

# INDONESIA: Rich but Broke

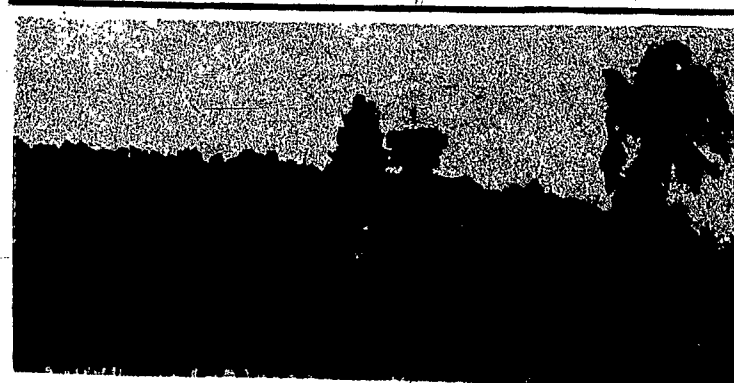
By FR. WILLIAM RICHARDSON, M.M.

Jakarta — Indonesia, the world's fifth most populous nation and fabulously rich in rubber, tin, oil and other natural resources, is broke!

Former president Sukarno's socialist scheme of guided democracy gave the capital city of Jakarta beautiful monuments, a stadium seating 100,000 persons, and hundreds of thousands of dollars in debts.

Jakarta is a city of over four million people, and it is a shabby one. Electricity is usually in short supply, and the city's water system flows only for a few hours each day — and not at all in some sections.

The people are discouraged. Prices are soaring, and wages are pitifully low. The average laborer earns about \$3 to \$4 a



This is Part 1 of seven articles on the Southeast Asian nations of Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan and the subcontinent of India, written by Father Richardson, editor of Maryknoll Publications. A former NC correspondent on Taiwan and currently engaged in a doctoral degree program at the Asian Center at St. John's University, Father Richardson is on an 11-nation tour of Southeast Asia, gathering material for a book.

month, while skilled workers make as much as \$12. Salaries of government workers and teachers sometimes reach \$20 a month.

Seventy-one per cent of the people of Indonesia are farmers who work less than half an acre each, and are frequently in debt to money lenders whose pernicious rates of interest are as high as 20 to 60 per cent a month. It's every man for himself here, and the devil take the hindmost.

Interest in the nation, or even the community, doesn't exist. No one looks beyond his own family, and nearly everyone is working several jobs in an effort to make ends meet.

Unemployment is widespread and it continues to grow as state-owned factories sell off equipment and close their doors. The economy has stagnated. Development of agriculture, not industry, is of the first priority here.

Gen. Suharto, who was pushed into top leadership following the aborted Communist coup d'etat in October of 1965, is now the president.

He is generally respected by the people, but more for his mode of simple living than for his leadership.

The army is running the country and, say critics of the government, is making a handsome profit of it. More strident critics will allege that the corruption goes far beyond the army and intrudes into nearly all government departments. Kickback on development and foreign aid is said to run high and, to a casual sightseer, the country seems to have a large number of chauffeur-driven Mercedes tooling along Jakarta's downtown streets.

Official figures for Communists killed in retaliation after the attempted takeover in 1965 list 87,000 dead. A more reasonable count might

Indonesian Communist party was a working membership in a Communist-controlled farmers' cooperative.

Communal and religious strife is another major problem in Indonesia. The Moslems, who make up 90 per cent of the population, are upset by the large number of converts to Christianity since 1945. Actually, dedicated Moslems number less than 30 per cent of their total, and this minority hopes to one day march the remaining 60 per cent back to the Mosque.

The National Council of Churches of Indonesia counts 800,000 converts in the past three years, with no sign of letup. Catholic pastors are experiencing this same influx of conversions, whose number is physically straining existing parish facilities. Ten new Catholic churches are in the

process of being built to accommodate the new members.

A bill calling for Islam as the state religion seems doomed if it goes to the polls. Nine separate political parties slash at each other on ideological and religious grounds, while not one practical political platform has been offered to get the economy of the country moving.

Indonesia's 110 million, still a largely feudal people in outlook, need a strong man of integrity to build confidence and trust.

Unless the economy and the conditions of the common man improve drastically within the next five years, a rebellion is inevitable — with or without Communist direction.

NEXT WEEK—Singapore: A tiny nation in a hurry.

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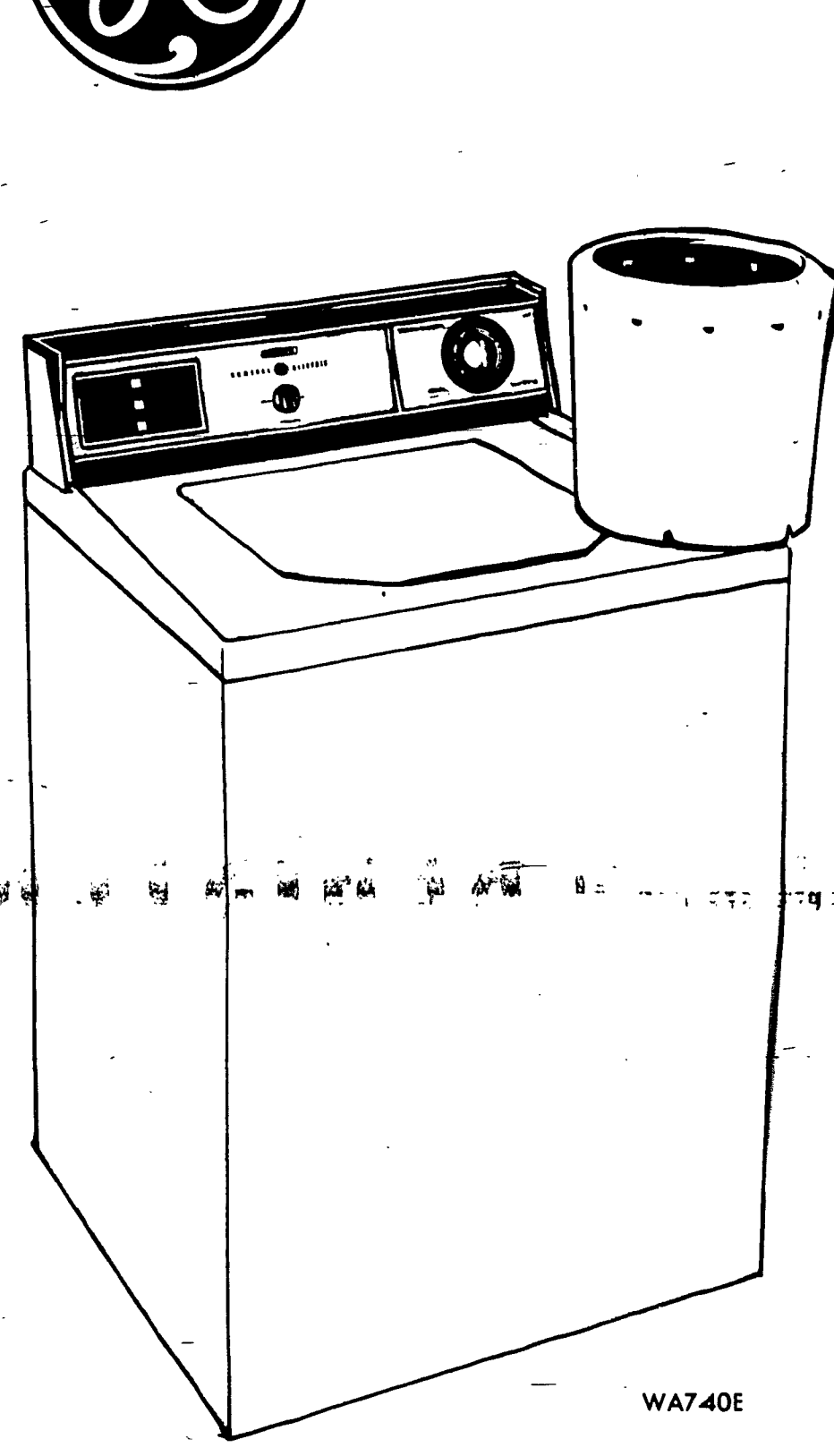
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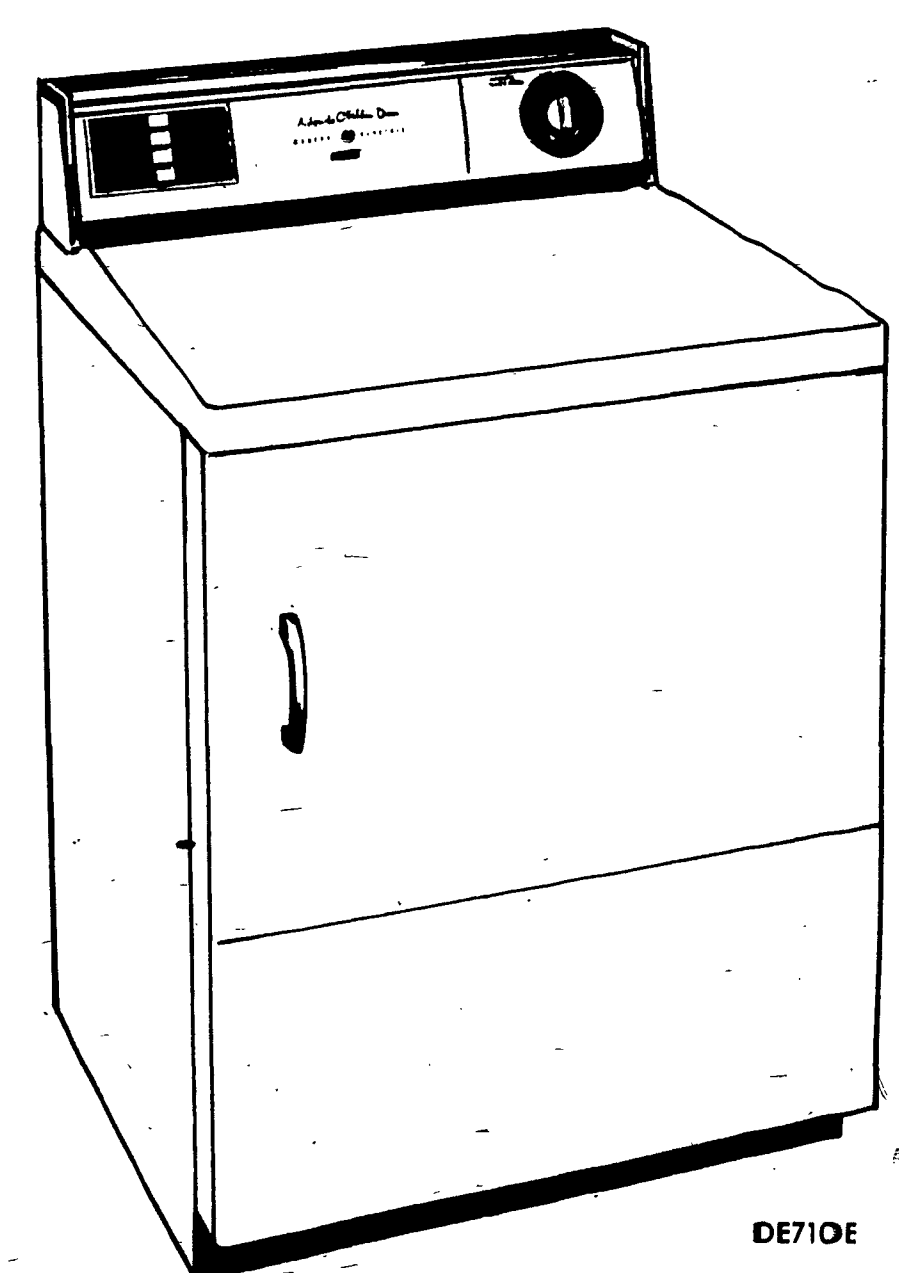
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