

Cutting from Within: the Electoral Strategy of the Indonesian Communist Party, 1955-1957

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Article history

Received : 2025-06-11

Accepted : 2026-04-20

Published : 2026-04-23

Keywords

Indonesian Communist Party;
Political campaign;
the 1955 Election;
The 1957 Election;
Liberal Democracy.

Abstract: The Indonesian Communist Party is among the major parties in the period of liberal democracy. The party's development was supported by a strategy of welcoming the 1955 General Elections for the DPR and the Constituent Assembly, followed by the 1957 DPRD elections. Therefore, this research aimed to analyze the strategy of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in facing the struggle of the 1955 General and 1957 Regional Elections. The research was conducted using a historical method comprising four steps: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The results showed that Marxism–Leninism served as the ideological foundation of the PKI, guiding its strategic development and strengthening party doctrine through the establishment of the National Unity Front. This initiative mobilized and integrated non-party organizations in pursuit of democratic objectives during the 1955 elections, while also strengthening national coalitions to consolidate the opposition against rival parties. In the 1957 regional elections, the PKI sharply criticized other parties that committed corruption and were considered traitors to the people's revolution. This strategy succeeded in splitting and winning votes from other parties. Therefore, PKI ranked among the top four parties with 6,000,000 and 8,500,000 votes in the 1955 General and 1957 Regional Elections, respectively. PKI succeeded in positioning the party with a strategy of coalition and attacking others for corruption. This study contributes to historiography by highlighting the role of ideological consolidation and mass mobilization in electoral success, offering insights into the dynamics of political strategy in post-independence Indonesia.

Abstrak: Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) merupakan salah satu partai besar pada masa demokrasi liberal. Perkembangan partai ini didukung oleh strategi dalam menyambut Pemilu 1955 untuk DPR dan Konstituante, yang kemudian dilanjutkan dengan pemilihan DPRD tahun 1957. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi PKI dalam menghadapi kontestasi Pemilu 1955 dan Pemilihan Daerah 1957. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode sejarah yang meliputi empat tahapan, yaitu heuristik, kritik sumber, interpretasi, dan historiografi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Marxisme–Leninisme menjadi landasan ideologis PKI yang mengarahkan pengembangan strategi serta memperkuat doktrin partai melalui pembentukan Front Persatuan Nasional. Inisiatif ini berhasil memobilisasi dan mengintegrasikan organisasi-organisasi non-partai untuk mencapai tujuan demokratis dalam Pemilu 1955, sekaligus memperkuat koalisi nasional dalam menghadapi partai-partai pesaing. Dalam pemilihan daerah tahun 1957, PKI meluncurkan kritik tajam terhadap partai-partai lain yang terlibat korupsi dan dianggap mengkhianati revolusi rakyat. Strategi ini berhasil memecah basis dukungan lawan sekaligus menarik suara dari partai lain. Sebagai hasilnya, PKI berhasil menempati posisi empat besar dengan perolehan sekitar 6.000.000 suara pada Pemilu 1955 dan 8.500.000 suara pada Pemilihan Daerah 1957. PKI berhasil mengukuhkan posisinya melalui strategi koalisi serta serangan politik terhadap praktik korupsi lawan. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada historiografi dengan menyoroti peran konsolidasi ideologi dan mobilisasi massa dalam keberhasilan elektoral, serta memberikan pemahaman mengenai dinamika strategi politik pada masa awal pascakemerdekaan Indonesia.



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INTRODUCTION

The industrial revolution led to the development of a class of workers and financiers with the nature of capitalism in exploiting more value. Communism is reported as an antithesis to industrial society, characterized by the opposition of the working class and driven by a revolutionary spirit aimed at dismantling capitalist practices. This dynamic has shaped global socio-political developments since the nineteenth century. In the Indonesian context, following the August Revolution, efforts were directed toward establishing a sovereign state grounded in anti-imperialist principles. Furthermore, the development of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) as a significant political force contributed to and influenced national political struggles within the democratic system (Kahin, 2013, p. 70).

National political history confirms that Indonesia has successfully carried out democratic practices in the early days through a liberal system with the spirit of public participation to realize a sovereign state based on collective agreement. Following the political struggle in liberal democracy, PKI provided a platform for broad public participation and engagement in political activities. This development marked an initial step toward the 1955 general elections for DPR and Constituent Assembly. Therefore, regional elections for DPRD became a significant opportunity for contesting parliamentary control, with substantial implications for the formulation of policies required to shape the nation's direction in the pursuit of an independent identity (Alfian, 1978, p. 39).

Previous research has been conducted by Maulida on lost democracy to determine public participation of the national and regional parliaments through DPR and Constituent Assembly elections in 1955 and 1957 DPRD elections (Maulida, 2020). Maulida only focuses on the participation of oppressed classes, namely farmers and workers.

Another study that is quite relevant to the spatial and temporal dimensions of the 1955-1957 elections, as conducted by Hasibuan et.al., Ningrum et.al., and Wirayuda. Recent scholarship on Indonesia's 1955 General Election has contributed to understanding electoral dynamics, social participation, and party competition; however, the strategic role of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) remains insufficiently examined. The first study by Hasibuan, Agustono, and Pujiati (2024) analyzes the 1955 election in Medan, focusing on electoral processes, socio-economic conditions, and

party competition. The authors demonstrate that political parties such as Masyumi, PKI, and PNI employed varied approaches, including religious appeals and nationalist rhetoric, within a complex post-colonial political environment. Nevertheless, the study primarily provides a general comparative overview of party strategies and voter behavior, without offering a systematic analysis of PKI's organizational networks, mobilization techniques, or ideological strategies as an independent analytical focus. As a result, PKI's electoral strategy remains underexplored within localized political contestation.

Similarly, Ningrum, Mukhtar, and Tri Wulandari (2024) examine women's participation in the 1955 election, highlighting the expansion of political engagement among women and the role of regulations, political education, and socialization in facilitating their involvement. The study emphasizes how women broke gender barriers and actively participated in Indonesia's first democratic election. However, its analytical emphasis on gender participation leaves unanswered questions regarding how political parties particularly PKI, mobilized women as a strategic electoral constituency or integrated women's organizations into broader campaign strategies. Consequently, the relationship between PKI's electoral strategy and gender-based mobilization remains insufficiently addressed.

In addition, Wirayuda (2024) investigates the historical politics of the Masyumi Party in East Java, demonstrating that the party adopted distinctive campaign methods shaped by its traditional Islamic base and regional political dynamics. The study highlights that Masyumi's strategy differed across provinces and was influenced by political competition, including confrontation with communist groups. Although the research acknowledges the significance of communist actors in shaping electoral competition, PKI is treated primarily as a contextual factor influencing Masyumi's strategy rather than as a subject of analysis. Thus, the study does not explain how PKI itself formulated campaign strategies, built grassroots networks, or adapted to socio-political conditions in East Java.

Taken together, these studies reveal that existing literature on the 1955 General Election tends to emphasize regional electoral dynamics, gender participation, and the strategies of non-communist parties. The Indonesian Communist Party is frequently positioned only as one of several competing actors or as an external influence on

other parties' strategies. Therefore, a significant research gap persists regarding a comprehensive examination of PKI's electoral strategies, particularly in terms of mass mobilization, organizational infrastructure, ideological framing, and adaptation to local socio-political contexts. Addressing this gap is crucial for a deeper understanding of PKI's electoral performance and its role in shaping Indonesia's early democratic politics.

Meanwhile, this research analyzes the activities and strategies of PKI in gathering collective awareness and making the momentum of 1955 General and 1957 Regional Elections the embodiment of the practice of communism.

Under the leadership of D. N. Aidit, PKI effectively mobilized the party apparatus through mass-based support, reflecting a strategic effort to cultivate political consciousness among the oppressed classes during Indonesia's transition from the legacies of colonialism and feudalism toward an industrial society. The movement was planned systematically to grow a big wave in the national political current (Utomo, Politik Dipa Nusantara, 2019, p. 62). The party tried to build mass power structurally and culturally, developing several multi-sectoral companies to indirectly spread community resistance (Compton, 1992, p. 195). Therefore, this study aims to analyze PKI efforts in building a collective movement based on political consciousness in accordance with the spirit of communism to destroy power relations over the class of financiers after exploiting profits based on the surplus value of the working and peasant classes in the industrial and feudal spaces of the city and village, respectively. Collective action was projected to destroy feudal and capitalist domination through 1955 General and 1957 Regional Elections to rebuild a life without exploitation and provide justice for the entire community.

METHOD

This research uses the historical method with a series framework to present a systematic critical record of past events (Gottschalk, 2006, p. 42). The historical process was conducted rigorously and credibly to generate novel contributions beyond previous research, address problems rooted in past events, and substantiate or refute existing theories, while enhancing knowledge and deepening the understanding of history (Sjamsuddin, 2007, p. 14). The method had stages as a series of processes in producing historical works of scientific value, with 4 stages, namely Heuristics, Source Criticism,

Interpretation, and Historiography (Kuntowijoyo, 2005, pp. 60-65). The four stages were carried out with great care in tracing, criticizing, interpreting, and writing the history of PKI strategy in the 1957-1955 elections contained in relevant archives, newspapers, books, and journals from the National Archives building and the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia. These journals are in the form of Investaris documents of the Supreme Operations Command (KOTI) Archives, *Bintang Timur* in 1957, and *Harian Rakjat* June-November 1957.

LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE INDONESIAN COMMUNIST PARTY

Communism was developed with the expansion of industrial society, shaped by the character of capitalism as manifested through colonialism in the early twentieth century. The arrival of Henk Sneevliet enhanced the development of PKI, which, since 1914 had been the ISDV trying to influence the awareness of the intellectual youth group of the Semarang branch of the Islamic Union through the figure named Semaoen to destroy capitalism in the breath of colonialism as a response to the revolutionary movements of the eastern world (Ruth, 2017, p. 17). PKI experienced ups and downs since the 1926 rebellion and the repression of the colonizers until Japanese colonialism (Anderson, 2018, p. 41). However, the existence was maintained until the proclamation of Indonesian independence.

Independence in August 1945 ushered in Indonesia as a sovereign state after being released from the shackles of colonialism and determined the fate as a free nation with a democratic spirit. Hatta stated that democracy was carried out with a multi-party system by adjusting the conditions of Indonesian society, allowing each group to possess a forum for transmitting diverse aspirations. This idea became the basis for the Government Decree No. X regarding the multi-party system in 1945 (Subhan, 2021, p. 37). Mohammad Jusuf was the leader of PKI at the beginning of independence, whose presence was based on Government Decree No. X in September 1945. PKI also encountered great obstacles when the physical revolution occurred with Dutch military aggression and diplomatic politics. In this context, old comrade Moesso preferred the new method of selecting the Soviet Republic of Indonesia in the 1948 Madiun incident (Djamhari S. A., 2009, p. 125).

Indonesia experienced great challenges in

maintaining independence, faced by the Dutch efforts to regain control of the colonies that had proclaimed independence with a series of Military Aggression I and II. The Indonesian government chose diplomacy to avoid casualties when forced to respond to total physical war. Furthermore, political diplomacy led to the recognition of independence from the Netherlands through KMB with the condition of becoming RIS (Republik Indonesia Serikat) (Permatasari, 2018). RIS gained recognition of independence from the Netherlands and became a commonwealth country under the leadership of Queen Wilhelmina.

RIS was implemented for less than a year, from 1949 to 1950, because the concept of a federal state was not consistent with Indonesian unity. On August 17, 1950, Soekarno's independence speech emphasized that Indonesia changed the federal concept and RIS into a republic under NKRI (Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia). The RIS Constitution had to be changed in accordance with the conditions of Indonesian society (Ricklefs, 2017, p. 350).

The Republic of Indonesia was established as a unified republican state, adopting the Provisional Constitution (UUDS) as the foundational legal framework. This temporary constitutional arrangement created space for broader public participation, particularly within the context of a liberal democratic system of governance (Gaffar, 2013, p. 95). Liberal democracy established the Constituent Body as a manifestation of the people's participation space for the formation of the state foundation. This was because participation was facilitated by political parties as an instrument of democracy.

Liberal democracy started with the enactment of the Temporary Constitution (UUDS) on August 17, 1950, at the end of RIS government. However, Nugroho Notosusanto stated that the liberal democratic system commenced on December 27, 1949, under the RIS government after the end of the physical war through the Round Table Conference (KMB) agreement. Liberal democracy embraces parliamentarism constitutionally and has a multi-party system that represents groups in every layer of society (Aman, 2015, p. 56). This system featured DPR and the Constituent Assembly as key institutions, serving as parliamentary bodies and tasked with shaping the foundation of the state. In the 1955 general elections, the people exercised the right to select members of DPR and the Constituent Assembly through political party representation. At the regional level, citizens directly elected

representatives to the local parliaments through 1957 DPRD elections (Castle, 1988, pp. 59-62).

The transition to liberal democracy in 1950 affected the leadership of PKI. The development of youth groups such as Aidit, Lukman, and Njoto was the result of political education in Menteng 31 dormitory when Japanese colonialism succeeded in shifting the leadership of the old group. Aidit made major changes to the leadership of PKI by shifting Tan Liang Djie from the old group and changing the party's strategy from cadre-based to mass-based. The people expected a revolution to destroy the domination of capitalism (Edman, 2015, p. 70).

PKI welcomed parliamentary democracy in the 1950s, using a party system to educate the public in understanding the different levels of oppression experienced. The party used a theoretical framework to analyze social phenomena within local communities and work sectors, enabling a rational understanding of oppression and motivating the public to actively accept socialism. The PKI's Articles of Association, adopted at the Fourth National Congress in 1947 in Solo, outlined the strategic direction for the 1950s. Article II on Principles and Objectives emphasized the commitment to establishing a socialist society in Indonesia, where the method of production would be controlled by the state for the benefit of the people. Meanwhile, Article III on Efforts specified the approach of pursuing revolutionary struggle in alliance with the exploited classes against the capitalist class (ANRI, Komandan Operasi Tingkat Tinggi (KOTI), Archive Number: 1947).

In 1951, following the decision of the PKI General Congress, D. N. Aidit assumed leadership of the party. During the congress, the previous leadership was assessed, reporting that the method advocated by Tan Liang Djie was largely inconsistent with the practice of communist revolution. The initial strategy focused on transforming the party into a mass-based organization by establishing the National Democratic Front, which served as a platform to cultivate a broad, multi-sectoral movement including women, students, workers, peasants, artists, and other social groups (Aidit, 1955, p. 82).

The spirit of liberal democracy is the basis for every political party to promote ideology in shaping awareness for members and sympathizers to create a mass wave with a common goal (Arta, 2020). PKI has a history of forming collective consciousness as a form of practice according to the teachings of Karl Marx. This communist party has a basic goal as a

condition for building a wave of strength in the vortex of collective consciousness. Therefore, every member and sympathizer has an ideological awareness to become a conscious mass (Kosat, 2021).

PKI has the task of arranging systematic movements and creating awareness as a condition for mass waves. During political struggles, the steps taken show mass waves as a mass-based party and create awareness, allowing members and sympathizers to realize the form of oppression (Lane, 2012, p. 27). Liberal democracy served as a platform for political parties to contest and advance ideologies in shaping the future of the Indonesian nation. In this context, PKI pursued an ambitious agenda aimed at continuing the struggle of the August Revolution, liberating Indonesia from all forms of oppression through communist efforts to eliminate exploitation in social and economic relations (Mohsin, 2018).

PEOPLE'S OPPRESSION IN PKI PERSPECTIVE

PKI carried out party work by using Marxism as an analytical tool to understand the ongoing social phenomena of the people. The perspectives of materialism, dialectics, and historical analysis were also analyzed to identify the root causes of popular oppression, presenting a critical thesis that exposed systems and structures affecting common people. This Communist Party realizes national independence and world peace. In this context, the success of the communist movement to achieve socialism is invincible (ANRI, Archive Number: 238).

In navigating parliamentary democracy, PKI relied on the teachings of Marx, Engels, and Lenin to shape the strategies and define party objectives. The party adopted a mass-based structure that drew on the support of the broader community, enabling individuals to become members or sympathizers who engaged with the party's culture through political activities. The party strategically cultivated political consciousness by providing education and guidance to the community (Aidit, 1963, p. 79).

PKI is based on materialism to understand the environment as the thesis of an oppressed society under capitalism. Subsequently, a fundamental contradiction reports the revolutionary struggle of the Communist Party to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat and seize control of production. This effort aims to realize the vision of a socialist society, in which the state holds authority over production to ensure collective welfare and common prosperity (Aidit, 1960, p.

477). PKI emphasized the position as a party of communism with the discipline of Marxism-Leninism as the basis of solving the problems of the oppressed society.

Marxism-Leninism advocates for a social revolution led by the working class to dismantle oppressive relations within the workplace, where the extraction of surplus value through wage distribution serves as a mechanism for capitalist exploitation. This exploitation arises from a mode of production that disadvantages the working class since the methods are privately owned by financiers, leading to production relations dominated by the capitalist class. Therefore, the conditions support alienation among workers, who are unable to satisfy personal needs and are compelled to meet production targets that primarily generate profit for the capitalist class (Mandel, 2013, p. 130).

The understanding of party ideology must be based on the theory of Marxism-Leninism. This condition reflects the consciousness cultivated among every member and sympathizer in carrying out the work programs. Marxism-Leninism served as an analytical framework for examining the phenomena of oppression, guiding the formulation of the party's programs and strategic objectives (ANRI, Inventaris Arsip Komando Operasi Tertinggi (KOTI), Archive Number: 236).

PKI conducted the Vth National Congress in 1954 with the hope of creating unity to fight foreign financiers and end the monopoly. The challenges arose from Indonesia's condition following the August Revolution, when the country remained partially colonial and feudal, leaving the population economically disadvantaged. In response, PKI eliminated the influence of Tan Liang Djie's method, which had distanced the party from the mass base. Therefore, PKI aimed to consistently design election manifestos that could secure parliamentary influence, enabling reforms in government and social structures to benefit all segments of society (ANRI, Inventaris Arsip Komandan Operasi Tingkat Tertinggi, Archive Number: 254).

The Election Manifest as a major program that underlies PKI strategy to tackle electoral contestation based on Marxism-Leninism as an ideological guideline. This describes the situation of Indonesian democracy, starting from the impact of RTC agreement, which allowed foreign entrepreneurs to build industries in the country. Following the persistent land monopolies that affected the prosperity of rural communities, PKI emphasized the concept of People's Democracy as a strategy and a new pathway toward national

independence. In this framework, parliamentary representation was envisioned as a reflection of individual party interests and a voice for all sectors of society (Michael, 2016).

PKI PRESENCE IN EFFORTS TO BUILD COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

In Aidit's view, Historical Dialectical Materialism is an epistemology regarding the traces of humanity developing with efforts to struggle against oppression. This is achieved under the condition that consciousness has been formed into an ideology supported by critical reasoning (Aidit, 1956, p. 44). The communist party builds sympathy by making a big wave. The awareness of the oppression of each individual is an absolute requirement for the revolutionary movement (Agung, 2018, p. 29). Communism reads the form of oppression of the working class but becomes an alternative to creating a classless society that oppresses each other. This concept employed a political manifesto to build a mass-based party with a revolutionary orientation, mobilizing all workers to collectively pursue socialism as a shared objective (Engels, 2015, p. 37).

The development of the PKI in the political arena of liberal democracy increased following the National Congress in 1950. During this congress, D. N. Aidit successfully displaced the older generation of leaders, such as Wikana and Tan Liang Djie, who transformed PKI into a Socialist-Democratic party, distancing the concept from grassroots mass movements and relying on parliamentary mechanisms. Aidit criticized these methods, emphasizing that the ideological foundation should focus on raising political consciousness through the creation of a structured mass movement under the organization and guidance of the party (Utomo, 2021). Aidit transformed the political method into a mass-based model, positioning the people as the foundation of political power and ensuring that the party's activities directly engaged with the everyday lives of the population. Moreover, the strategy of integrating closely with the people served as a mechanism for raising political awareness through education, cultivating a broad base of voters and sympathizers who contributed to strengthening the influence and reach of the party (Utomo, 2019, p. 4).

The political conditions are quite crowded with the presence of a multiparty system driven by the historical development of the Republic of Indonesia as a pluralistic society. According to Soedjatmoko, the multi-party system represents the

solidarity groups of society. Geertz viewed the system as a representation of the *abangan*, *santri*, and *priyayi* groups to compete for the form of the state (Suryadinata, 1992, p. 20).

Indonesia experienced a cultural crisis caused by a very high illiteracy rate in the early 1950s. These problems affected progress due to the large number of people who could not access science and education. For example, 56% of the people in Surabaya experienced illiteracy, dominated by 3,591 men and 1,381 women out of a total population of 899,461. These conditions show that newspaper information and political discussions in liberal democracy cannot be felt by all levels of Indonesian society (Yuliantri, 2018). Aidit wanted PKI to seize full independence after the National Congress in 1950 through the National United Front. The social reality of Indonesian society was read, which had a high rate of illiteracy and oppression. Meanwhile, Capitalism includes the oppression of urban communities within industrial settings, characterized by exploitation in which profits are distributed without reflecting the actual contributions or labor of the workers (Syatori, 2017).

PKI was aware of the condition of high illiteracy caused by difficult access to education for small communities experiencing oppression. The party and the wing organizations provided reading training to fight illiteracy with the Barisan Tani Indonesia (BTI) for rural communities. This was achieved by creating a People's Education Board (BPR) class at the Junior High School (SMP) level and a People's Education Committee (PPR) at the Elementary School (SD) level for villagers after doing work in the fields. Efforts to fight illiteracy in urban areas were carried out by GERWANI (Indonesian Women's Movement) when BTI (Indonesian Peasants' Front) provided education in rural communities. Urban residents attended folk schools established by GERWANI, a PKI-affiliated organization, which offered reading lessons and organized creative activities for housewives. In addition, these educational programs incorporated campaign messages, connecting literacy efforts with broader political and social awareness initiatives (Kristianwantoni, 2019).

In addition to addressing social issues such as illiteracy, BTI and GERWANI extended efforts to support the party's campaigns and raise awareness of the people's oppression. In literacy lessons, teaching tools were used to connect education with political consciousness. The letter "A" stood for "Aidit" to introduce the PKI leader, "T" represented

Tanah untuk kau Tani ("Land for the Peasants"), and "U" symbolized *Upah Layak* ("Living Wage"), combining literacy instruction with messages of social and economic justice (McVey, 2016, p. 20). Indonesian society during this period was not fully agrarian or industrialized, leading to different dominant oppressed classes, namely poor peasants and laborers, subjected to an inequitable economic system within existing social structures. These groups were regarded as the pillars of the revolution, representing a progressive force with the potential to advance toward a socialist society free from oppression. To prepare for the revolutionary transformation, the oppressed classes were provided with education in skills, knowledge, and political awareness, aimed at enhancing the capacity and readiness to participate effectively in the struggle (Sanit, 2000, p. 100).

PKI STRATEGY IN 1955 GENERAL ELECTION AND 1957 REGIONAL ELECTIONS

Aidit led PKI in the early 1950s after successfully displacing the older generation, who were reluctant to implement a mass-based party. This party was blended with the people and moved dynamically in all sectors of human life since the impact of capitalism affected all spheres of human life (Utomo, 2019, p. 74). As PKI leader after the 1950 National Congress, Aidit made major changes,

which adopted mass-based practices. The initial step was to establish the National United Front to expand the reach of the party across all sectors of society. In 1952, the membership was expanded, followed by ideological training for members (Edman, 2015, p. 73).

The Collection of Party Course Dictates is a guidebook explaining the program to all levels of membership, which represents New Democracy established by PKI. New Democracy is based on the theory of Marxism-Leninism implemented by Mao Tse-Tung in China. Space is provided for all sectors of society, such as workers, farmers, students, arts, and culture, in implementing the dictatorship of the proletariat in a democratic space (ANRI, Archive Number: 236). PKI pursued a political strategy of "blending" into society, infiltrating every aspect of life. In the first phase, beginning in 1946, the labor sector became a key voter base through the Central Organization of All Indonesian Laborers (SOBSI). The party's sectoral influence expanded with the establishment of the Indonesian Farmers' Front (BTI) in 1953, which promoted the slogan "Land for Farmers" (Latif, 2014). In the arts and literature sector, PKI established the People's Cultural Institute (Lekra) to cultivate an artistic and literary culture that promoted the interests of oppressed social groups while supporting a revolutionary consciousness (Aidit, 1964, p. 12).

PKI revitalized the education and youth sectors through the Indonesian Student Youth Association (IPPI) in 1955. The Indonesian Student Movement Concentration (CGMI) was initially established in 1953, following earlier initiatives in 1950, while women's organization efforts were consolidated through GERWANI in 1954. These organizational activities across various social sectors formed an integral part of political strategy, guided by the National United Front Strategy, aimed at supporting national unity under the leadership structure (Djamhari, 2009, pp. 50-55). Decisions of the 5th PKI National Congress in 1953 developed national unity by opening up a space as a forum for aspirations for every member and organization under the leadership of the party. Unity was built as a multi-sectoral layer of the oppressed society through each group (Latif, 2014, p. 372). Following the decisions of the 5th National Congress, PKI emphasized two central responsibilities, namely 1) the construction of a National United Front, and 2) the development of the party through the strengthening of ideological training for the cadres.

The success in expanding the membership of

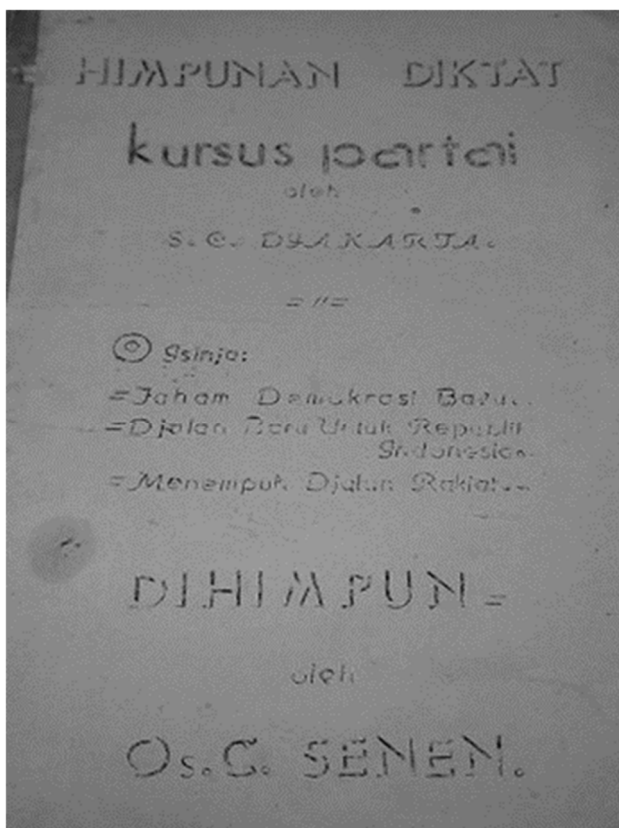


Figure 1. Set of Dictates of the Party Course in KOTI (Source: ANRI, Archive Number: 236)

PKI became a significant asset for D. N. Aidit, who developed an Election Manifesto as a strategic guide to understanding societal oppression during the 4th National Congress in 1954. The dictum of “Semi-Colonial and Semi-Feudal Society” depicted urban populations dependent on capitalist industry and the resurgence of foreign investors following the Round Table Conference, with rural communities dominated by landlords or feudal elites. This analysis motivated party members to engage in disciplined work, preparing PKI for national political competition. Furthermore, Aidit advocated for the establishment of a People’s Democracy within the Election Manifesto, ensuring that parliamentary representation included diverse sectors of society, such as labor groups, poor farmers, intellectuals, and national entrepreneurs, broadening the political base of the party (Compton, 1992, p. 188).

In 1955, before the election, PKI succeeded in gaining strength from the massive number of members. The party only had 165,200 and 500,000 members in 1945 and 1955, respectively. At the end of the election year, the number increased to one million members. The success of the expansion was influenced by the BTTI’s efforts in gathering 3.3 million farmers at the end of 1955, with 90% being structural and cultural members, becoming the strength base of the party. PKI had strength in the Sobsi, Lekra, Gerwani, Gerwis, CGMI, and other organizations (Tornquist, 2011, p. 44). General elections were held to determine members of DPR on September 29 and the Constituent Assembly on December 15, 1955. The representatives were to be directly elected by the people, in contrast to previous parliamentary members who were successors of KNIP and DPR-RIS and were not selected through direct popular elections. Aidit successfully gained public trust in the election, with PKI receiving 6,176,914 and 6,232,512 votes for DPR and Constituent Assembly, respectively (Feith, 1999, p. 58).

The results were determined in January 1956 for DPR and Constituent Assembly elections. The battle continued, especially in determining the Speaker of DPR. There was a tight competition between Mr. Sartono and Prawoto Mangoenkoesomo in PNI and Masjumi Parties, respectively. The elected council members preferred Mr. Sartono since the idea of unity was prioritized in the breadth of PNI nationalism. The struggle for Deputy Speaker III was very fierce when PKI representative at the Working Meeting and the Masjumi Party representative Zainal Abidin were heated. However,

Table 1. Results of 1955 General Election

No	Contestants	Votes in the DPR Election	Votes in the Constituent Assembly Election
1	Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI)	8.434.653	9.070.218
2	Masjumi	7.903.886	7.789.619
3	Nahdatul Ulama (NU)	6.955.141	6.989.333
4	Paratai Komunis Indonesia (PKI)	6.176.914	6.232.512

Source: Feith, 1999

Table 2. Results of the DPR Membership

Political Party	Membership
DPR PNI	56 Members
DPR Masjumi	55 Members
DPR NU	47 Members
DPR PKI	41 Members

Ir. Sakirman obtained most of the votes, and PKI was entitled to the position of Deputy Speaker III (Waskito, 2015, p. 148).

PRRI-PERMESTA was present as evidence of public disappointment with the centralized government system to promote independent regional levels in carrying out development and political activities. The central government, amidst the decline in the local community, rebuilt trust by drafting a law on DPRD elections. DPR responded by providing an election system for regions with the same pattern as the general election through Law No. 18 of 1956, stating that DPRD members must be replaced no later than July 15, 1957 (Purnamawati, 2020). The government had only one year, from 1956 after inaugurating DPR and Constituent Assembly, to prepare for 1957 DPRD elections. All Party Committees made adjustments to prepare for the regional election campaign. Campaigning started with cadres at the city and village levels. Furthermore, the People’s Daily was used as a medium for PKI propaganda agitation (Waskito, 2015, p. 151).

Under the leadership of the Provincial Committee (Provcom), PKI was responsible for maintaining the party’s strength and cadres at the provincial level through the Harian Rakjat (People’s Daily). The East Java Provcom, with the work program theme “For the People’s Living Standards,” attempted to report low wages and discrimination

against female workers, as well as the prosperity of farmers by examining the plowing burden policy and the phenomenon of land monopolies, as reported by *Harian Rakjat* (*Harian Rakjat*, 13 Juni 1957). The Central Java Provincial Government through the People's Daily on June 20, 1957 published the title "Democratic Regional Government, Improving People's Lives and Strengthening the Republic of Proclamation 1945" indicating the problems of the prosperity of workers, teachers, the high rate of school dropouts, and demanding the facilitation of arts activities for the community (*Harian Rakjat*, 20 Juni 1957).

PKI advocated for the needs of the people, addressing issues ranging from fair wages to improved access to public infrastructure, including interregional roads, electricity, clean water, and adequate sanitation. The party also campaigned for the legalization of housing for those affected by land disputes (Mortiner, 2011, p. 73). Aidit presented the government's condition with a fairly high level of corruption while criticizing representatives of other parties caught in corruption. In the election campaign on July 26, 1957, Blitar emphasized the high number of corruption cases as an act of betrayal of the August Revolution. PKI cadres or representatives who committed corruption would be given sanctions by being expelled to realize the growth of democracy at the regional level (Bintang Timur, 29 Juli 1957).

DPRD election was held in June 1957 in accordance with Law No. 1 of 1957. Therefore, *Harian Rakjat* (People's Daily) began reporting on DPRD election results from June to August 1957, presenting accounts of vote outcomes while informing the public about electoral procedures and vote-counting processes at polling stations. The publication employed agitational propaganda through prominent headlines. For instance, June 24, 1957, featured the headline "The Entire Masjumi Front Has Declined" to show results in the Jakarta Raya area. After the strong performance in Central Java, "Central Java Also Shifts to the Left" was published, while coverage of East Java on July 22, 1957, included the headline "PKI Average Rises and Masjumi Declines." *Harian Rakjat* reported significant increases in support with the headline stating that PKI increased by more than 100% in Trenggalek and Bondowoso, showing the electoral momentum of the party in the areas (Maulida, 2019, pp. 105-116).

The Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) elections were held throughout 1957–1958 between June and January (Winardi, 2018, pp. 99-



Figure 2. *Harian Rakjat*, 26 November 1957 (source: ANRI)

100). PKI won the election with a landslide victory, especially when compared to 1955. The intelligence in criticizing the phenomenon of corruption in the central government became harsh criticism for PNI party. The criticism attacked candidates from other parties, such as the NU and the Masjumi Parties (Aji, 2020).

Aidit celebrated a resounding victory in the regional legislative elections, winning 7.5 million votes (6.5 million votes from Java and 1 million votes from outside Java). The PKI succeeded in increasing the vote share by approximately one million votes, rising from about 6.5 million votes in the 1955 general election (*Harian Rakyat*, 26 November 1957). PKI succeeded in gaining strength by seizing votes from the Masjumi, PNI, and NU Parties because only PKI managed to experience an increase in votes, while other parties experienced a decline. In urban areas, the party approached industrial workers who were faced with exploitative wage values for labor. PKI approached farmer groups and abangan people who were experiencing oppression from land monopolies in rural areas (Anshori, 2017).

In communist ideology, PKI raises awareness among oppressed groups that collective action could challenge and transform oppressive social relations within the framework of a democratic state. The party endeavored to instill the motivation and the knowledge necessary for independent political struggle, facilitated through the organizational structures and the National United Front. Therefore, PKI sympathizers developed an increased social consciousness and increasingly participated actively in various forms of national political engagement (Utomo, 2017). The National United Front built by Aidit as a consistent form of making PKI a mass-based party was a strategy to spread the party's wings to the reality of society. Aidit successfully developed a dual cadre system,

consisting of direct (permanent party members with a strong understanding of communist ideology) and indirect cadres, who were incorporated into National United Front organizations and possessed an awareness of communist principles (Hindley, 1966, p. 925).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, people's democracy constituted the principal objective of PKI in the pursuit of national independence. The election manifesto was deemed insufficient when pursued solely through the parliamentary method. Therefore, Aidit formed the National Coalition as a strategy to raise awareness among national entrepreneurs and landlords to join the struggle against global capitalism in preparation for 1955 General Election. This strategy succeeded in regaining public sympathy and trust after the ups and downs of the destruction during the recovery from the Madiun incident in 1948. PKI was developed as the fourth-largest party after PNI, Masjumi, and NU.

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