Indonesia, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and Asian Regional Labour Networks: A Historical Perspective

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This working paper is a work in progress and on completion will be the first in a series on Indonesian Trade Unions and Federations and their contacts with international labour groupings during the 1951-1975 period of the Cold War. Research for this series of articles has been made possible through an Australian Research Council Grant and CAPSTRANS.
Abstract
The establishment, and sustaining, of international trade union solidarity has always been historically difficult. It has been contingent on overcoming the problems associated with diverse historical experiences, cultures, geography, religion, ideologies, and personalities. The history of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) is replete with just such difficulties.

This paper is the first in a series on Indonesian trade unions and federations and their contacts with international labour groupings during the Cold War period. It focuses on the efforts of the ICFTU to build and maintain contacts with one large non-communist Indonesian transport workers’ union, the railway workers’ PBKA (Persatuan Buruh Kereta Api), from 1951 until 1966-67. The time frame reflects, in the history of post-colonial Indonesia, the change from a robust process of labour organisation formation in the 1950s-1960s, to an authoritarian, state-sponsored one in the 1970s. Until 1965, Indonesia had the largest communist party in Southeast Asia, and the railway workers were not only represented by the PBKA, but by an even larger communist-aligned union the SBKA (Serikat Buruh Kereta Api). It was vitally important to the ICFTU to expand its influence both within Indonesia and the region as a counter to the efforts of the communist sponsored World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). In discussing the ICFTU’s work to influence Indonesian labour organisations towards affiliation with it, and to establish regional networks through its Asian Regional Organisation (ARO), the paper aims to give an historical perspective to the formation of Asian regional and international non-communist networks of labour organisations during this period of the Cold War.

Introduction
With the formation of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in 1945 after the end of the Second World War, it was hoped that a new unity would prevail and progress made towards achieving a true international workers’ movement. The 'new internationalism', however, was beset with difficulties from the beginning. With the development of the Cold War tensions emerged between the most influential Western affiliates, the American Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO) and the British Trades Union Congress (TUC), and the All Union Central Council of Trade Unions (AUCCTU) of the Soviet Union. There was increasing concern from Western oriented labour unions about communist influence within the executive committee of the WFTU. When the powerful American Federation of Labour (AFL) added its voice and influence to the opposition there was a walk out of the non-communist organisations from the WFTU. The explicitly non-communist ICFTU was formed in London in December 1949, at a conference of national trade union centres. The conference made the ‘unprecedented decision’ to establish, within the overall framework of the ICFTU, separate regional organisations for all the major area of the world. The Asian Regional Organisation (ARO) was founded in 1951 in Calcutta, India, and the Asian Trade Union College (ATUC) in 1952. From 1965 both were based in New Delhi.

The focus of this paper is the large non-communist railway workers’ union, the PBKA (Persatuan Buruh Kereta Api). It discusses the efforts of the ICFTU, and the difficulties the
organisation encountered, in building and maintaining contact with the PBKA. The history of the relationship is important because the PBKA was the major union in a large non-communist and secular labour federation, the KBSI (Kongres Buruh Seluruh Indonesia) and the same man, Kusna Poeradiredja, headed both organisations. The paper is a work in progress report and it forms part of a larger project on Indonesian non-communist labour unions from 1945-1975, and their links to the ICFTU and ARO. The project's aim, and indeed the aim of this paper, is to provide a historical perspective to the formation of Asian regional and international non-communist networks of labour organisations during this period of the Cold War. The thirty-year time frame is central to the larger project in that it reflects in the history of post-colonial Indonesia the change from a robust process of labour organisation formation in the 1950s-1960s, to an authoritarian state-sponsored one in the 1970s. Until 1965 Indonesia had the largest communist party in Southeast Asia and the railway workers were not only represented by the PBKA, but by an even larger communist-aligned union the SBKA (Serikat Buruh Kereta Api). It was vitally important to the ICFTU to expand its influence both within Indonesia and the region as a counter to the influence of the WFTU. The history of the ICFTU's connection with Indonesian non-communist national networks and individual unions is, as yet, un-researched. It is my hope that the historical perspective of the research will add depth to future analysis of the problems associated with establishing Asian international links and intra-regional networks in this era of globalisation, as we seek to understand notions of labour, labour rights and regulation in the context of Asian practices.

The paper is divided into two parts:
1: A description of the role and work of the PBKA.
2: The ICFTU and the PBKA.

The PBKA
In the early years of the Indonesian revolution, the years between 1945-49, there was an active partnership between members of the Republican ministries and unions to develop worker consciousness. This arose because of the involvement of union leaders in the decision-making bodies and committees set up to inquire into the welfare of workers after Indonesia had declared independence in 1945. The close connection between many government members and communist labour leaders was often commented on in the general ICFTU correspondence. Nevertheless, it was the working relationship between labour and Republican leaders prior to the events of Madiun in 1948 (which saw the temporary eclipse of the communist party in the political and ideological struggle) that provided a critical impetus to trade union formation and to
a development of a ‘substantial…trade union organisation’ during the revolution\(^1\). By March 1951, 392 unions had been established nationally: 121 of these in Jakarta the largest city.\(^2\) It is important to mention here that from 1951-57 an Emergency Law, which included a ‘vital enterprise’ clause, was in place. This was designed to limit the increasing militancy of labour. When it was superseded by the Act on the Settlement of Labour Disputes in 1957 the vital enterprise clause remained. As the railways were classified as a ‘vital enterprise’ this meant severe penalties for railway worker unions (and others such as the harbour workers) if they proceeded outside the law.

The State was not impartial in labour affairs, the government was a large employer and political leaders, political party leaders and trade union leaders were often one and the same. This was particularly the case for the non-communist unions. It is this that has led to the concentration in the somewhat scarce literature about Indonesian unions during this period on their political function, rather than on their economic function and the actual gains that they made for workers. Nonetheless, the political function of the unions is germane to the issue of relationship building because the disunity among, and the ideological differences and jealousy between unions, hampered the efforts of the ICFTU in its dealings with federations and individual unions.

The forerunner to the PBKA was the SSKA (Serikat Sekerja Kereta Api), which was formed in Dutch controlled Bandung in 1948. Among those present at the first official meeting of the SSKA were many of the leaders of the PBKA over the next two decades: Tambunan, Tarja, Asep Ardi and R.H. Kusna Poeradiredja who was elected head of the Provisional Executive Board. The union’s objective was to be a ‘serikat sekerja working in particular in the social economic field’. It appears that initially the Dutch authorities considered it a social economic association rather than a trade union in the commonly accepted sense.\(^3\) The PBKA was formed on March 17, 1949 from a fusion of the SSKA and a number of rail and tram workers’ unions from Central and East Java.

From the beginning the PBKA placed an emphasis on unity, and on a democratic, non-sectarian, non-political base for membership. In 1949, the WFTU in support of the Indonesian communist party aligned labour federation, SOBSI (Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia-all Indonesian Central Workers Organisation) and one of its unions, the SBKA (Serikat Buruh Kereta Api-Railway Workers Union), made clear its displeasure about the new union. In a resolution from the 1949 Trade Union Conference in Beijing, it announced itself ‘…against the

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\(^2\) Kementerian Perburuhan, 1950, pp.9-10.
attempts to set up a yellow trade union movement under the leadership of Husuma Paradiredja (sic) who is a Hatta-puppet’.4

The BPSS (Badan Pusat Serikat Sekerja-Central Body for Unions) was also headed by Poeradiredja, and was itself the forerunner to the KBSI (Kongres Buruh Seluruh Indonesia-All Indonesia Workers Congress). Through Poeradiredja the PBKA was aligned first to the BPSS and then to the KBSI. Both were established as counter organisations to the SOBSI. Initially the BPSS had taken on the role of an independent union, but in 1948 its role changed to that of a federation. From then on it became a contact body working to give advice and to offer directions if needed. In 1951, in a surprise announcement but one revealing of the conflict and tensions between individual members, the PBKA said it was withdrawing from the BPSS because of differences in policy. The KBSI was finally established on 12 May 1953. There was a split in the ranks of the KBSI in less than a year and Poeradiredja became Head of the organisation.

Poeradiredja was not himself a member of any political party but many in the leadership of the KBSI were members of the Socialist Party of Indonesia. Educated in Holland and a lawyer by profession, Poeradiredja was a young man of 37 when he returned to Indonesia after the war. It was during this time that he began his union involvement but his involvement in the Pasundan administration, a Dutch controlled area, his strong connection with a Minister of Labour, Iskander Tedjasukmana, and his heading of both the PBKA and the KBSI made him a prime target for the communist labour unions.

According to Poeradiredja the philosophy behind his union was one, which could be accepted by all groups, all aliran, all religions, except by groups and aliran, which rejected religion. At the leadership level this was the dividing line between the two railway unions. In the minds of the PBKA leadership to identify those who rejected religion was to identify the SBKA. The consequences of this ideological split between the two leadership bodies was continuing and bitter rivalry for the expansion of their membership bases from amongst the railway workers. Writing in 1952, an AFL activist and commentator on Indonesian labour, Harry Goldberg, called Poeradiredja ‘one of the outstanding leaders of the independent single unions in Indonesia’. He added that amongst the leaders of the independent trade unions ‘too many on the non-SOBSI side had been recruited from the political parties, or from the ranks of middle-class professionals such as lawyers’.5 Since Poeradiredja was both middle-class and a lawyer he appears to have impressed Goldberg to the extent that such criticism did not apply to him.

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As early as May 1949 the PBKA formed an insurance fund for its members. As the union expanded there was increasing commitment to serving the social economic needs of its members through the operation of a loan fund, housing aid, a cooperative for the distribution of food and clothing, shoe and sugar factories, a policlinic and maternity clinic, and a sickness and death benefit insurance fund for members. Through its attempts to educate members in the function of trade unions the PBKA worked towards the development of greater mass membership. To be a truly viable democratic organisation, it argued, ‘a union must have the support of members and a broad base…it is not for the few but for all’. In 1955 the union had 80 branches and a total membership of approximately 18,000. By 1960 it claimed a membership of 30,000. For his work in developing the social economic policies of the PBKA Poeradiredja was awarded the Magsaysay Citation in 1962.

Yet, even in the heyday of member mobilisation trade union building remained a difficult task for there was a porousness of membership. To a large extent, in the early years of the trade unions, this porousness was a consequence of the fighting and the difficulties in communication during the revolution. Later, regional rebellions also interfered with communication with branches and workers. But there were other factors - multiple union membership and doubts expressed by workers about the value of joining unions - that were additional problems to overcome. The last mentioned factors were linked to the skill level of workers, and to their level of satisfaction with their work.

In terms of attracting members it appears that the general difference between communist and non-communist unions was the ability of the former to secure leaders from the ranks of the workers. Therefore the communist unions were able to represent the manual worker more completely than the non-communist unions. They proved far more adept at getting new members by identifying their needs and at organising workers. The majority of the non-communist unions, on the other hand, were labour sections of the political parties without separate industrial categories. The ability of the communist railway union the SBKA to attract members can be seen in its membership figures. The union claimed a membership of some 65,000. Even allowing for some exaggeration of figures the union had at least twice the number of members as did the PBKA.

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6 PBKA, Laporan Kerdja 3 Tahun, 1958.
7 Pembina 1/2, 1961, p.13
Throughout the 1950s the PBKA leadership worked at becoming better organised, disciplined and responsive to workers' problems. However, during the 1960s the support of the Army was instrumental in the union's efforts to increase membership. The union had to draw on that relationship to counter the efforts of the SBKA, through its influence with government members and the President, to have it banned. The years between 1960-65 were difficult ones for the PBKA. The KBSI, along with other organisations and some political parties, was banned in 1960. The support of the Army was crucial to Poeradiredja: it allowed the PBKA to function in the face of sustained communist attacks and it no doubt kept Poeradiredja out of gaol. When the SOBSI and the SBKA finally succeeded in persuading Sukarno to 'freeze' the PBKA in April of 1965, Colonel Djoehartono, in his capacity as Deputy to the Head of the National Front Board, issued an order to ‘unfreeze’ the union and it was allowed limited operation. The events of September 30, the alleged coup attempt, overtook both railway workers' unions. The PBKA survived, but after almost twenty years of ideological warfare the SBKA, caught as it was in the aftermath of September 30 was destroyed.

The ICFTU and the PBKA

A reading of the ICFTU files relating to Indonesia gives a sense of the fine line that headquarters in Brussels and the ARO had to walk in dealing with the internal tensions within and between unions, and in considering the national political climate. In developing its association with the PBKA and KBSI the organisation was greatly aided by the work of one of its International Trade Secretariats (ITS), the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF). Prior to the split with the WFTU, the ITF had been led by J.H. Oldenbroek who became the first General Secretary of the newly constituted ICFTU. Oldenbroek was not popular with the AFL leaders who supported U.S. cold war policies and derided Oldenbroek as a 'socialist'. Conversely, V.S.Mathur, head of the ATUC in 1952 and later Director of ARO from 1965, considered Oldenbroek ‘...the best General Secretary (of the ICFTU) during my period’ (Personal communication V.S. Mathur to author).

Another affiliate, the TUC, was also a facilitator of relations with the PBKA. The TUC was headed by Vincent Tewson, who had served a two-year term from 1951-52 as President of the ICFTU. It was Vincent Tewson who wrote to Oldenbroek in August of 1952, to give him confidential information about moves towards trade union unity in Indonesia. This concerned Poeradiredja and the tensions within BPSS (see above.). Tewson's informant had said finance was a real problem and suggested that the TUC might send someone out to Indonesia in order to give advice to the trade unions. He also suggested a few months study of TUC methods and
practices in England would be of great importance to Indonesian trade unionists. Tewson saw the suggestions as important and a means of establishing contact.\textsuperscript{10}

Having noted the internal problems of Indonesia it is as well to note the internal organisational tensions within the ICFTU. It was by no means a united organisation for it was affected by the schisms and ideological warfare between the CIO and the AFL. The AFL was vociferously ant-communist and it charged that communists dominated the inner councils of the CIO.\textsuperscript{11} When the communists were purged from the CIO the two organisations merged to form the AFL-CIO in 1955. Prior to that date, however, Victor Reuther, the CIO Director of the European Office and Jay Lovestone, a former American communist party member and now the chief foreign policy expert of the AFL, were in constant conflict over the gaining of influence within the ICFTU.\textsuperscript{12} Robert Zeiger writes that: ‘All too often, Victor Reuther believed a key appointment to an important or international labor post went not to a balanced labor representative but to a ‘Lovestone stooge’, someone for whom bellicose anti-communism was an end in itself’.\textsuperscript{13} Nonetheless, both organisations believed that ‘the fight against communism required the adoption of American-style labor relations regimes’.\textsuperscript{14} Both were also funded by the Central intelligence Agency (CIA). They continued to be so after the merger when the AFL-CIO International Affairs Department (IAD) was set up to bring labour into support for U.S. Cold War policies abroad.

Despite its own internal tensions and the domestic difficulties within Indonesia the ICFTU began its regional network building. In 1950 a seven-member delegation made an eight-week tour of fourteen countries in the region, including Indonesia. The organisation was aware of the need to take internal considerations into account before embarking on any vigorous push for free trade union expansion within Indonesia. Of course, just what constituted free’ trade unions’, or tyranny, or democracy, was at the heart of both the international and the national debate. For example, the meaning was very different for the PBKA and the Muslim Workers' union the SBII (\textit{Serikat Buruh Islam Indonesia}), and those unions aligned through the communist labour federation, SOBSI, to the WFTU. Charles Millard, the ICFTU Director of Organisation, made a world tour to the region in 1957 and in his report he commented that everywhere he had been asked about communist interest and control in Asian trade unions. He wrote:

\begin{itemize}
\item ICFTU: Box 3481 1955-1974. Confidential letter Tewson to Oldenbroek, 12 August 1952.
\item ibid.
\item ibid.p.330.
\item ibid.
\end{itemize}
I find it is more a case of division and weakness in the non-communist groups than one of strength on the part of the so-called communist controlled unions... (there) is plenty of goodwill and a spirit of cooperation on which to build a unified and strong movement in every Asian country where the political climate is receptive.¹⁵

Nonetheless, the political climate in Indonesia was not particularly receptive to organisations such as the ICFTU. While it is true that the non-communist unions were disorganised the communist federation SOBSI and its unions were very strong. As well as issues to do with structural strategies of organisation, communication, financial policies, and not least personalities, the organisation had to take the political climate into consideration because it was a critical factor for federations and unions when they were looking at international affiliations. Most Indonesian labour leaders were nationalist before internationalist. Also, while some, such as Poeradireja were avowedly anti-communist and unconnected to any political party, they did not want to be, or be seen to be, in the ‘imperialist’s’ camp. Because of this there was a good deal of hesitation and even diffidence towards establishing relations with the ICFTU. Moreover, some political parties, such as the Islamic Masjumi Party opposed the moves made in the late 1950s towards an independent Trade Unions Council because it would mean unions being free from political party control.¹⁶

In early 1953 Poeradireja undertook a visit to Brussels headquarters. Mr. G. Mapara, ARO Secretary at that time noted that Poeradireja had indicated that he wanted to make the visit in a private capacity only. He apparently felt that an official visit as Head of the PBKA and KBSI would be misunderstood at home. Moreover, he maintained that the ICFTU was being used by the anti-Soviet power bloc for its own political ends. He told Mapara that he was concerned that a weaker labour movement, as was Indonesia's, was likely to be dominated by the strong labour movements of the UK and USA. Mapara also noted in his letter (that) ‘it appears there exists strong prejudices and suspicions in Indonesia against the West’.¹⁷ It appears that Poeradireja made strong comment about the work of Harry Goldberg because he believed that Goldberg's attempts and propaganda for the consolidation of the labour movement in Indonesia had rather prejudicial effects upon unity moves. Mapara wrote: ‘with a little indignation he said’...‘why do these people take so much interest in our labour movement'? Let them leave us alone...my country refuses to be hustled in the political alliance with the Western powers; first we must be strong and only then will we be in a position to decide our proper

¹⁶ ICFTU: Box 3462 1953-1959. Trade Union Movements in Indonesia: Part II. SBII. Taken from NVV Bulletin.
Poeradiredja referred to the CIO resolution at the Atlanta Convention, which gave support to the MSA (Mutual Security Agency). In his view this was a clear indication of the political motives behind the American labour movement. Poeradiredja was correct in his assessment of American motives. Goldberg was an interesting figure and a supporter of Poeradiredja’s (see above) but he was one of Jay Lovestone’s men in the AFL-FTUC (Free Trade Union Committee). V.S. Mathur did not ‘think much of him [Goldberg] at all…he was in Asia for the AFL pursuing their own interests’.  

On Mapara’s part he believed that Indonesian labour leaders such as Poeradiredja needed to have more information about ICFTU policy on colonial powers. Overcoming Indonesian nationalist fears of a post-colonial domination by the Western powers was a cause of organisational concern for the ICFTU. Over the years, notwithstanding the regional tour of 1950, several ICFTU-ARO sponsored missions had been to Indonesia to strengthen relations with unions. In 1954 and 1955 Knut Larsson (the retired President of the Swedish Woodcutters' Union) spent time in Indonesia and helped establish an ICFTU office in Jakarta. The office was a house rented in the name of an affiliate the SBU (Serikat Buruh Umum-General workers' Union). An official of the SBU, Mr Soekanto, served first as Administrative Officer, then Liaison Officer, and then as the Acting Representative.

In the early 1950s the ICFTU had a Malaysian, Abdullah bin Ibrahim, as an in-country representative. Ibrahim was an official of the Malayan NUPW (National Union of Plantation Workers). He married whilst in Indonesia but this put him at odds with the ICFTU as he already had a family at home, moreover, he didn’t like Indonesia. Eventually visa difficulties forced him to return to Malaysia. Mapara was engaged in November 1951 as Chief of Service for the Region and undertook trips to Burma, Malaya, Singapore and Thailand on behalf of the ICFTU. He made a trip to Indonesia in 1952 to further contacts with the non-communist unions and to report on the situation to the ICFTU. The ICFTU attempted to station a representative in country in 1960, but technical difficulties meant this was delayed until 1963 when Mr A. Mukherjee from the Secretariat was appointed. Mukherjee was unable to obtain a residential permit and was forced to leave at the end of the same year. One of the interesting networks slowly being established, through Mapara, Mukherjee and Mathur, was that between Indian and Indonesian trade unions.

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18 ibid.
19 Personal communication V.S. Mathur to author.
20 ibid.
One of the major problems identified by Larsson during his stay in Indonesia was the lack of financial aid available to the non-communist unions from the ICFTU. He was critical of the fact that just when the non-communist unions were working towards establishing a Contact Bureau to prepare a merger of leading organisations, and later to form a new confederation of Free Trade Unions on a national basis, no money was forthcoming from the ICFTU. ‘The work is under way (he wrote) but it craves money…the non-SOBSI unions must be encouraged to take up the fight’. But financial constraints were a problem for the ICFTU and other major affiliates. A three-share proposal that the ICFTU, the ITF and the Dutch Trade Union Federation bring PBKA unionists to the Netherlands to work with and gain experience from unionists floundered for want of funds.

In favour of having field representatives in country the ICFTU argued that their purpose was to establish good relations with the trade union movement and to develop relations with other social, educational and non-governmental organisations. The aim was to be diplomatic as building up public relations and goodwill was critical. However, the ICFTU maintained (that) ‘it is not the intention of headquarters to lay down rules or some uniform terms of reference as to what representatives should or should not do’. In this respect the ICFTU was indeed fortunate to have a man such as Soekanto in country. From 1963, Soekanto published an Indonesian language bi-monthly information bulletin, Serikat Buruh Merdeka, on the international activity of the ICFTU, ICFTU-ARO news, other international organisations and the ITS, together with news about the activities and organisation of Indonesia ‘free and democratic trade unions’. Soekanto was by all accounts an honest, decent, able and committed official. His contacts at all levels were vitally important for the ICFTU-ARO, and his personal networking and mediation was invaluable during the difficult times when internal Indonesian politics and ICFTU ideals clashed and threatened relationships, not only with the affiliates but also with the important and as yet non-affiliated unions and federations such as the PBKA and KBSI. Although the PBKA was not affiliated with the ICFTU it did become an affiliate of the ITF. Direct affiliation with the ITF was ‘politically easier’ than it would have been with the ICFTU. This was the view expressed by Soekanto to a visiting Dutch unionist in 1957:

26 ICFTU: Box 1181. Field Representative’s Seminar, 17-27 April 1963.
His general view was that there are favourable perspectives for the ICFTU, but that the game must be played carefully; although he found everywhere much more understanding than half a year ago, he thought it better not to force definitive affiliation of the organisation.28

In 1959 President Sukarno proposed that all labour trade unions and federations be combined into one called OPPI (Organisasi Persatuan Pekerja Indonesia-Organisation of Indonesian Workers' Unions). OPPI was to be under the control of Sukarno, members could choose their leaders, however Sukarno retained the right to approve or reject those elected. This was seen as an attempt to curtail the power of the communist unions. When the Labour Minister brought together the trade union representatives in 1960, the communist federations and unions rejected the proposal outright. Other non-communist unions (including those affiliated with the ICFTU) were either in full support or gave tentative approval subject to amendments being made. The PBKA initially favoured the proposal but on closer reading the KBSI rejected the conception.29 It was in this year and for this reason that the KBSI was banned. These domestic political events threatened the survival of the PBKA as the union was accused, through its membership of the KBSI, of having links to the PSI (Partai Sosialis Indonesia-Socialist Party of Indonesia).

The threatened dissolution of the PBKA and the proposal to form OPPI caused great concern at ICFTU headquarters. With regard to the PBKA Omer Becu, the then General Secretary, requested the ICFTU representative based in Singapore to fly to Indonesia and make contact with Tambunan and Poeradiredja about any ICFTU/ITF action they might consider appropriate. ‘Please consult (Becu wrote) the PBKA about the possibility of a complaint to the ILO, which should be submitted by the ITF and supported by the ICFTU if the Government should carry out its plan to dissolve PBKA’.30 The PBKA survived because of its army contacts but government pressure forced its disaffiliation from the KBSI. Despite any misgivings about the ties between unions and the army the ICFTU was required to accept the realities of the internal situation. For ‘continued existence of the ICFTU in Indonesia and of the independent unions, army cooperation [needed] to be cultivated’.31 To this end the International Trade Secretariat for plantation workers invited Lieutenant-Colonel Moertono, the Chairman of the Military Labour Cooperation Body (BKS-BUMIL) to visit its affiliate in Malaya for talks.32

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28 ICFTU: Box 3462 1953-1959. Informed memorandum brought by Mr.Van Der Ende, CKO, 4.1. 1957
29 Pembina 1/2, 1961, p.4
On the question of the establishing of OPPI Charles Millard wrote to Mapara:

*Whatever the position of our affiliates might be our principal reason for our proposing to you a joint mission to Indonesia is our deep concern about the unification plan as such. We are aware the situation may arise in which trade unions accept, or even initiate, plans to unify the trade union movement by government fiat. We are thinking particularly of the cases of Ghana and Singapore. That does not mean, however, that we, as an international trade union movement whose duty it is to be the guardians of trade union freedom, can acquiesce to such restriction of trade union rights...the draft rules, as they were originally conceived, would mean a complete regimentation of labour even to the point of compulsory trade union membership of all workers...*

The ICFTU sent a letter to President Sukarno on 28 December 1960 over its concern for trade union independence under the current proposal for OPPI. It was this type of action that stirred up nationalist sentiments. And as a consequence Soekanto was forced to make a trip to Bandung in February of the following year to explain to the PBKA (as an ITF affiliate)...’the real position of the ICFTU towards OPPI, so that there need be no difference of interpretation between us regarding the matter so badly misunderstood by the Minister of Labour’. Equally, there were other political circumstances when the ICFTU did offer public support to Indonesia’s position. As instanced in Becu’s letter to one of its affiliates in support of the return of Irian Jaya when he wrote: [the return would be] ‘a step in the struggle against colonialism’. OPPI, in fact, never achieved the status proposed by Sukarno. Political events, and the formation of an Army sponsored military labour alliance and a new Army sponsored labour federation SOKSI (Sentral Organisasi Karyawan Sosialis Indonesia-All Indonesia Socialist Workers Organisation), over took it.

**Conclusion**

By 1958 ARO was the largest of the five established ICFTU regional organisations. Thirty four percent of all funds available for regional activities had been spent in Asia, and new proposals to establish new research organisations and translation services were being implemented. Nonetheless, just as the years from 1960-65 were difficult ones for the PBKA

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35 Ibid.
36 *Warta Buruh Merdeka*, 1 July 1963, 1.
they were equally so for ICFTU-ARO aspirations for Indonesia. Internal political events and its own financial constraints meant adequate support to affiliates and the non-communist independent unions such as the PBKA was hard to give. Still, even in these most difficult years Poeradiredja sought to maintain contact. He visited Europe again in 1962. A letter to Stefan Nedzynski of the ICFTU from the ITF stated that Poeradireldja wished to have talks with the ICFTU and the ITF (but) ‘he is bound to discretion in his movements, due to the internal and external political situation in Indonesia’. 38

The PBKA was forced to withdraw from the ITF in February of 1965 because of SBKA pressure. After that the ICFTU-ARO and the ITF had but spasmodic contact with the union. Conditions within the country after September 30 were chaotic and it was not until 1966 that news began to filter through to the ICFTU: ‘Indonesia, for some years seemingly lost to us, is accessible again and our affiliates have apparently survived the Sukarno era reasonably unscathed’. 39

In 1966 Hans Imhof, the General Secretary of the ITF, wrote to Omer Becu now General Secretary of the ICFTU in reply to a earlier letter with news of the PBKA:

Many thanks for your letter…we have been trying to get in touch with the PBKA for some time but it seems from what you say our chances of doing so are much brighter now. I have therefore written to them again, two copies enclosed-one for your own information and one that you might consider passing on through the same diplomatic channels by which you got your news, just to be on the safe side. It occurs to me that the ICFTU might have some interest in getting a PBKA representative to visit you and a discreet opportunity for this might be the holding of our Railwaymen’s Section Conference in Rome from 23 to 26 June…. 40

During the following months of 1966 and into 1967, as Sukarno’s control weakened and more information began to emerge from Indonesia, the ICFTU began the task of forging a relationship with the new leadership and also of renewing ties with its old affiliates. Goldberg reported to the ICFTU that an ‘enormous vacuum’ had been created by the destruction of the communist labour federation and unions and their removal from the trade union scene. 41 With no sense of irony at all, he further remarked that Suharto and Nasution had shown a ‘minimum amount of wisdom’ when they consciously contacted anti-communist trade union leaders for

38 ICFTU: Box 3478. Letter P. de Vries to S. Nedzynski, 7 September 1962.
39 ICFTU Box 1845(c).
discussion as to how to improve the ‘confused and shattered trade union movement in the country’.\(^{42}\) The ICFTU felt that it would be able to work with the new group in power and that it should cultivate friendship with them as quickly as possible.\(^{43}\) As for Kusna Poeradiredja, by mid-1966 he was no longer head of the PBKA, and the next stage of the relationship between the ICFTU, ARO and the ITF was to begin under new leadership.

\(^{42}\) Ibid.