The decline of Dayak political movements (1960-1971)

As discussed previously, the first Dayak political party supported the Dutch colonials, and Dayaks and their party were some of the staunchest supporters of DIKB, a state created by the Dutch. After temporarily disappearing from provincial politics after DIKB was dissolved in 1950, they recovered quickly following PD's wins in the 1955 and 1958 elections. The number of Dayaks finding positions in the bureaucracy started to increase, although they still represented a very small percentage of the civil service. Dayaks were appointed as executive heads in several districts, and a Dayak was appointed governor of West Kalimantan. This golden era for Dayak politics lasted for a little more than ten years (1955-1966). After 1966, however, Dayak political influence declined rapidly. From the end of the 1950s to the mid-1960s, Dayak politics underwent various life-saving processes, from PD to Partindo, and from Partindo to IPKI. Each process weakened Dayak politics even further.

BREAK-UP OF DAYAK POLITICS

At the end of the 1950s, Indonesia faced several political uncertainties. Liberal democracy did not provide stability to the nation because parliamentary governments failed to resolve the struggles between political parties. After years of deliberation, the Konstituante was still unable to reach compromise on the new constitution. Meanwhile, insurgencies were on the rise in some regions. Soekarno’s solution was to introduce the Guided Democracy system, in which the President became the power centre of Indonesian politics.

Under Guided Democracy, a new regulation, Penpres 7/1959, was introduced to regulate political parties, curb growing regionalism, and
limit foreign intervention in Indonesian politics. Under this regulation political parties could receive no foreign funding without government permission, and no foreigner could be a member of a political party. More importantly for local political parties, this regulation required each political party to have branches in at least a quarter of the provinces. PD was one of many regional parties whose constituents were based in certain areas and who could not fulfil this requirement.

PD’s four branches were all in Kalimantan.1 Within the other three Kalimantan provinces, only Central Kalimantan was strong enough in the 1958 general election to win enough votes to place a few representatives in the local parliament.2 Various sources claimed that there were efforts to set up new branches in Yogyakarta and other cities, where Dayaks were studying, but the number of Dayaks in these cities was very small. Dayak students were not united politically, especially those from outside West Kalimantan. Eventually, all efforts to set up additional branches failed.3

The only way to save the party was to merge into a larger national party. Internal party deliberations resulted in a decision that the new party should have a nationalist and not a sectarian (in this case, not religious) platform. This requirement automatically excluded the Catholic Party, a party favoured by Palaunsoeka, one of PD top leaders. Three other nationalist parties fulfilled these requirements: PNI, IPKI, and Partindo. PNI was a party with a history dating back to 1927; it had been established by Soekarno, who was a student at that time. IPKI was a relatively new party founded in 1954 by military veterans. Partindo was the newest party, established only in 1958.4 In 1959, the leaders of West Kalimantan PNI were S.H. Marpaung and Dr Soedarso, neither of whom a native of West Kalimantan. West Kalimantan IPKI was led by Ibrahim Saleh and Tan Husni Abdullah, both of whom were Malay. Partindo, as a newcomer in national politics, still had no office in West Kalimantan.

2 PD obtained three seats in the Central Kalimantan provincial DPRD. At the district level, only in Kapuas district did PD gain a significant number of seats (five) (‘Daftar angka hasil pemilihan DPRD 1958’, 1958, in: Collection of Robert Cribb, Canberra). The majority of Dayak votes of Central and East Kalimantan went to nationalist and Christian political parties.
3 Interviews with Ks and Ttg.
4 Partindo was founded on 29 April 1931 after the colonial government banned PNI, but fell into obscurity.