



The Nationalist Movement



Sukarno

The new nationalist-movement which developed after 1925, and rose rapidly after the failure of the communist rebellions in 1926, reflected the changes in the structure of the intellectual élite in Indonesia. The new political activists were no longer mainly Dutch or Indo-European, they were Indonesian. As such they realised that recognition of the values of the traditional society was essential to the survival of a mass movement. They had learned from the failure, of the *Sarekat Islam* that it was impossible to introduce at this stage of the struggle against the colonial régime, modern ideologies which were impossible to comprehend by the great masses of rural Java. Therefore, although most of the leaders had received a Western education, they remained in the first place Indonesian in outlook and while they used the new organisational methods of the West, they made sure that the ideology of their movement was firmly rooted in the traditions of the indigenous society.

- [link to PKI political biography](#)
- [link to Wikipedia](#)

As early as 1908, students, attending Dutch universities, established in the Netherlands the nationalist movement *Perhimpunan Indonesia*.

In 1922, the name of the magazine published by the *Perhimpunan Indonesia* was changed from *Hindia Putra* (Son of India) to *Indonesia Merdeka* (Free Indonesia), reflecting the disappointment over the failure of the Dutch Government to make good its promises of Indonesian participation in the government of the colony.¹ During this same period the principle of non-cooperation was adopted as the policy of the *Perhimpunan Indonesia* and the major aim of the association became the unification of all nationalist movements in Indonesia. These changes reflect the radicalisation of the movement after World War I. Before the war, the organisation followed a course similar to that of the *priyayi* party, *Budi Utomo*, of opposing the colonial status quo in Indonesia, but advocating co-operation with the Dutch Government.

¹ *Indonesia*. Editorial, p. 169.

The radicalisation of the *Perhimpunan Indonesia* did not mean that the organisation came into socialist or communist hands. The Indonesian intellectuals remained at all times in control of the nationalist associations and although they did not refuse cooperation with the Communist International in Europe, they did not allow the communists to take over.² The radicalisation of the movement did not result from any left-wing ideology, but from of the restrictive policies of the Dutch Government. Most members of the *Perhimpunan Indonesia* began to realise in the early twenties that if the organisation were to be effective, it had to change from an *outpost* of the Indonesian nationalist movement in Europe, to that of organiser of the new nationalism in Indonesia itself.³

Before World War I, Indonesian intellectuals, returning from Holland to Java, had joined the *Budi Utomo*. But after the war, and specially after 1922, when the stevedores' strike had split the *Budi Utomo* over the issue of support, the organisation had become less and less representative of the aspiring young intellectual nationalists. In 1923, the *Bond van Intellectuelen* (Union of Intellectuals) was formed by Dr. R. Satuman Wirjosandjojo, but many young intellectuals felt that a more militant organisation than the *Budi Utomo* was needed to offset the rather conservative *Bond van Intellectuelen*.⁴



Congress of the *Budi Utomo*



Mohammed Hatta

In 1924, Dr. Sutono of Surabaja founded the *Indonesische Studieclub* (Indonesia Study Club). The aim of the organisation was to give advice and develop the Indonesian community and help it to solve its social problems on the basis of *self-help*. At the same time, nationalists such as Mohammed Hatta and Sutan Sharir, tried building smaller, primarily educational organisations, with the aim to train an élite, which could spread the concept of nationalism among the masses.⁵

After 1924, Indonesian intellectuals, after their return from Europe, would now join study clubs rather than the *Budi Utomo*. Soon major differences developed between the various clubs over the issue of cooperation with the Colonial Government. The Bandung Club was opposed, whereas Dr. Sutono

² Alers, p. 41. The *Perhimpunan Indonesia* was associated with the *Ligue Against Colonial Oppression*. Important members were Soematri, who had studied in Moscow, Mohammad Hatta, who led the deputation to the international congress of the Ligue in 1927, Satromoeljono, and Mangoenkoesomo.

³ *Indonesia*. Editorial, p. 169.

⁴ Blumberger, p. 197-198. The crisis over the stevedores' strike was healed in 1923, when the executive committee of the *Budi Utomo* spoke out against the concept of non-cooperation. But the pacification of the older priyayi elements was done at the expense of alienating most of the younger members. The *Bond van Intellectuelen* was a strictly élitist organisation of Javanese intellectuals. It was immediately attacked by the communists and those Muslims who protested against this "restricted Javanism".

⁵ Mintz, p. 73. Both Hatta and Sharir were exiled to Boven-Digul in 1934.

in Surabaya advocated cooperation on the basis of equality. Those who advocated non-cooperation were shown to be the more realistic ones, when it became obvious, even to Dr. Sutono, who had rejected an appointment to the *Volksraad*, that the Colonial Government was unwilling to make concessions to the nationalists.⁶



Sutan Sharir

In 1926, an effort was made to unite the various Study Clubs, the *Perhimpunan Indonesia*, and the *Bond van Intellectuelen* into a federation called the *Persatuan Indonesia*. But not surprising, considering the many differences in social class and attitudes toward the colonial régime, the common front soon collapsed.⁷

In 1925, the *Perhimpunan Indonesia* formulated a plan to create a revolutionary nationalist people's party, a *Sarekat Rajat Nasional Indonesia*, based on a close cooperation between communist and nationalist intellectuals. The failure of the *P.K.I.* rebellion, however, destroyed these plans.



The idea of a nationalist revolutionary movement remained attractive, however, and in April 1927, the members of the *Bandung Studie-Club*, of which the leaders were; Ir. Achmed Sukarno, Tjipto Mangun Kusomo, IskaqTjokroadisurjo, Budiarto and Sunarjo, formed an action committee for the establishment of such a movement.⁸ In July of the same year the *Perserikatan Nasional Indonesia* was formed. (Later the word *Perserikatan* was replaced by the more international word *Partai*).⁹ The aim of the new organisation was to achieve Indonesian independence through a consciously nationalist movement, based on the power, resources, and structure of the

Indonesian society. The slogan was: "*Indonesia los van Nederland*" (Indonesia Independent from the Netherlands).¹⁰

A more purely nationalist movement had taken the place of the semi-religiously oriented *Sarekat Islam* and the Marxist-socialist *Partai Kommunis Indonesia*. The *petit bourgeois* members of the *P.K.I.*, embarrassed by the rebellion, and the disillusioned intellectuals in the *Sarekat Islam* and *Budi Utomo* now joined the *Partai Nasional Indonesia*, and formed the basis of the party.¹¹

⁶ Blumberger, p. 199-201.

⁷ *ibid*, p. 200.

⁸ Mintz, p. 71; Blumberger, p. 203-206; McVey. *Indonesia*, Van Niel, p. 296-298; Vlekke, p. 373-374; Alers, p. 41. The *Bandung Club* spoke out strongly against the government measures after the communist rebellions. It claimed that it was not international communism but the existing discontent of the population, which had come to realise that the colonial government did not understand their wants and demands. (Blumberger, p. 203)

⁹ Alers, p. 41.

¹⁰ Blumberger, 205-206.

¹¹ *ibid*, p. 206.

Although Mohammed Hatta claimed in the late 1920's that only a real mass movement with as its only aim: "*nationale bevrijding*" (national liberation) would be successful, the reality turned out to be quite different.¹² It is true that the masses flocked to the *P.N.I.*, but this was once again the result of the party's identification with traditional custom. Sukarno had received his apprenticeship in the *Sarekat Islam*, and although influenced by socialist ideas, he had never joined the *P.K.I.*, but had remained loyal to the traditional leadership of Tjokroaminoto. For Sukarno unity was more important than communist internationalism.¹³



Boven-Digul

To the Colonial Government the differences in party-ideologies were really of little importance and it viewed all political activity with great suspicion, communist, religious, or nationalist. As soon as the *P.N.I.*, under Sukarno, began to show signs of success, and as soon as it looked even remotely as if Sukarno's movement might become a threat to the Dutch establishment, the government took action. It began to harass the leaders first, and when that did not prove to be sufficient, began to arrest *P.N.I.* organisers. Soon Sukarno and the others found themselves in Boven-Digul and other concentration camps.

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¹² Hatta, p. 399.

¹³ Dahm, p. 34 and 39-42.