

The Role of *Angkatan Bersendjata* Newspaper as a Medium of Political Agitation, 1965-1967

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji mengenai peran surat kabar *Angkatan Bersendjata* sebagai media agitasi politik tahun 1965-1967. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah metode penelitian historis dibantu teori pers otoriter, agitasi politik dan stabilitas politik sebagai pisau analisis. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa setelah terjadinya pembredelan terhadap beberapa surat kabar anti komunis pada masa Demokrasi Terpimpin, membuat terbitnya surat kabar *Angkatan Bersendjata* sebelum peristiwa Gerakan 30 September 1965 memiliki peran untuk menutup agitasi propaganda yang disebarkan oleh media massa *under bouw* Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) di masyarakat dan di tahun 1966-1967 surat kabar ini selain digunakan sebagai media pemerintah pada masa Demokrasi Terpimpin dalam melakukan stabilitas politik, surat kabar ini juga digunakan untuk memperkuat posisi Angkatan Darat dalam memegang kendali di pemerintahan dengan menyebarkan agitasi-agitasi yang ditujukan kepada kelompok komunis agar tidak mendapatkan posisinya kembali di pemerintahan.

Kata kunci: surat kabar *angkatan bersendjata*, militer, agitasi politik.

Abstract

This study aims to examine the role of the Angkatan Bersendjata newspaper as a medium of political agitation during 1965-1967. The research employs the historical method, supported by the authoritarian press theory, political agitation, and political stability as analytical tools. The findings indicate that, following the banning of several anti-communist newspapers during the Guided Democracy period, the publication of Angkatan Bersendjata prior to the September 30th Movement of 1965 played a role in countering the propaganda agitation spread by the mass media under the control of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). In 1966-1967, beyond serving as a government medium during the Guided Democracy era to maintain political stability, this newspaper was also utilized to strengthen the Army's position in controlling the government by spreading agitation aimed at preventing communist groups from regaining their place in the political arena.

Keywords: *angkatan bersendjata newspaper, military, political agitation.*

INTRODUCTION

The press serves as a medium for society to express opinions and plays an important role in public life, thereby creating a relationship between the press, the government, and society (Syafriadi, 2018). According to Albert Wijaya, one of the most essential pillars of democracy is press freedom. The press has the

obligation to build a shared interest between the people and the state; therefore, it is natural that the press functions as a bridge connecting the interests of the government and society, since the press is a medium capable of expressing the voice of the people as well as that of the government (Albert Wijaya, 1982). One of the most influential forms

of the press is the newspaper. Newspapers are vital instruments of mass communication in political life, as they provide a platform for news accompanied by commentary to be delivered to the public. The world of print media has continued to evolve over time. During the early decades of independence, President Sukarno referred to the press as an instrument of revolution, responsible for stirring enthusiasm and mobilizing public opinion (Adam, 2003).

Newspapers became one of the means for the dissemination of agitation. The effort to stir and arouse the emotions of the public through speech or writing is known as agitation. The purpose of agitation is to create unrest by provoking contradictions within society. Furthermore, by shaping new circumstances, people are encouraged to support a new ideology or idea (Anwar Arifin, 2003). Agitation is carried out through continuous appeals, often involving the efforts of governments, political parties, or influential groups to achieve strategic or tactical objectives. Agitation can therefore be seen as a form of political communication, conducted systematically and deliberately to influence, shape, or direct public opinion. Such methods were employed by the military to carry out their agitation among the wider society through the newspapers they published (Lapian, 2002).

The absence of strong counter-opinions against communist ideology led the leadership of the Armed Forces to feel the need for a newspaper capable of balancing the communist-owned press. Brigadier General Soegandhi, who at the time served as Director of Information for the Armed Forces, was tasked by Coordinating Minister for Defense and Security/Army Chief of Staff General A.H. Nasution to establish the *Angkatan Bersendjata* newspaper. The unstable political and security situation made it difficult to obtain a Publication Permit (SIT). This was compounded by President Sukarno's banning of 21 newspapers in Jakarta on 12 February 1965, which made the permit process subject to suspicion (Agus Husni, 1995). On 15 March 1965, the *Angkatan Bersendjata* newspaper was launched in Jakarta. Its publication served as a medium of agitation to counter communist ideology propagated by the PKI. The *Angkatan Bersendjata* openly opposed communism, as reflected in many of its issues. The newspaper's establishment was initiated by General A.H. Nasution (Soerojo Soegiarso, 1988).

After the September 30th Movement of 1965, during a period of political instability, the *Angkatan Bersendjata* played a significant role in restoring political order. Initially, the newspaper was intended as an anti-communist platform to counter newspapers published by communist

groups, particularly *Harian Rakjat*. In the aftermath of the coup attempt, a strong anti-communist faction emerged, propagated by the Army. This propaganda proved highly effective in weakening the communist movement across Indonesia. The political transition that followed the October 1st, 1965 events and the subsequent transfer of power from President Sukarno to Major General Suharto, formalized by Decree No. XLIV/MPRS/1968, marked the beginning of the New Order regime, which curtailed the Old Order's press rhetoric (Agus Husni, 1995).

In the aftermath of September 1965, specifically on October 3rd, 1965, military authorities banned the circulation of communist-affiliated newspapers. This ban greatly benefited anti-communist newspapers, particularly the *Angkatan Bersendjata* published by the military. These restrictions were intended to promote a more moderate press line, urging the media industry to safeguard national security from both internal and external threats and to act in accordance with Pancasila. With the public increasingly opposed to communism after the October 1st, 1965 tragedy, the Army sought to stabilize the political situation. Following the September 30th Movement, which had created political tensions in Indonesia, President Suharto strove to establish national stability. The government began to employ various

instruments to gain broad public acceptance, one of which was the mass media. The *Angkatan Bersendjata* newspaper was utilized as a supporting tool in achieving national stability (Agus Husni, 1995).

The novelty of this study, in comparison to earlier research, lies in its focus on the agitation conducted by the military through the *Angkatan Bersendjata* daily newspaper, a mass medium published by the military and used as a channel of resistance to mobilize mass support against communist ideology. This study examines how the military, through *Angkatan Bersendjata*, carried out political agitation in its publications to strengthen the Army's political position within the government while mobilizing society to resist communist ideology. This explanation invites a deeper investigation into the role of the *Angkatan Bersendjata* newspaper, published on 15 March 1965 by the military, as an anti-communist press outlet aimed at countering communist media. The year 1967 serves as the endpoint of this research, as the study focuses on how the daily *Angkatan Bersendjata*, as a military-owned press medium, was used to disseminate information, carry out resistance as an anti-communist newspaper, and serve as an instrument supporting the success of political stability under the New Order government.

METHODS

The method employed in this research is the historical methodology. The historical method is a process of critically examining and analyzing records and relics of the past, followed by writing the results based on the verified facts, a process known as historiography. Historical research generally consists of four stages: heuristics (source collection), criticism (source verification), interpretation (source analysis), and historiography (writing) (Helius Sjamsuddin, 2019).

In addressing the research problem, this study also applies a political science approach to enhance the analytical framework. The topic of this study is the role of the *Angkatan Bersendjata* newspaper as a medium of political agitation from 1965 to 1967. Both primary and secondary sources were used.

Primary sources:

- a. *Angkatan Bersendjata* newspaper (1965-1967)
- b. *Harian Rakjat* newspaper (1965).
- c. *Antara* newspaper (1965).
- d. *Warta Bhakti* newspaper (1965).

Secondary sources:

- a. *30 Tahun Harian Umum Angkatan Bersendjata Penegak dan Pengamal Pancasila*, by Agus Husni.
- b. *Understanding History*, by Louis Gottschalk.
- c. *Pendekatan Ilmu Sosial Dalam Metodologi Sejarah*, by Sartono Kartodirdjo.

- d. *Sejarah Pers Nasional dan Pembangunan Pers Pancasila*, by Tribuana Said.
- e. *Siapa Menabur Angin Akan Menuai Badai*, by Soerojo Soegiarso.
- f. *The Indonesian Military Politics, 1945-1967*, by Ulf Sundhaussen.
- g. *The Army and Politics in Indonesia*, by Harold Crouch.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Background of the Establishment of *Angkatan Bersendjata* Newspaper in 1965

The print media business in Indonesia, particularly newspapers, has now entered the era of the media industry and is no longer merely a tool for conveying the ideology or doctrines of a particular group, as was the case in the past. This does not mean that print media today is no longer used to communicate the messages, aspirations, and interests of certain groups or even the government. During the Old Order era, newspapers frequently employed jargon-filled language and accusatory tones, whereas today's press tends to be more subtle in expressing political matters. The *Angkatan Bersendjata* newspaper was a publication under the supervision of the Armed Forces Information Center (Pusat Penerangan ABRI) and could be regarded as one of the largest-circulating newspapers of its time.

When *Angkatan Bersendjata* was first published on March 15, 1965, it did

not immediately face strong competition. In fact, it became one of the leading newspapers, especially after the closure of 21 newspapers in the capital by the Old Order government. This positioned *Angkatan Bersendjata* as the principal medium opposing communism, which the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) under D.N. Aidit sought to disseminate. Historically, the establishment of *Angkatan Bersendjata* cannot be separated from the political and economic conditions of Indonesia at the time. Its publication was a direct response to the banning of newspapers affiliated with the *Badan Pendukung Soekarnoisme* (Supporters of Sukarnoism Organization), which had attempted to counter the aggressive practices of communist-aligned newspapers operating under the PKI's influence.

The establishment of a military press at that time was primarily intended to fill the void left by the banned press and to serve as a counter-propaganda tool against the communist press. The military newspaper was essentially a political effort by the Army to offset and resist the communication strategies carried out by the communists through their publications. With the absence of newspapers willing to oppose communist ideology due to the closure of 21 newspapers in Jakarta the military leadership recognized the urgent need for a newspaper that could balance the

dominance of communist-affiliated publications. Brigadier General Soegandhi was tasked by Coordinating Minister for Defense and Security/Army Chief of Staff General A.H. Nasution to establish the newspaper. However, due to the tense political and security situation, obtaining a Publishing License (Surat Izin Terbit, SIT) was not an easy task.

On March 15, 1965, the first issue of *Angkatan Bersendjata* was published under the motto: "*Batjaan Pradjurit, Veteran, Hansip, Purnawirawan, OPS, Sukarelawan, dan Rakjat Pedjuang Progresif Revolusioner, Tertib!*." At that time, the newspaper was printed using an intertype machine, with its editorial office, advertising, and subscription department located at Petodjo Selatan 11, Jakarta.

The publisher was the Armed Forces Staff, under the supervision of the Coordinating Minister for Defense and Security/Army Chief of Staff and Chiefs of Staff of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Police. The newspaper was overseen by Brigadier General H. Soegandhi, with retired Colonel Widjar serving as deputy, while the editorial board included the heads of the information offices of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Police. The editor-in-chief was Major Soegiarso Soerojo, supported by Colonel Komar, Lieutenant Colonel Isa Edris, and Major Jusuf Sirath.

Before the events of the 30 September Movement (G30S), *Angkatan Bersendjata* had already served as a newspaper countering communist publications, which had been the main purpose of its establishment. This was especially necessary since many anti-communist newspapers had previously been banned by the government at a time when the PKI still held strategic positions within the state apparatus.

The PKI's rise in influence during that period was strongly supported by its use of newspapers as tools of political agitation and propaganda, aimed at consolidating its power within the government. According to Marlaini, *Angkatan Bersendjata*, as one of the anti-communist newspapers founded during the press bans, was instrumental in promoting ideas and criticisms to counterbalance the PKI's growing dominance (Marlaini, 1994: 97).

***Angkatan Bersendjata* Newspaper as a Medium of Political Agitation, 1965-1967**

The emergence of the *Angkatan Bersendjata* newspaper was truly like "rain in the midst of a long drought." The people longed for a source of truth that this new newspaper seemed to promise. According to Agus Husni, the period was marked by the height of political agitation carried out by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) through its newspaper wings to propagate *Nasakom* in all aspects of

society (Agus Husni, 1965). From the beginning, the Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia (ABRI) intended to establish *Angkatan Bersendjata* as a counterweight to the "red" press, which was then gaining dominance through its constant political agitation. As a newspaper under the supervision of the ABRI Information Center, *Angkatan Bersendjata* was not independent in its reporting. Consequently, there were many issues on which the newspaper chose silence rather than criticism.

The publication did not only report on the activities of Army officers but also carried political agitation directed against the Army's political opponents. This was because the Army was one of the three major political forces at the time, alongside President Sukarno and the PKI, each of which pursued its own interests.

1. The Role of *Angkatan Bersendjata* as a Medium of Agitation Before the September 30th Movement

Throughout 1965, the newspaper was filled with reports about the campaign to "Crush Malaysia," often citing speeches of Indonesia's Great Leader of the Revolution, Sukarno. In addition, *Angkatan Bersendjata* also published reports on the economy, social issues, culture, and even crime. Meanwhile, the PKI and its supporting organizations launched their "revolutionary offensive," which culminated in what became known as

the September 30th Movement (G30S). This movement targeted Army generals whom the PKI considered obstacles to their expansion.

Different newspapers reported the events through contrasting lenses: the communist-aligned *Harian Rakjat* and *Antara* on one side, and the military's *Angkatan Bersendjata* on the other.



Figure 1. *Harian Rakjat*, October 2, 1965: “Lt. Col. Untung, Battalion Commander and RI from the Council of Generals Coup”
Source: National Library of the Republic of Indonesia

Harian Rakjat published its October 2, 1965 issue under the headline: “Lt. Col. Untung, Commander of Tjakrabirawa Battalion and RI from the Council of Generals Coup.” In the article, Lieutenant Colonel Untung stated: “*This movement is an obligation for me as a Tjakrabirawa soldier, whose duty is to protect the safety of the President and the Republic of Indonesia.*” He further explained that the Jakarta events would be replicated across

Indonesia, targeting the supporters and sympathizers of the so-called “Council of Generals.”

As Anwar Arifin has argued, agitation is a form of political communication used to mobilize the masses through speech or writing (Arifin, 2003). In this case, the PKI’s agitation was disseminated through its press organs *Antara*, *Warta Bhakti*, and *Harian Rakjat* to encourage the public to support the movement and join the Indonesian Revolutionary Council.

On the same day, October 2, 1965, the military’s *Angkatan Bersendjata* countered with articles denouncing the self-proclaimed “Indonesian Revolutionary Council.” The newspaper dismissed their claims about the so-called “Council of Generals” and reported that Radio Republik Indonesia’s broadcasting studio at Merdeka Barat Street No. 4-5 had been secured from the movement’s control. It declared: “*With the announcement of what they call the Indonesian Revolutionary Council and their claim that the Dwikora Cabinet is demissionary, it is clear that the September 30th Movement consists of counter-revolutionaries who have seized power from His Excellency the President, Supreme Commander of*

ABRI, and Great Leader of the Revolution, Bung Karno."

The paper further reported that ABRI's operations had swiftly retaken public facilities seized by the movement and that Radio Republik Indonesia was back under government control with little resistance. *Angkatan Bersendjata* asserted that almost all areas previously seized by the "Indonesian Revolutionary Council" had collapsed and would soon be completely crushed (*Angkatan Bersendjata*, 1965).

In the aftermath of G30S, non-communist groups especially the military seized the opportunity to weaken communism further by using their press organs. Through political agitation, narratives were constructed to shape public opinion, framing the September 30th Movement as an act of treason against the state. Moreover, with the banning of communist-aligned newspapers, the military press, particularly *Angkatan Bersendjata*, enjoyed wide latitude in pushing its agenda. At the same time, the paper was also used to help restore political order amid Indonesia's crisis.

The year 1965 was thus a turning point for the Indonesian press, which had been dominated by communist publications. After G30S, the communist press suffered a sharp

decline. By October, approximately 46 of the 163 newspapers in circulation were permanently banned by military authorities. In their place, military-controlled newspapers became the main source of information, while other publications allowed to continue were those supportive of or accommodating to the New Order's consolidation.

2. The Role of *Angkatan Bersendjata* as a Medium of Political Agitation After the September 30th Movement

The dominance of the military press during this period reflected the growing role of the military in Indonesia's political system. The press industry could not be separated from the broader socio-political context of the time. The New Order government, led by the military, emphasized political and social stability as prerequisites for economic development. As Ulf Sundhaussen argued, it was logical that the military sought to minimize factors that might obstruct the formation of its socio-political order (Sundhaussen, 1988).

In 1966, *Angkatan Bersendjata* increasingly highlighted the importance of the Army in maintaining national security and stability. According to Agus Husni, in order to achieve national stability,

the government employed various means to ensure acceptance among the population, with mass media serving as one of the key instruments. The *Angkatan Bersendjata* newspaper was utilized as a supportive tool in this stabilization effort (Husni, 1995).

This headline exemplified the paper's role in informing the public that ABRI had suppressed the organizations and groups identified as perpetrators of the September 30th Movement in order to preserve national security and stability. The newspaper thus became an extension of the government's broader agenda, serving as a stabilizing force in the turbulent post-G30S political landscape.

In line with ABRI's "Dual Function" (*Dwi Fungsi*) doctrine—as both a defense-security apparatus and a socio-political force—the *Angkatan Bersendjata* newspaper was directed by General Suharto to perform two main functions: as a source of troop information (*Troop Info*) and public information (*Public Info*). Troop Info referred to news intended for ABRI's internal ranks, while Public Info was aimed at the wider public.

The struggle of *Angkatan Bersendjata* was considered identical to the struggle of ABRI itself. Its voice was the voice of the armed forces not of an individual, an editor, or even a

single leader, but of ABRI as a whole, claiming to represent the conscience of the people. As noted by Agus Husni, ABRI, together with the people, succeeded in suppressing the PKI's rebellion. However, remnants of the Old Order remained in some state institutions, where certain civilian officials regarded ABRI's growing role as a threat to their positions (Husni, 1995).

CONCLUSION

The *Angkatan Bersendjata* newspaper, published by the military during the vacuum of anti-communist press opinion caused by government bans in 1965, emerged as a response to the need felt by the Army leadership to counterbalance the communist-affiliated newspapers. The *Angkatan Bersendjata* newspaper played a crucial role as a medium of political agitation during Indonesia's political crisis from 1965 to 1967. It was utilized by the Army both to counter the intense communist propaganda of the time and to serve as a platform for strengthening its influence over the government as well as the wider society.

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