



Conclusion

Why did the radical movement in Indonesia suddenly blossom after 1910, and why did it quickly disappear after 1928? Indonesian, as well as Dutch historians, have tried to explain success and failure in terms of ideology. Mohammed Hatta, for instance, claimed that neither *right wing* nor *left wing* organisations were of much use and were doomed to fail, because the only viable movement was the purely nationalist one.¹ But he wrote this in 1928, just after the debacle of the *left-wing* communist uprising and before an equally bad set-back for the *Partai Nasional Indonesia*.

Ideology, left, right, or nationalist, cannot be used as the measuring stick in an analysis of the radical movement on Java before 1928. Not only did the various parties remain singularly vague in the descriptions of their ideologies, but specific ideologies were not restricted to specific parties. For instance, the *Partai Nasionalis Indonesia* had a radical political ideology, partly borrowed from the communists, as well as from the *Sarekat Islam*. Furthermore, all three movements adapted their ideologies, to a more or lesser degree, to the concepts of the traditional *adat* system, to make them more acceptable and understandable to the rural population.

As pointed out earlier, the rural masses on Java were not easy to organise. Although the landless agricultural proletariat increased during the twenties, as a result of the introduction of plantations, the rural workers still found in the traditional community enough social security. Thus the community served as a serious restraint on political restiveness.² It was precisely in those regions where the traditional community was weakest that the communist rebellions took place. The main problem was that, although the plantation industry had undermined traditional society, no new indigenous social structure had yet emerged. To the contrary, both plantation industry and the Colonial Government tried to maintain the traditional system by all means. As a result a proletarian revolution was impossible.

Equally impossible was the development of a bourgeois nationalist movement for the simple reason that the bourgeoisie was not only dimly small, but was furthermore closely tied to the government bureaucracy. The only alternative was a mass movement based on the value system of the traditional Javanese society. There had been rebellions in the past, often violent, and involving large areas of the Indonesian archipelago. But these rebellions had been local affairs and to bring unity, even among the Javanese people, was a task that seemed beyond the power of the radical parties. It was relatively easy to appeal to traditional values, but to translate these into a political ideology that would appeal to all Javanese, never mind all Indonesians, was another matter. Even Sukarno in the late twenties and early thirties was not able to do so, and although Dahm talks about Sukarno's successful synthesis of nationalism, socialism, and Islam³, the fact remains that his party's strategies had to take into consideration the *priyayi* class, so as not to alienate those whose support was essential. The emphasis was therefore

¹ Hatta, p. 339.

² Kahin, p. 13-19.

³ Dahm, p. 43.

on some form of political *Merdeka*, rather than on a new social and economic structure of an independent Indonesian state.⁴ But perhaps Sukarno's *Partai Nasional Indonesia* might have overcome these problems if it had been given the time. However, the Colonial Government put a stop to the movement rather quickly.⁵

This brings us to the crucial issue. Ultimately all political activity existed by the grace of the Colonial Government. As long as political parties concerned themselves with theoretical issues and argued among themselves, they were tolerated, but as soon as they showed any sign of growing into a threat to the colonial establishment, the government clamped down with *Exorbitant Rights* denying freedom of speech and assembly, and increased activity of the *Perintah Alus*, the secret police.⁶

The reason why the period between 1910 and 1930 saw so much political activity was that the Colonial Government had introduced the *Ethical Policy*, but as soon as it became evident that Dutch control in the colony was weakening somewhat as a result, the government switched course. The emphasis was once again on the maintenance of the *priyayi* class and the traditional structure of the *adat* system. It became the aim of the government to restore the *closed* traditional society, so as to isolate the rural communities from the agitation of the urban centres. This policy became more pronounced when it became necessary for the colony to produce good profits to balance the budget of the mother country, which showed an ever increasing national debt.

When under the pressure of disturbances in the mother country, the Dutch Government declared itself after World War I in favour of greater participation of the population in Indonesia, it did not carefully consider the consequences. The major one was, that as a result of the changes in 1922 and 1925, the constitution gave so much power, that any extension would involve real participation well beyond the advisory capacity of the *Volksraad* now had. Dutch authorities at home and in the colony resisted therefore any further extension. Some of the reasons given were:

- The *Volksraad*, even though it was carefully selected, did not sufficiently consider Western enterprises.
- As 97% of the native population was illiterate, the Dutch officials did not regard the representatives of the native population in the *Volksraad*, as truly representing the Indonesian people.
- The unfavourable results the English government experienced when introducing Western institutions in its Eastern colonies.

⁴ Alers, p. 39. Soekarno created in 1928 the term *Marhaenism* for his vague socialism cum strong nationalism (after the *Marhaen*, the Indonesian rural proletarian). But Soekarno never tried to impose this as an ideology. He spoke directly to the *Marhaen* and his popularity was based on his personal charisma, rather than on the ideology of the party he had created.

⁵ After the Communist rebellions, the government was not willing to take any chances. Vested interests in Indonesia blamed the *Ethical Policy* and those administrators who had followed a too liberal policy. Actually those *liberal* administrators, expertly trained at the Indological Faculty of Leyden University, followed a rather paternalistic policy. Now they were blamed for having conjured up some monster, while all they had done was to speed up the social and political evolution of the Indonesian people. (Benda, p. xii)

⁶ The *power of exile* by the Governor General created a rapid turn-over of nationalist leadership and weakened the movement. The *Political Information Service* (P.I.D.) had the power of *provisional arrest*, and under article 155 of the Penal Code, anybody who expressed dislike for the Colonial Government could be arrested. Censorship hindered communications and labour legislation limited the power to strike. (Kahin, p. 61-62)

- The idea that, as administration, justice, police, education, economy, etc. was entirely depending on Western intellect, work, and capital, the whole society in Indonesia would collapse when Indonesians would take over.
- Of course, the Indonesian society would have to be adapted to Western concept, but gradually and without haste.
- The *Volksraad* could criticise easily because it did not have real government responsibility. This considerably lessened respect for the *Volksraad* in the mother country.
- An important reason was, although never mentioned openly, that the Indonesian profits kept the economy of the mother country going, during the bad years of the Depression.
- A change in the power structure would deliver an economically weak population into the hands of a small group of more or less educated Indonesian, who exploited their own people.

The authorities knew what they did not want, but could not agree on the question on how to go about the whole problem of nationalism. There was no specific course of direction, and those who felt that the colony should remain in the hands of the Dutch, were quite happy with that situation.⁷

In such a political climate it became increasingly difficult for the radical movements to operate, specially as the Depression hit Indonesia hard.⁸

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⁷ R. Reinsma. "Een bronnenpublicatie over Nederlands-Indië" (A Sources-Publication about the Netherlands-Indies). *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*. Volume 80, Nr. 1, 1967, p. 117.

⁸ Various nationalist groupings developed after 1930, but almost all of them were relatively moderate, as most of the radicals were either in jail, exiled, or interned in Boven-Digul, or other isolated places. Examples are: *Partai Rajat Indonesia* (cooperative nationalist), 1930; *Fraksi Nasional Indonesia*, in which several groupings united with the aim to cooperate with the government (1931); *Frani*, an association of Indonesian Government employees, (1931); *Gerindo*, in which the *Budi Utomo* and the *Persatuan Bangsa Indonesia* (Dr. Sutono's Study Clubs) joined, and which was later called the *Partai Indonesia Raja* (Indonesian People's Party), 1937; *M.I.A.I.* (Great Islamic Council of Indonesia) a combination of the *Muhammadiyah* and the *Nahdatul Ulama* (1937); the *P.I.I.* (Indonesian Islamic Party). All these parties met with little success as the Colonial Government maintained an intransigent attitude. The result was the formation of a new more radical movement in 1939: *Gapi* (Indonesian Political Concentration a united front of conservative and radical nationalists pressing for an Indonesian Parliament. In 1941, a Council of Indonesian people, *Madjelis Ratjat Indonesia* formed. The Dutch government, in exile in London, was willing to make some concession, as soon as the war would be over. In general, however, it repeated the statement of 1939, in which it had finally answered a request for some reform made it 1936, and which included such sentences as: *under the present circumstances...it may be called premature.... the moment seems ill chosen... the existing and satisfactory relations... might be disturbed'... in due time... the possibility... of ultimately...doing something...* (Vlekke, p. 394).