fact that the children of the labourers were stealing coal was actually discussed by the local government, but the company was unable to prevent it. The bad working and living conditions were fertile ground for the spread of communist influence. Propagating the concept of the class struggle and promises of a better life, the communists tried to mobilize the masses.

3. National and Local Political Developments

In 1958 the constellation of Indonesian politics was marked by a significant change. The parties in the parliament were deprived of their legitimacy and the claim of the regionalist leaders to political authority had finally been destroyed by military defeat. The PSI and the Masyumi, the parties that had most militantly resisted Sukarno's moves towards Guided Democracy and were involved in the PRRI rebellion, had been outlawed. President Sukarno and the central leadership of the army around the Chief of Staff, General Nasution, emerged as the decisive new political force. Although the party-based parliament still continued to function, much of its authority and many of its functions had been shifted to the army and the Dewan Nasional or National Council. This council functioned more or less as a legislative body that legitimized the gradual transfer of power from parliament to president. After the return to the 1945 Constitution on 5 July, 1959, President Sukarno became head of the government and then tried to limit the influence of the Army by appointing himself to Supreme War Commander or Penguasa Perang Tertinggi.


There are many studies on the period of Liberal Democracy and the rise of Guided
Sukarno needed support to counterbalance the army's power, and in particular he required an instrument that could organize the mass support elicited by his charisma. This he found in the PKI. He united the communist, the nationalist, and the religious ideologies in his concept of NAS-A-KOM, which was represented by the PNI, the NU, and the PKI. Through his conceiving of this integrated ideology, Soekarno was actually offering the PKI special opportunity on a plate (Feith 1962:338).

Sukarno's efforts to attract parties into his political camp did not run smoothly. His choice to lean heavily on the support of the PKI made many people uneasy, especially the right-wing elements in the political parties and the army. This latent apprehension about his wooing of the PKI led to the birth of functional groups and their mass organizations which eventually emerged as a political power (Reeve 1985:162). Between 1963-1965 the functional group and its mass organization, Sentral Organisasi Karyawan Sosialis Indonesia (SOKSI; Central Organization of Socialist Karyawan Indonesia), consolidated itself as the counterbalance to the PKI and its mass organization, SOBSI (Reeve 1985: 208).

How was the national balance of power expressed in local terms? In West Sumatra, the Masyumi and the PSI, which were invariably and inevitably associated with the PRRI rebellion, became impotent. Both these parties had already been effectively banned from the region from April-May 1958 (Amal 1992:94). After this the focus of political life in West Sumatra centred primarily on the army commander and the Javanese in the region. The army leadership established a new military district for West Sumatra and Riau, called the Military Command or Komandan Militer (Kodam) III/17 August in honour of the operation commanded by Brigadier-General Ahmad Yani who had defeated the PRRI in the region. Most of the troops who had participated in the operation were drawn from the Kodam Diponegoro (Diponegoro Military Command) from Central Java. So the new Kodam III/17 August was a kind of extension of Kodam Diponegoro. All of its commanders in the pre-1965 period were Javanese officers who continued to regard themselves as part of the Diponegoro division.

The centrality of the army commander was immediately made apparent when Kaharuddin Dt. Bagindo was appointed governor of West Sumatra by the central government in 1959. He had to accept that his authority was very limited, because all major decisions were subject to the Kodam's approval. This also happened at the lower level of the regency, where the power was also in the hands of the military. Because of the involvement of the majority of West Sumatran civil servants in the rebellion, a large number


Apart from Colonel A. Yani, the other commanders of the Kodam 17 August before 1965 were Colonel Pranoto Reksosamudra, Surjosumpeno, Colonel Panuju and Lieutenant-Colonel Suwito Harjoko, all of them were from Kodam Diponegoro. See Sejarah Kodam III/17 Agustus as quoted by Amal 1992:95.

Kaharuddin Dt. Bagindo Basja from Minangkabau was a former police commissioner of Central Sumatra. He was appointed for some months on an acting basis and the appointment was confirmed in December 1959. He had been one of the chairmen of the Dewan Banteng, but he had opted for the central government when the rebellion broke out. In 1965 Kaharuddin was replaced by Saputro Brotohardjono, a Javanese, who hoped to work together with the West Sumatran communist leaders. See Antara, 10-7; 13-8-1965.
of Javanese pamong praja officials were assigned to the province after the government troops had occupied West Sumatra. In other words the central government and the Javanese controlled the political life of West Sumatra, and ethnically also the Minangkabau.

The presence of the Diponegoro Division in West Sumatra and the failure of the PRRI in 1961 were two important factors which contributed to the rise of communist power in West Sumatra. In the first place, the PKI no longer had any strong political opponents and rivals such as the Masyumi and the PSI in the province, and in the second place, the presence of the Angkatan Perang Republik Indonesia or APRI (the Indonesian Republic Military Army) from Jakarta helped the PKI gain influence among the local people. To what extent APRI officers were involved directly or indirectly in spreading communist influence is a matter of discussion but it could be explained as follows.

According to the version given by Saafroeddin Bahar, there were three different groups of APRI officers who came to West Sumatra. The first group was composed of those who actually carried out the task of crushing the PRRI rebellion and worked on strictly military principles, in other words, had no ulterior political motives. They were Colonel Achmad Yani, Colonel Soerjosoempeno, Lieutenant-Colonel Yoga Sugama, Major CKH Iman Soeparti S.H., and Captain Wardjono. The second group included Colonel Pranoto Reksosamodra and Major Ali Murtopo. It mapped up the last shreds of the rebellion and supported the PKI. Among the third group were Major Latif, Second-Lieutenant Untung, Major Iman Soebandi, Colonel Madjiman, and Colonel Soemedi and their jobs too was to put down the rebellion. They used this chance to extend communist influence down to the village level in the region. Some such as Baharuddin Hanafi or Baharuddin Rangkayo Mudo had taken the oath as a member of the PKI and worked in the Biro Khusus (Special Bureau) of PKI in West Sumatra. The Central Committee of the PKI did not rely solely on men like this but also sent members of the Special Bureau from West Java, like Djajusman or Mamak. It also recruited some PKI cadres in West Sumatra itself among the military officers such as Major Djohan Rivai, Lieutenant-Colonel Bainal Dt. Panduko Malano, Captain Bahar Kirai, and Harmen Soehardjo.

While the army was under the command of Colonel Pranoto Reksosamodra (1958-1959), the influence of the PKI expanded steadily. The members of Pemuda Rakyat were recruited to become members of the People’s Security Organization or OKR, which later on had

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28 I have not yet been able to find confirmation of this from other information. Saafroeddin Bahar was born in 1937 in Padang Panjang, West Sumatra. He was a military man and the first leader of the West Sumatra Golkar Leadership Board, and can be counted as one of the architects in establishing the New Order Regime in the region. On this see Zed 1998:169.

Baharuddin Hanafi was a member of the General Staff 1 of Markas Besar Angkatan Darat, Jakarta, and acted as a ‘pioneer’ in the extermination of the PRRI. Djajusman or Mamak was the head of Barisan Tani Indonesia (BTI) in West Java, and was sent to West Sumatra to recruit PKI cadres. Major Djohan Rivai, was Bupati of Pasaman. Before his appointment as Bupati, Djohan Rivai acted as head of the military district at Sawahlunto, and used labourers from the Ombilin coal-mines to help in APRI operations. Lieutenant-Colonel Bainal Dt. Panduko Malano was the head of staff of the Regional Civil Defence or Hansip in West Sumatera. Captain Bahar Kirai was the OPR Command of Lubuk Alung, and Captain Harmen Soehardjo was a military official of the Intelligence Section of Kodim 50 Kota. See Bahar 1992:497 as quoted by Chaniago 1998:301-2.
its name changed to Peoples' Defence Operation or OPR with the task of protecting public security and helping the APRI to face attacks from the PRRI. In contrast to his political predecessor Achmad Yani, Pranoto Reksosamodra (1958-1959) not only formed the OKR and the OPR as reserve troops to lighten the tasks of the APRI, it was his deliberate strategy to recruit a great number of the members of the OKR and the OPR mainly from the Pemuda Rakyat. In fact, no less than 6,341, which is equivalent to about nine army battalions, were members of the OKR and OPR. Generally speaking the Pemuda Rakyat's political activities were of considerable assistance to the PKI.

Communist influence invaded the bureaucracy, local legislative councils, the DPR-GR, various trade unions, and the mass media. Local government officials were replaced by Javanese present in West Sumatra because many local people had been involved in the rebellion. At the village level, the nagari heads were replaced by people who supported the PKI. In the local legislative council, the DPR-GR, the power of the PKI was in no doubt, three out of eight people representing the political parties.

The PKI used its mass organizations such as Gerakan Wanita Indonesia or Gerwani (Indonesian Women Movement), the Pemuda Rakyat, and the BTI to strengthen its influence by recruiting people interested in all these groups to become members of the PKI. As its suppression meant a clean sweep of its opponents, the PRRI rebellion was regarded by the PKI as a heaven-sent opportunity to extend its influence. As will have been deduced from what has just been said, the military also played a not insignificant role in extending the PKI's influence. Despite this propaganda machine, strong support for communist activities in West Sumatra was conspicuous by its absence with the exception of a few centres. First among these was Pasaman, where it enjoyed strong support from a concentration of Javanese transmigrants and had the active sympathy of a leftist military Bupati, Major Djohan Rivai, who was one of the best-known PKI leaders in West Sumatra. The second PKI centre was Sawahlunto, where it was the Javanese coal-miners who supported the PKI. The third place was Payakumbuh where


31 Among other assistance the Pemuda Rakyat campaigns supported the PKI strategy for Guided Democracy and the Political Manifesto (Manifesto politik or Manipol) in 1959. About political activities of the Pemuda Rakyat, see Hindley 1964:192-3.


33 This is a transmigration area for Javanese and Surinam-Javanese people who had returned to Indonesia. In 1953 there were 300 Javanese families who had transmigrated to Pasaman. They were given 600 ha of land, see Hainan, 5-5-1953; 22-5-1954;


35 The Javanese transmigrants in Pasaman had formed a close relationship with the Javanese in Sawahlunto. They helped each other. According to information gathered from interviews with Javanese people in Sawahlunto, the Javanese people in both places had had intensive contacts with each other either by forming kinship ties or in looking for jobs.
some prominent individuals and families had had a strong connection with the communists going back to the 1920s. The fourth and final place was the area of Pasisir Selatan, a poor peripheral area far from the Minangkabau heartland.

The PKI did not organize any unilateral land actions (aksi sepihak) in West Sumatra. Indeed, apart from land actions in Java and on government plantations in North Sumatra, there were few unilateral actions in any of the Outer Islands (Mortimer 1974:303). Feeling that its support would only be lukewarm, the PKI took no steps to implement its land-reform programme in West Sumatra. One very pertinent explanation for this lack of action was that the party was seen as heavily Javanese at a time when the Minangkabau people saw their region as suffering under a Javanese military occupation (Amal 1992:98).

While all this was going on, what were the political conditions at Sawahlunto and in the mining society like? After the PSI and the Masyumi were banned, other political parties except for the PKI made a pretty poor showing. The PNI was weak and not a favourite party with the local people, because it was seen as being the prerogative of a small group of educated people in Sawahlunto and had never struck deep roots. PKI power waxed, especially after it won support from the more left-wing members. The communist leaders who had previously been arrested by the PRRI leaders (who were from the Masyumi or the PSI) were now released from prison. These freed political prisoners enjoyed the full support of the left-wing of the military. They resumed their activities, and gained influence in the town and the villagers around the mines. Hence, the coming of APRI was considered to be a watershed in local history.

In Sawahlunto, the communist mass organizations such as Gerwani, Pemuda Rakyat, and Lekra became more active after 1962. Gerwani, for example, led by Djalinus with the help of Subranti was also active in the villages of Durian, Surian, and Sikalang, and its social activities concentrated mainly on the arisan, mutual assistance in times of need (such as deaths, births, and marriages), anti-illiteracy courses, handicrafts, sports and other social and cultural activities. Gerwani's activities were intensified after 1964, and military training was added to its programme. It is reported that about twice a week, twenty to thirty women reported for training, wearing long shirts and trousers and holding a bamboo spear. They were

36 The unilateral action (aksi sepihak) was launched by the PKI to motivate the rural masses to demand the implementation of the government land-reform programme. In Java, unilateral action was carried out intensively in Klaten, Central Java. For this, see Mortimer 1974; Rural Violence 1990:121-59; Suwondo 1997:34-5.

37 For a more detailed study on Gerwani, see Wieringa 1995.

38 Subranti was born in Sawahlunto in 1916. Her father was a Javanese policeman and her mother was the daughter of a Javanese contract labourer. She was married to Sugino M.Wiguno. She was very active in enthusing women in the villages of Durian and Surian to become members of Gerwani. In carrying out her activities, she was supported by her husband who was Camat or District Head of Palangki, a district located in the regency of Sawahlunto in the 1960s. When I interviewed, she was very proud of her past activities. Interviews with Subranti, 17, 19-4-1996.

39 Arisan is a voluntary rotating savings association whereby all members contribute a certain sum each week and each member in turn receives the whole sum.
especially keen in the villages of Durian and Sikalang, where they were given leadership by the Pemuda Rakyat. Moreover, the Gerwani was successful in putting about twenty-five women to work in the mines.

The Pemuda Rakyat was very active among the younger generation, whether they worked in the mines or not. It organized all kinds of sports such as volleyball, badminton, football, and table tennis, as well as cultural activities. In 1964 and 1965, the Pemuda Rakyat branch of Sawahlunto sent its representatives to Jakarta to participate in cultural festivals. For example, Sjair, a miner who was one of the leaders of the SBTI-SOBSI and member of the Enterprise Council, was also a member of the Pemuda Rakyat. He went to Jakarta to follow courses organized by the Pemuda Rakyat.

Another communist mass organization was the Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (Lekra) or the People's Cultural Agency. At Sawahlunto, it had a branch established in every village. The Lekra attracted its members from various Javanese cultural associations which had been formed in earlier years, such as ketoprak and wayang wong troupes. For example, the Badan Kesenian Kebudayaan Sikalang or BKKS, whose members were mainly Javanese labourers from Surinam, was drawn into the orbit of Lekra. The leader of Lekra, Ngadiran, a labourer who also became a member of the SBTI-SOBSI, was very assiduous in attracting followers for the traditional performances of his ketoprak troupe (Interview with Nanar, 6-7-1966). Finally there was the Barisan Tani Indonesia or BTI. Its membership was made up of villagers (Minangkabau) from around the mines and of the Javanese. Apart from becoming members of this, the villagers also joined the Pemuda Rakyat, OPR, and Lekra which had a branch in villages such as Kubang, Sijantang, and Kolok.

There is no information available about the total number of the members of each communist mass organization. Nevertheless, it can be said with some certainty that all the labourers, with their families, and local people around the mine mainly from poorer areas such as Kolok, Sijantang, and Kubang joined the PKI mass organizations. The extent of personal choice in this is hard to gauge, but the main reason would seem to have been that the head of the nagari had been influenced by PKI propaganda, an interest reinforced after the arrival of the APRI. From the interviews conducted with labourers in 1966 and 1970, it appears that the heads of these nagaris were very active in drumming up the nagari people to become members of one of the communist mass organizations.

Within the mines the salient role of the PKI leaders became more pronounced which caused tensions. In the 1950s, there had been political competition between the PSI, the Masyumi, and the PKI. In the 1960s this competition shifted to a contest between the PKI and the SOKSI, a party continuation of the PSI and the Masyumi.

4. Old Division, New Competition

It is impossible to examine the formation of trade unions in the Ombilin coal-mines after 1960 in isolation from the support given by the left and right wings of the military and the role of the military manager. There were four trade unions active in the mines during the years 1960-1965,

40 Information on this is derived from the result of interviews of the screening team held in 1966 and 1970 at Sawahlunto.
which can be seen in the following table. Three more trade unions were formed in addition to the SBTI, namely the Persatuan Karyawan Tambang Baturaja (the Coal-Mine Karyawan' union) or PKTB which was affiliated with the Seniral Organisasi Karyawan Sosialis Indonesia (Organization of Sosialist Karyawan of Indonesia) or SOKSI, the Sarikai Buruh Muslimin Indonesia (Indonesian Muslim Trade Unions) or Sarbumusi, which was affiliated with Nahchatul Ulama (Islamic Scholars Association), and Kesatuan Buruh Marhaenis (Marhaenist Workers’ Union) or KBM, which was linked to the Partai Nasional Indonesia or PNI (Indonesian Nationalist Party). The SBTI-SOBSI was formed early in 1953, and emerged as the strongest, with the support of the left-wing members of the Diponegoro military division in 1959. In a very short time, from 1959-1962, the SBTI-SOBSI and the other communist mass organizations gained power and attracted mass support, drawing not just the Javanese labourers, but also the Minangkabau. It benefited from the way in which the power of other trade unions such as the SBTI-KBSI and the SBI had dwindled after the suppression of the PRRI rebellion.

Table VII.2 Trade Unions in the Ombilin coal-mines, 1960-1965.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trade Unions</th>
<th>Political Party</th>
<th>Year of formation</th>
<th>Leaders</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Ethnical Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SBTI-SOBSI</td>
<td>PKI</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td>Nursali, Sjair, Ibnu etc</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>Java (majority) and Minang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KBM</td>
<td>PNI</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Usman St Pamuntjak</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>Java, Minang, Batak, and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarbumusi</td>
<td>NU</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Zulkarnain Sjahbuddin Kamisan</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Minang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PKBT</td>
<td>SOKSI/Funct. Group</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Sudono M.Wiguno Djamaruddin Djanan Thaib</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Java, Minang and others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to balance the power of the SBTI-SOBSI, in 1962 former leaders of the SBTI-KBSI and the SBIi established a trade union called the PKTB. The initiative was taken by Sudono M.Wiguno, a former leader of the PSI, and Djamaruddin and Djanan Thaib, former students of the STTM. Both came from the Kerinci area in the province of Jambi. Originally the PKTB had no links with any political party. It was formed solely to balance the power of the PKI. But later, after having been intimidated by the SBTI-SOBSI, the PKTB leaders girded loins to try to strengthen their position by co-operating with the SOKSI in the creation of the Sekretariat Bersama Golongan Karya (Sekber-Golkar). This affiliation was largely defined by links between the PKTB and SOKSI leaders like Soehardiman in Jakarta. It is important to note here, that the formation of this trade union was supported by right-wing members of the 17th August Command in West Sumatra (Interview with Sudono M. Wiguno, 12-5-1995).

The third trade union was the Kesatuan Buruh Marhaen or the KBM, formed at the beginning of 1964 and this was affiliated with the PNI. It had already entrenched itself in Sawahlunto. The KBM was formed by Usman Sutan Pamuntjak, a Minangkabau and former student of the Bandung Technological Institute or ITB. This trade union was rather elitist, because the majority of the members were employed in the middle and upper echelons in the
company. Almost all the members of the staff of the company were graduates from ITB and the mining academy.

Finally there was the Sarekat Buruh Muslimin Indonesia or Sarbumusi, formed in 1964 by former members of the Masyumi, such as Zulkarnain, Bulkhañi, Sjahbuddin Ali, Kamisan, and Maridin. The background of its formation was very similar to that of the KBM, namely to fill the religious element required in the integrated ideology of Nasakom which the manager was implementing. The formation of the Sarbumusi was followed by the setting up of the Nahdatul Ulama party branch at Sawahlunto. This deviates somewhat from the general trend, i.e. that it was the political parties which took the initiative in forming their mass organizations. One of the leaders told me how the Sarbumusi was formed.

I still remember the date, May 1, 1964. We celebrated Labour Day. It was a wonderful celebration. It took place on the ‘Tanah Lapang’. Afterwards, we dispersed. It seemed strange to me that the people at that time separated into different groups. They did not go directly to their offices. Members of the PNI got together in one house, while members of the PKI assembled at another place. Members of the PKTB went to Sudono’s house, he was their leader. I went with some friends to ‘urang awak’ [that is Minangkabau for to discuss] and we agreed to form a party. The following day there was a meeting. The manager, Pak Sjamsoeri, announced that a party had not yet been formed. Immediately we took the initiative to form the Sarbumusi. We canvassed people from house to house, especially the people who disassociated themselves from the SBTI-SOBSI, both Minangkabau and Javanese. We also looked for members of religious study groups. Because the Masyumi was banned by the government, we affiliated with the NU. I thought this was the suitable thing for a newly formed organization to do. We contacted people who worked at the departments of religion both in Sawahlunto and in Padang. Finally, our organization was registered and the NU was established. (Interview with Bulkhañi, 9-6-1995)

I have not been able to obtain the exact figures of the total number of members of each trade union, but I have put together a rough estimate gathered from interviews with the leaders of the trade unions. It gives the following figures; SBTI 1,200, PKTB 500, KBM 300, and Sarbumusi 200 members.

The instruments used by the leaders of each trade union to obtain mass mobilization were many and varied and included ethnicity, class, ideology, religion, patron-client ties, and economic interest. The Sarbumusi, for example, emphasized religion and ethnicity in the initial process of its formation. The Minangkabau people who worked at the middle and lower levels of the company were highly aware of their identity as ‘urang awak’ and ‘urang surau’. This identity tag of ‘urang awak’ and ‘urang surau’ was seized upon by the leaders of Sarbumusi to mobilize its members. Associations like religious study groups or recreational ‘pencak silat’ groups functioned as a place of recruitment. Besides these extra-curricular associations, the workplace was also used as a basis of mobilization. Quite clearly, the unions used various

41 ‘Urang awak’ refers to Minangkabau people and ‘urang surau’ indicates people who are mosque-goers and listen to sermons. During that time, people from other regions in West Sumatra such as Matur, Bukittinggi, Batusangkar, Pariaman, and Painan, who worked both in the mines or in government offices, also formed Islamic study groups.

42 Interview with Bulkhañi 9-5-1995; Zulkarnain 16-3-1996; Djamaluddin Peto Basa 12-8-1996.
strategies to attract members.

The KBM-PNI homed in on friendship ties and patron-client ties. Mining engineers from the ITB who were posted in the Ombilin by the central government tended to choose the ruling party, the PNI. Patron-client ties which were created through work relations between mining engineers and their subordinates, either Minangkabau or non-Minangkabau were transformed into a basis for mobilization. A subordinate like Masdur, for example, a Minangkabau and graduate of the senior high school who began to work at the beginning of 1960, tended to choose KBM-PNI on the basis of patron-client ties. He said spontaneously “I imitated my boss, because that was the only way to secure my job after the PRRI” (Interview with Pak Masdur 3-6-1995).

Like the KBM-PNI, ethnicity was not the major instrument used by the leaders of PKTB-SOKSI to mobilize the masses. The main tools wielded by this trade union were patron-client ties and relations of production. Social relations between the leaders of the PKTB-SOKSI and the miners outside the mines to do with the making of squatters’ dryfields for additional income and a pattern of mutual visits were successful ways to attract a following. Such patron-client relations would have been ineffective had it not been for the dominant position of the leaders of the PKTB-SOKSI as overseers. The overseers presented the miners with a choice: they could choose politics or work. If the miners chose politics, then they had to join the SBTI-SOBSI. Otherwise, if the miners opted for work, then they had to follow the PKTB-SOKSI (Djanan Thaib, 14-6-1995).

The SBTI-SOBSI simultaneously juggled ethnicity, patron-client ties, and the ideology of class struggle for the mobilization of its members. This was especially effective in recruiting Javanese miners and Minangkabau people from the frontier areas. The marginal position of the Javanese miners in their relationship with the non-Javanese overseers, plus the bad working and living conditions they had to endure, proved fertile soil for mobilizing them by wielding the ideology of class struggle. The patron-client ties, which had already been in place since they had been recruited, were strengthened through daily social contacts in the barracks. These also proved a fruitful method to mobilize the mass. Naturally, against this kaleidoscopic background there were obvious differences between the leaders of the KBM-PNI, the Sarbumusi, the PKTB-SOKSI, and the SBTI-SOBSI. Unlike the leaders of the three other trade unions, the leaders of the SBTI-SOBSI were mandors who had close relations with the labourers. They worked in the mines and lived together in barracks, some of them were even heads of a barrack. Their double functions strengthened their position among the labourers.

Apart from the Sarbumusi, all three trade unions took contributions from their members by deducting membership fees from their wages. The SBTI-SOBSI and the PKTB-SOKSI took contributions in kind (rice). The rice contribution was obtained by cutting the labourers’ rice rations at the Beka (Interview with Sudono M. Wiguno, 16-5-1995). There was a marked element of competition between the SBTI-SOBSI and the PKTB-SOKSI. The leaders of the SBTI-SOBSI forced the labourers to become members of it and to give their contribution in

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43 According to Pak Subari Sukardi, the mayor of Sawahlunto, it was difficult to mobilize the population of the tangsis for public activities such as giving each other mutual help. The most successful way was through the head of the barracks. The inhabitants of the barracks obeyed the head of tangsi rather than the head of a village, although the status of the latter was higher than the former. Interview with Pak Subari Sukardi, 22-3-1997.
Of the four trade unions the SBTI-SOBSI was the strongest in terms of membership, activities, and representation on the Enterprise Council, in the Political Team and the Management Organization. It had two representatives on the Enterprise Council, Sjair and Ibnu, while the PKTB had only one, Sudono M. Wiguno. The KBM and the Sarbumusi were not represented on the Enterprise Council, because both these trade unions had too few members. All demands were channelled through this Dewan. The Political Team and the Management Organization consisted of three commissions, two of which were headed by the SBTI-SOBSI. The first commission was headed by Ngadiran, a mine mandor and the second one by M. Joeskal, also a mine mandor (PTBA-UPO Archives, report of Harsanto).

The other strength of the SBTI-SOBSI lay in the modest attitude adopted by its leaders and their willingness to give labour problems a central place. This trait is what distinguished the SBTI-SOBSI from the other three trade unions. Other trade unions, like the Sarbumusi, gave labour problems scant attention, preferring to concern itself with religious matters. The KBM-PNI was more elitist, and not interested in any concessions to labour which would endanger its members' comfortable position in the company. Finally, the PKTB-SOKSI had never struck deep roots among the miners.

Evidence of the SBTI-SOBSI's concern for labour problems is quite obvious from the demands it made to management. Its demands did not take the form of strikes, as in 1953 or as preferred among the labourers in the East Sumatran plantations during the 1960s (Stoler 1986:157-61). The protests which the SBTI-SOBSI channelled through open demands to and protests against the management according to its reading of the situation were about improvements in the nine basic needs such as foods, clothes, and the like (Sembikan Bahan Pokok), and a wage rise. These demands were also part of the SOBSI's political jockeying for national power, and symptomatic of the radicalization of national politics. Compared to other wage labourers, the miners' life was relatively well-insulated from runaway inflation because their wage packet was made up almost entirely of in-kind payments. Despite the numerical strength of the SBTI-SOBSI, the demands and protests never strengthened its bargaining position with the management. This was clearly evident, for instance, when the Minister of Mining, Armunanto, who was known to be a supporter of the PKI, visited the mines in 1964 and again in 1965. A big meeting was held at Sawahlunto in 1965 for all members of the trade unions. At that meeting, the SBTI-SOBSI was very vocal, passing on its demands to the manager through the minister. The minister tried to force the manager to agree to what the SOBSI wanted, but the manager was unable to do so, since the production of coal at that time was very low (Antara, 30-8-1965).

The Ombilin coal-mines turned into an arena for the political interests of the national and local PKI leaders, as well as the left-wing military. Given this climate, it is not surprising that

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44 Unfortunately the exact date of the formation of Enterprise Council is not known, but it was very probably at the beginning of 1965. Whereas the Political Team and Management Organization was formed in July 1965 with the political intention of intensifying the position of Nasakom in the company, co-operation between civilians and the military, the National Front, the political parties at district and local level. In the management sector, the task of the team was to improve working and living conditions and improve the skills of labourers. For a more detailed description about this, see PTBA-UPO Archives, Report of Harsanto SH, the Head of the Political Team and Management Organization.
Communist leaders like Aidit and Nyono visited Sawahlunto. In their turn, the SBTI-SOBSI leaders were sent to attend the meetings of the SOBSI congress in Jakarta. All this conspired to put them in a stronger position than that of the other trade unions (Interview with Zulkarnain, 16-3-1996). As just mentioned two weeks before the 1965 coup, the Minister of Mining, Armunanto visited Sawahlunto accompanied by Busono, one of the leaders of the PKI at the national level. The overtones of this visit were more political than economic since the PKI was out to strengthen its grassroots support.

The strong position of the SBTI-SOBSI caused difficulties in the social relationships between the overseers, mandors, and labourers. The overseers who were mostly from the PKTB or the Sarbumusi and ex-adherents of the PRRI were not at ease when they were faced with mandors and labourers from the SBTI-SOBSI and other communist mass organizations in the town. Some overseers tried to intimidate the labourers through the imposition of work discipline, trying to frighten them into submission by saying that labourers would not be given any overtime if they did not obey the company’s work regulations (Interview with Pak Djanan Thaib 16-4-1995). Overtime was hard to come by so competition was fierce as each labourer wanted to survive. This tactics was partly successful and obtained the obedience of some of the workforce, some even shifted their allegiance from the SBTI-SOBSI to the PKTB or the Sarbumusi, especially as long as overseers continued to play the role of ‘patron’ who could protect them. At the places where the cadres of the PKI worked such as in the Sawah Rasau underground mine and at the central electricity plant in the village of Salak, such tactics were a fiasco. In an effort to prevent the labourers from being influenced by the PKI, the overseers told them to keep work and politics entirely separate, but this remained largely a pipe dream (Pak Djanan Thaib 16-4-1995). There was a general tendency for the SBTI-SOBSI and other communist mass organizations to adopt a more radical stance at this time which made the situation unsafe for their political opponents.

5. New Socio-Political Divisions and Control of Labour

The role of the leaders was undeniably important in mobilizing the masses. The trade unions were formed on the initiative of the former, and the organization of labour actions was in their hands. But that does not mean that the miners just sat back passively and accepted their fate. The miners were also intent on pursuing their own strategies for survival and resistance. The individualized resistance of the miners continued and was indicated by high rates of absenteeism. Attendance at work was not regular, and in 1961 only around 78 percent of labourers was present in the mines. Individual resistance by absconding and stealing of coal for survival was an everyday occurrence.

The rapid expansion of the role of the army in the state economy gathered real momentum after the nationalization of the Dutch companies in 1957. The army officers joined the political and economic elite, and became accustomed to the privileges and wealth associated with these positions (Crouch 1978:41). As a political power, the army had a growing interest in defending and expanding its interests.

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45 For a comprehensive study about the involvement of the army in politics and economy in Indonesia, see Sundhaussen 1971; Crouch 1978; Lowry 1996.
The intervention of the army at the national level was reflected at a lower level in the mining society. Intervention by the army and changes in the mining society mirrored the national political development and the economic development of coal under the Guided Democracy. At the same time such changes were also the outcome of local political developments, especially the PRRI rebellion.

How drastic were the changes in the background, composition, and social relations of the mining society? The first change which occurred was in the system of the way the company was run. The intervention of the army in the Ombilin coal-mines is most plainly demonstrated by the appointment of ten to fifteen military officials to important and strategic positions in the company in the wake of the PRRI rebellion (Interview with Lieutenant-Colonel Soeharto, 23-2-1998). Their appointment was a political move intended to assuage the tension between ex-supporters and opponents of the PRRI, and economically it was a tactic to protect production from sabotage by the PRRI supporters who returned to the mine.

The appointment of managers is a good gauge of army intervention. Until 1960, the managers were civilians, Minangkabau, and former students of the Mijnbouw School. They were appointed on the basis of suggestions from below, from both the mining society and the local government. Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that they also represented local economic and political interests. After 1960, the background to and the system of appointment of managers were modified. These changes were initiated by the central government to protect the mines from the losses which ensued because of the chaos caused by the PRRI adherents. Between 1960-1965 there were no less than three managers, all from outside West Sumatra, and two of them were military men. They were S.A. Sjauta (1960-1961), Captain Harun Al-Rasjid (1961-1962), and Major Samsoeri Sontosudirdjo (1962-1967). Of the three managers, Major Samsoeri Sontosudirdjo served the longest. He was from Yogyakarta, and started his career in the Diponegoro Division, Central Java.

Quite apart from being the manager, Major Sjamsoeri Sontosudirdjo was also the head of the National Front at Sawahlunto, indoctrinating the villagers and the labourers in the tangis in collaboration with civilian leaders. With the Bupati of Sawahlunto and Sijunjung, Sudarsin, a Javanese army man, he was also active in carrying out the formation of new political groups.

S.A. Sjauta, was a former student of the Mijnbouw School at Sawahlunto in colonial times. He came from North Sulawesi. After working at the Ombilin and Bukit Asam coal-mines, he was moved to the Mining Office in Jakarta. He was a neutral person in the sense that he was not interested in politics as the former managers Sjahbuddin Sutan Radjo Nando (PSI), and P.A. Darami (Masyumi) had been. He was appointed to calm down the political conflicts, especially between followers and non-followers of the PRRI, between the PSI and the Masyumi trade unions and the communist trade union. Captain Harun Al-Rasjid came from Palembang, and started his career in the Indonesian Army. After he had retired from the army, he worked as manager at the Ombilin coal-mines, but not for long. According to information obtained in interviews, he was unable to manage the company and was not untainted by corruption. Interview with Sudono M.Wiguno 23-4-1996.

The National Front was set up in 1960 to mobilize all political parties and other organizations in Indonesia, including the armed forces, to support the government’s policies. It replaced the army-sponsored National Front for the Liberation of West Irian, which had been based on the army-led military-civilian ‘co-operation bodies’, set up after the introduction of martial law. See Lev 1966:65-7; Crouch 1978:34.
forces in the company based on the ideology of Nasakom. He busily organized campaigns among the people of the mining town for the liberation of West Irian and the Crushing of Malaysia. He was, in this respect, an extension of the central government policy from Jakarta. He should have been a neutral person placed in the middle of the Nasakom leaders, but in fact, according to some informants, he was surrounded by communist leaders and in his actions he tended to take sides with them.\(^{48}\)

So the power of the managers shifted from civilians to the military, and from the Minangkabau to the non-Minangkabau. During this period the managers had a double task. They not only had to run production but also to represent the political interests of the ruling group. The ways in which the managers handled this double function, will be explained later on.

The winds of change blew not just through the upper echelons of management, they also touched the higher and middle levels of the mining society in matters of ethnic composition, education, and formal and informal organizations. During the 1950s, the positions in the higher and middle level staff of the company were held in the main by Minangkabau, former students of the Mining School and the STTM, members of the Socialist and Masyumi parties and their trade unions. During the period 1960-1965 these positions were taken over by young engineers from the ITB or from the Bandung Mining Academy, mostly Javanese, who were appointed by the Mining Department of Jakarta. They were members of the Indonesian National Party (PNI) and the KBM which was dominant among civil servants at that time. These young engineers had no experience whatsoever of working in mines. A number of them had undergone very limited training experience in the Ombilin coal-mines under the watchful eye of experienced overseers, who had graduated from the Mining School and from the STTM. Their level of education may indeed have been higher than that of the former students of the STTM, but their work experience was nil. So it was not surprising that most of them were afraid to go into the mine. They preferred fiddling with administrative matters and placing ‘their political friends’ in important positions rather than giving leadership to their subordinates.\(^{50}\) Under such a regime the division of labour was based more on political considerations than efficiency and expertise. Their life-style was exclusive, according to the former students of the STTM. They had their own associations like sports clubs and arisan or savings club. They felt lonely, banished to the

\(^{48}\) It is not clear to what extent the manager Sjamsoeri Sontosudirdjo was involved in the PKI actions. According to some people, even though he was forced to follow the PKI policy, he still illegally supported the activities of the SOKSI trade union. But some former leaders of the Masyumi claimed he was a supporter of the PKI. It had also become a public secret among the population of the town that Hamzah, Sjamsoeri's secretary, had abused his power among former members of the PSI and the Masyumi. He was completely convinced that the communists would be the winners. After the coup of 30 September 1965, demonstrations against him were organized by local Islamic student groups. Interview with Sudono M.Wiguno 23-4-1996; Zulkarnain 16-3-1996.

\(^{49}\) See Angkatan Bersenjata 22-2-1969. This phenomenon reminds us of the 1950s, when the socialist manager, Sjahbuddin Sutan Radjo Nando, placed members of the PSI in important positions in the company without their expertise. For this see Bendera Buruh 5-9-1956.

\(^{50}\) It was reported by a local newspaper that those young engineers preferred to become the suppliers of rice and other basic needs for the company. They abused their power. Under such conditions the company went downhill. See Angkatan Bersenjata, 24-8-1969.
back blocks, being educated Javanese and having to live in an isolated town like Sawahlunto.  

A new balance of power in the higher and middle level staff emerged and this, in turn, created new social relations and conflicts. It was not merely an ideological differentiation between the nationalist and socialist mine engineers or the Masyumi alumni of the STTM, but more importantly it impinged on problems of power and security. The promotion of young engineers to a high level was not commensurate with their training and knowledge of the mine, which was what had come to be expected from the former students of the STTM. The rapid promotion of new mining engineers, combined with their displacement of some former students of the STTM created conflicts among the middle-level staff. The former students of the STTM felt this was unfair. The conflict became more serious when the middle level staff members, who were PRRI adherents, returned to the mines. Their position was unenviable. They were demoted, and worse still they were suspected of sabotage or of making political moves in the mines. The hidden resistance of the middle-level staff to the higher-level staff is indicated by their comments about ‘children still wet behind the ears’ (‘anak-anak kemaren’) who did not know anything yet (Interview with Djanan Thaib, 25-4-1995, Yulius 27-4-1995). They also regarded the incursion of the new high-level staff as the beginning of Javanese domination and the end of Minangkabau power in the mines. Leaving professional jealousy aside, competition between the two groups was also coloured by ethnic motives.

In order to survive, to strengthen their power, and to channel problems encountered in the workplace, the former students of the STTM formed an association, called the Association for Graduates of the Technical School for Mining or Ikatan Tamatan Sekolah Teknik Tambang (ITASETT) in 1960 (Interview with Timbul Sidabutar, 25-5-1995). It had roughly 200 members. This association provided more than a place to discuss job problems, here they could chew over their daily basic needs. It also sponsored other activities like sports, recreation, establishing a soap factory, and distributing textiles to its members (Interview with Bulkhaini, 13-6-1995; Timbul Sidabutar, 25-5-1995).

Changes in ethnic background also occurred at the lower levels of the mining society. A rough estimate shows that the lower administrative jobs, such as clerks, were still dominated by the Minangkabau, but their percentage declined from 75 percent to 60 percent, whereas the percentage of clerks who came from among the former Javanese contract labourers and their families increased from 25 percent to 40 percent (Interview with ex-manager Somad 19-5-1995). According to interviews with some who were top-level staff members during the 1960s, the number of children of former contract labourers who had had some education increased in

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51 These circumstances are more readily comprehensible when we read the report of an Antara correspondent who visited the mine in 1964. Generally the young engineers complained about the lack of facilities provided by company to enhance their lives in an isolated town. They were bored. They complained about the poor communications between house and mine and between their town and other towns in West Sumatra, the dearth of entertainment, and the difficulties in getting information from both local and national newspapers. See Antara, 22-8-1964. Interview with Atmoso Soehoed, 8-8-1995; Prasadja S. Sugoto 12-8-1996).

52 According to Zulkarnain, one of the PRRI adherents who returned to the mine in 1963, social relations between the former followers of the PRRI and either top-level staff or labourers did not run smoothly at all. He said that the former followers of the PRRI suffered under a heavy psychological burden. Interview with Zulkarnain 16-3-1996.
the 1960s. They had graduated from primary and junior high school (SMP) but could not continue their studies because of economic difficulties and the rampant inflation. Those who worked as clerks at the mines became members of the SBTI-SOBSI. They occupied important roles as organizers of this trade union, mobilizing the miners, whereas those who worked in the main office, especially the Minangkabau clerks, preferred to follow their boss, and became members of the PKTB-SOKSI and the Sarbumusi.

Almost all the former or retired Javanese labourers wanted their children to have an education, envisaging a future for them working at the mines as white collar employees. Some of them achieved this ambition and found employment in low level administrative jobs. Those who had lost out in the educational stakes were forced to work as common miners. The Javanese who worked in the lower-level administrative jobs regarded themselves as being of a higher social status than the common miners, which had also been the case before 1960. Turning their backs on ethnicity they identified themselves more closely with the non-Javanese, both in their social relations and political choices. Politically they were members of the PKTB trade union. This is illustrated by a son of a former contract labourer who graduated from the so-called ‘sekolah Jawa’ in the village of Durian.

I belonged to the office workers, and socialized with those bosses (meaning non-Javanese people, non-communists). Thus my party was initially the PSI, the local SBTI trade union, then I moved to the PKTB. (Interview with Pak Kasno S. Hartono 27-5-1995).

The ordinary miners were the lowest level of the mining society, the bottom of the social pyramid. Their background varied in origin and ethnicity. The largest group was the first and second generation of older miners recruited from Java or, in other words, people who had been living in Sawahlunto for a long time. Or they were those who had been recruited from Java after Independence either directly by the company or indirectly through kinship ties. Generally, they were people who had been settled in Sawahlunto for several generations and depended on the mines for their income, whether in the form of pensions or that of daily or monthly wages. Some had lived in the tangsi with their families up to that time but others had built themselves houses outside the tangsi.

The second group was the local people from the areas in the vicinity of the mines. Their number swelled during and after the PRRI rebellion (Interview with Zulkarnain 16-3-1996). Poverty and political unrest were the main reasons which made them choose to work as miners. Like their Javanese fellow-workers they were ordinary miners. Unfortunately there is no information available which would allow me to calculate their total number. They were usually recruited through kinship ties. The third group was comprised of the Bina Karya people, which I have discussed above.

It is interesting to note that the Javanese top-level staff spoke Indonesian with the Javanese labourers. According to the Javanese top-level staff, the use of Indonesian was intended to maintain social distance between them and to avoid intimacy. Interview with Prasadja S. Sugoto, Muljadi 25-8-1996.

Original text: "Saya ini orang kantor, bergaul dengan bapak-bapak itu (menunjuk ke orang-orang non-Jawa, non-PKI), jadi partai saya dulu socialis, SBTI local, kemudian pindah ke PKTB."
These three groups can be subdivided into even smaller units, who were already regarded as civil servants, receiving a monthly salary. Being a civil servant was to enjoy a prestigious status. The second was composed of day labourers who received their wages by the day. Newcomers like the Bina Karya people, who were recruited at the cost of the company, had to sign a contract for three years. Afterwards, they could choose whether they wanted to continue to work in the mines or return to their home region at the cost of the company.

As in the 1950s, the miners as a community were involved in various formal organizations, as well as cultural and social associations. Unlike the 1950s, cultural and social associations in the 1960s, although still very active in their chosen fields, were more thoroughly permeated by politics. The involvement of the labourers in various organizations and associations makes us aware of the collective solidarity that was formed by many factors. As in their links with formal organizations, very often the labourers were involved in one or two associations outside the mines, and more often than not those associations determined their political participation, and the political decisions they would ultimately make about formal organizations.

In the confines of the changing mining community and under the new political configuration, social relations and social control between managers and miners overlapped. Social relations and social control were to some degree determined by the work discipline of the company, but they were now also clearly steered by party discipline. The boundary between the world of work and the world of politics was blurred. The military manager, Major Sjamsoeri, imposed discipline on labourers, and he also saw that they obeyed the political will of Jakarta. As the Head of National Front, he was assiduous in visiting the miners' barracks and the mosques to campaign for the political programmes which were a flagship of Guided Democracy, such as Manipol/Usdek, and the programme for the stepping up of production, especially between 1964-1965. The manager carried all this out working in conjunction with the company staff and representatives of each political party. In his politicking, the manager gave the PKI leaders more room to manoeuvre than he allowed the other political parties which were united in Nasakom (Interview with Bulkhaini 13-6-1995).

In 1964-1965, the manager seemed to want to compromise more with the miners, listening to their complaints and demands. On the Enterprise Council the miners were also given a forum in which to discuss the problems of the management with the company staff. In the discussions, the representatives of the SBTI-SOBSI had more power to push the miners' interests than was granted their counterparts from the PKTB-SOKSI. This put the manager and the high level staff in a difficult situation, because of the gap in educational background between the higher level staff and the leaders of the SBTI-SOBSI. Atmoso Soehoed, a company staff member, recalled that the meetings of the members of the Enterprise Council were very tedious, and they were unable to provide any solutions to the problems. Atmoso Soehoed claimed that it was difficult to make the leaders of the SBTI-SOBSI understand how an adequate balance between the interests of the miners and these of the company should be achieved (Interview with Atmoso Soehoed 12-4-1995).

When the manager was campaigning for the government programme to increase production, he introduced the word 'front'. 'Front' was an important concept and often used in political rhetoric. In the mining society 'front' was also translated in terms of production, to mean 'struggle'. The miners had to struggle to cut as much coal as possible.

The campaigns to increase production depended on the patron-client relationship between the miners and the overseers and the foremen, and also on the political affiliations
of the miners. Political links had dual functions. They could be productive and stimulate the miners to be industrious, but they also could have the opposite effect and make the miners thumb their noses at work discipline. The overseers, who were ex-adherents of the PRRI, members of the Sarbumusi, the PKTB, or the KBM would be in a position to discipline the miners from the SBTI. They could act as patron, provided their followers, for example, with such sought-after prerequisites as social security, and economic and political protection. Links between the overseers and the miners were overtly expressed through their intensive social contacts outside the mines. For example, they collaborated in the preparation of dryfields to earn some additional income, in visiting each other during important holidays or commemorations. Overseers quickly lost authority if they misused their power or were cruel to the miners and the foremen. In this respect, the power of the communist foremen was stronger than that of the non-communist overseers. The overseers’ narratives which reiterate ‘they had more power than us, we had to be careful in what we did, otherwise we would be terrorized by them’ indicate how they had to negotiate in their relations with their subordinates from the PKI.  

Similarly, the foremen from the SBTI-SOBSI could be more influential than the overseers from the non-SBTI-SOBSI. Foremen from the mass communist organizations had also double roles. They could manipulate work discipline in order to advance their own aims and political interests. They had the authority to order the miners to stop working or, conversely, to force them to work overtime, depending on their priorities. For example, the foremen could stop the miners working or force them to join in organizational activities such as political courses, meetings, or mutual co-operation or ‘gotong royong’. The overseers were powerless to do anything like this. Meanwhile, other ‘fronts’ were emerging as the political tension at the national level increased.

6. In the shadow of the Coup of 1965

The miners had various motives for becoming involved in political parties, trade unions, and other mass organizations during the period 1960-1965. These motives were multiple, and

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55 Interviews with former overseers, Bulkhaini, Djanan Thaib, and Timbul Sidabutar. They refer to the foremen and the miners from the SBTI-SOBSI. Bulkhaini said that he and his friends who were junior overseers, were forbidden to visit the miners at the barrack by their superiors with a view to maintaining authority. But they did not obey. They reasoned that ‘zaman sudah berubah’ (‘times had changed’). There were not like overseers of the colonial government. Bulkhaini and his friends went to the barracks of the miners secretly at night. Bulkhaini also recognized that some overseers still tended to use their power excessively behaving like petty kings at the mine. He says such overseers had no power to discipline the miners. It is interesting to note that such social relations continue up to the present. When Bulkhaini comes to Sawahlunto from Batusangkar every month to get his pension, he keeps up his contact with people in the barracks. I saw that he preferred to pray together with the miners at the mosque located at the centre of barracks rather than in the big mosque in the town.

56 A great part of this description is based on the interviews of the screening team organized by the company for the miners in 1966 and 1970. Team screening was instigated by the New Order government to investigate, and categorize the involvement of civil servants in the PKI and its mass organizations
sometimes contradictory, especially when we look at how individual and collective interests, each played a role in influencing the miners to become member of an organization. This period was so highly politically charged that it was certainly unsafe for anyone to become a member of a party. However, there was no alternative for people.

For the Minangkabau labourers, motives for becoming involved in a political party were rooted in ethnicity, religion, and economic factors. They can be sub-divided into two categories. First, there were Minangkabau labourers from outside Sawahlunto who were engaged in religious activities in mosques, and who belonged to village-bonded associations. They chose overwhelmingly for the Sarbumusi-NU. The second group was made up of Minangkabau people from the frontier region and the poor areas in the vicinity of the mines such as Kubang, Kolok, and Sijantang. They were mostly involved in the SBTI-SOBSI and other mass communist organizations formed outside the mines, such as the Barisan Tani Indonesia and the Pemuda Rakyat.

The positive relationship between ethnicity and political current was not valid for these villagers. Their dependence on the Ombilin coal-mines and efforts to protect themselves from accusations that they were adherents of the PRRI were the principal reasons for them to become involved in the PKI and its mass organizations. Rather than being accused and subsequently intimidated by the members of the OPR and the APRI as followers of the PRRI, they chose to become members of the SBTI-SOBSI.

Djama’a, a labourer from the village of Kubang, began working as a transport labourer at the mine on 19 April 1954. Until 1959, he was member of the SBTI-KBSI, and then he shifted his allegiance to the SBTI-SOBSI:

At that time the situation was very dicey. My cousin was an adherent of the PRRI, and involved in the guerrilla warfare in the jungle. Hence, I became member of the SBTI-SOBSI because I was anxious about being suspected of being a follower of the PRRI to by the OPR. 

Interview with Djama’a, 22-6-1966).

Intimidation was everywhere and dominated the daily social contacts of villagers whether at work, at roll call, in the barracks, or in the dryfields.

which were banned by the New Order Government soon after the coup. The result of interviews might not be objective. Firstly, because the people interviewed were afraid, and some even preferred to remain silent. Secondly, the interviews were witnessed by the military, and it is possible the interviewees had a tendency to admit their involvement in the banned party. I am very aware of the limited and insufficient information to be extracted from these interviews. In order to give a comprehensive description on the nature, motives, and activities of the miners and the hidden internal tensions among them, I have combined these with the results of information which I have obtained from interviews with communists and non-communists at Sawahlunto.

Original text: “waktu itu situasinya sangat tidak aman. Keponakan saya menjadi pengikut PRRI, dan ikut bergerilya di hutan-hutan. Karena itu saya menjadi anggota SBTI-SOBSI, karena saya tidak ingin dicurigai oleh OPR sebagai pengikut PRRI.
The following story of a labourer, Djasan from the village of Kolok, illustrates this.

I worked at Section C, in Pompa Rantih. I was intimidated by the organizers of the SBTI-SOBSI from Kolok, and members of the OPR, like Rabaatin and Sukirman. They came to my house at night, forcing me to become a member of the SBTI-SOBSI. Initially I refused. They came for a second time for the same purpose. I still continued to refuse. The third time, I was summoned while I was working. They showed me their guns, and then forced me to sign the membership list of the SBTI-SOBSI. (Interview with Djasan, 22-6-1966).

Like most people caught up in the political uncertainties of the time, the Javanese miners and their family members who were involved in the communist mass organizations had multiple motives. A mixture of economic difficulties, patron-client ties, and ethnicity all featured as decisive factors inducing an individual to throw in his lot with the communist mass organizations. Most of the Javanese labourers who worked at the heavy jobs like those in the underground mine were involved in such organizations, hoping against hope for social and economic improvements in their lives. They were also interested in the support the communists offered them on such an occasion as a child’s first bath or turun mandi, circumcision or sunatan, marriages, and death.

In this respect, a Javanese miner, Kaspanut, explained why he had become a member of the SBTI-SOBSI.

I became member of the SBTI-SOBSI in 1964. I was visited at home by Ngadimin, an organizing member of the SBTI-SOBSI. He invited me to join the SBTI. I refused. He was angry with me, and threatened me. If I did not want to become a member of the SBTI, I would find myself in difficulties. One day, I asked the head of the village for permission to hold a celebration to mark my child’s first bath or turun mandi. I did not get it. Then Ngadimin came to see me again. If you were a member of the SBTI, everything would have run without a hitch. (Interview with Kaspanut, 16-6-1966)

In the course of 1965 efforts to mobilize cadres and followers were intensified. Supangat, a

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60 Supangat was recruited from Java to work in the Ombilin by the Japanese in 1942. From 1945-1948 he was a member of a revolutionary group and was posted in the church of Sawahlunto. When the Dutch army arrived at Sawahlunto in 1948, he and his group moved to Tanjung Ampalu,
miner described what happened in the barracks at Durian before the coup as follows:

Towards 1965, one of the organizers of the SBTI-SOBSI, Gafaruddin, ordered people to dig trenches at the barracks, people were told to follow courses, a political school, it was called and it was attended by thirty people. I saw Gampo, Hamzah, Djalinus, Juskal, and Sjarifuddin. Participants in the courses also included women like Ramali’s wife, Satidjah, and Gadis. Every late afternoon, I saw Djalinus, and Satidjah ordering my wife to attend marching drills. I was angry with my wife, because she neglected her work at home. My wife told me, if she did not join in, she would be shunned and could not associate with other the women. (Interview with Supangat 12-6-1970).

Most people also believed that the communists were genuinely struggling to improve their lot. They were convinced that the communist leaders who attended congresses of the Pemuda Rakyat and the SBTI-SOBSI would fight for better living conditions in the future. There were rumours that some of the local PKI leaders had been to Moscow.

The fact that the communist leaders were successful in mobilizing miners, does not mean the miners were passive and allowed themselves to be led by the nose simply following all the party discipline. They seemed quite capable of making their own decisions. The miners would make choices, weighting up such matters as contributions in kind, attendance at organizational activities like meetings, courses, and mutual co-operation.

a village nearby, but outside Sawahlunto itself. In 1950, he returned to work at the mine with the help of the leader of communist trade union, Ronojudo, whom he regarded as ‘bapak angkat’ and as a patron. He became a member of the SBTI-SOBSI and went on strike in 1953 on the orders of Ronojudo.

Among them was Sjarifuddin Pardi born at Sawahlunto in 1927. His father was a former contract labourer from Sunda, West Java, and his mother was Minangkabau. He was Sudono M.Wiguno’s friend, and had graduated from junior high school. His father was also a communist and his mother was a very active member of Gerwani. He was member of the local parliament, DPR-GR. After Sjarifuddin Pardi returned from Moscow (?), he always wore a Moskow hat or ‘topi moskow’. Another important cadre was Ngadiran, son of a former contract labourer from Java. He became clerk in the underground mine of Sawah Rasau V during 1960s and leader of the SBTI-SOBSI branch of Sikalang. He was sent to Jakarta around July 1965 to attend the SBTI-SOBSI congress. He stayed there for one month. Interview with Pak Sudono M.Wiguno 14-4-1995.
Sometimes the miners did not obey when told to follow the cadre courses, which the SBTI-SOBSI had organized.

I became a cadre of the SBTI-SOBSI after Ngadiran returned from the PKI conference in Jakarta in 1965. I joined with friends like Sukarman, Ngadio, Mudjiono, Mario, Nirwan, Kamidjo, and Kusman. I followed courses for cadres at the Workers Association Building at Sikalang. What was taught there were lessons about Marxism, and the labour struggles in China, and Russia. It also taught us how to seek out as many new members as possible by making promises and, if need be, by threats. I followed the courses for fifteen days only, because I could not make head or tail of it. I was tired, because the next day, I would have to work.  

(Interview with Surasin 16-6-1966).

Sjofjan, a labourer, moved from the socialist trade union, the SBTI-KBSI, to the communist trade union, the SBTI-SOBSI in 1959, because he wanted to shield himself from the accusation of being a PRRI adherent. Quite apart from this he was also really interested in the lectures about the living conditions of labourers in communist countries such as China and Russia. Afterwards, he wondered whether such conditions would ever be achieved at Sawahlunto. In 1963, Sjofjan decided to resign his membership of the SBTI-SOBSI because he was disappointed in that trade union. The straw which broke the camel's back was when he did not receive any help from the SBTI-SOBSI when two of his children died (Interview with Sjofjan 29-5-1970).

The miners were faced with a difficult choice between individual interests and organizational discipline, which is illustrated by such statements as ‘if we did not join in the trade unions activities, we would be shouldered. We also had to feed our families, if we did not do as we were told, we would not get any money’.

In daily social contacts, there was a fierce competition between members of communist and non-communist organizations. Miners and their family members who were involved in communist mass organizations shunned members of the non-communist organizations. Pak Rahmat who had chosen for the PKTB-SOKSI told us how difficult social relations were between the communist labourers and their non-communist colleagues in the barracks. “Their numbers were very large, they were powerful, there was nothing we could do but to keep our mouths shut” (Interview with Pak Rahmat 15-4-1995). Bu Rubiyah, Pak Rahmat’s wife, also told us how she was rebuffed by the members of Gerwani. She had no social contacts with her neighbours at her barracks, because they boycotted her. After the coup of 30 September 1965, the military assumed power and launched a series of violent attacks on thousands of people who were allegedly members of the PKI and its affiliated organizations. Army personnel, right-wing Muslims, and other civilians wiped out communists and their sympathizers, killing or

imprisoning thousands of alleged members of the PKI and people deemed their sympathizers.  

After the coup, efforts were started to weed out the PKI among the Military Command III/17 August, the local parliament (DPR-GR), the heads of nagari (penghulu), and the common people. No stone was left unturned. These actions were in the hands of the right-wing military, the Indonesian Student’s Action Front (KAMI), and the Indonesian Student and Youth Action Front (KAPPI) in various towns in West Sumatra. Unfortunately, no information is available which would permit a reliable estimate to be made of the total number of communists who were killed. In general, the process of the cleaning up of the communists was more subdued and controlled than were similar actions in Java, Bali, and East Sumatra which were marked up by conspicuous violence.

At Sawahlunto, which was one of the centres of communist activities in West Sumatra, the cleaning up process was effected by imprisoning suspects at the hospital and the prison of Sawahlunto. Thousands of the people were led to these two buildings so that they could be interrogated by the local military. The mayor of Sawahlunto, Achmad Nurdin, a member of the PNI, declared in his office on January 1966, that seventeen out of nineteen civil servants, all Hansip (civil defence corps) members, and four of the five heads of nagaris were involved in communist activities (Warta Berita Antara, 25-1-1966).

In the Ombilin coal-mines, the total number of those who were regarded as communist, can be sub-classified as groups B, C1 and C2. Nobody qualified for inclusion in Group A and therefore nobody was sent for detention on the island of Buru. Group B consisted of people who were PKI leaders, and they were arrested directly by the army. They were eleven in total. Group C1 comprised people who were registered as members of the PKI, and there were 201 of them, whereas there were 960 in Group C2. These were simply regarded as sympathizers of the SBTI-SOBSI. Groups B and C1 were dismissed straightaway and later imprisoned in 1966. Like the convict labourers of former times, these political prisoners were employed by the New Order government for the construction of public works projects in the town. People in Group C2 were maintained in the company’s employ until they could be replaced in the labour force by new labourers. As a rule, the communists surrendered themselves to the military voluntarily.  

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64 Between 500,000 and 1,000,000 people were killed between October 1965 and March 1966. See Hughes 1967; Cribb 1990.

65 The total number of the military officials involved in the communist activities was relatively small. But, nevertheless, they held important and strategic positions in the army. They included Colonel Imam Subandi, Assistant V/Territorial, Colonel Mardjiman, Resort Military Command 032 Wirabraja, Lieutenant-Colonel Bainal, the staff of Civil Defence Camp of West Sumatra (Markas Daerah Pertahanan Sipti), Major Djohan Rivai, the Bupati of Pasaman regency. For further explanation on this see Zed, Utama, Chaniago 1998:217-8. Some fragmented information was found in Warta Berita Antara 1-4-1966; 15-4-1966, 16-1-1966; 29-4-1966.

66 For a general description of the violent actions in Java and Bali, see Cribb (ed.)1990; Robinson 1995. For West Sumatra see Chaniago 1998; Zed 1997.

67 See PTBA-UPO Archives. Letter of Director of PN.TBO to Assistant of Urusan Personalia, Dirjen Pertambangan Jakarta, 16-11-1966; Laporan mengenai ex-anggota SBTI-SOBSI yang terlibat pada PN. Tambang Batubara Unit Produksi Ombilin, 30-4-1969.
Only a few of them tried to hold out and effected a further strategy to enable them to continue their struggle outside the town or in the frontier areas, true to the tradition the communists had observed since the 1920s (Chapter IV).

As I have just said, unlike in Java, Bali and East Sumatra, the cleaning up of the communists in the Ombilin coal-mines or at the town of Sawahlunto were not blighted by acts of violence such as mass killings. Only one communist leader was shot by the military, when he refused to surrender. At the same time, the Kappi mounted various demonstrations, demanding the replacement of local officials as well as the manager of the Ombilin, Mayor Sjamsoeri Sontosudirdjo (Interview with Soehoed 17-8-1995). He stayed on till March 1967. There is no information available which would explain why this manager was able to keep his job till 1967. Possibly the moderate group in the mine decided to retain him as manager.

Why the acts of violence or mass killings did not happen in the town and in the Ombilin coal-mines is a question which is difficult to answer. Some cadres were not at Sawahlunto at the time. They were in Medan or Pekanbaru, where they remained with their families. It may also be that the military tried to weed out the communist remnants in a non-violent way, following the command of the Kodam III/17 August of West Sumatra. Nevertheless, terror and intimidation still ruled the roost according to the testimonies of ex-prisoners. Finally, and very significantly in this area, the non-communists regarded people who were involved in the communist activities as their own family. Hence, it is not impossible that many people helped the communists or their sympathizers (Sudono M.Wiguno 15-4-1995).

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68 At the top of a hill, he announced he would continue the struggle of the PKI. The military finally fired at him. His body was dragged from the hill and brought to Sawahlunto.