

The Socialist Movement



The trio Tjipto Mangunkoesoe-mo, Douwes Dekker and Suwardi Suryaningrat led the *Indische Partij*

The early socialist movement in Indonesia was dominated by Dutch socialists. Because they were European oriented, the socialist parties failed to get any mass support. Still, they played an important role because of their influence upon those parties that were able to win a mass following, such as the *Sarekat Islam* and the *Partai Komunis Indonesia*.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the city of Semarang on Java was the centre of the socialist movement.¹ In 1903, the *Semarangse Kiesvereening* (Electors Association of Semarang) was founded. It was radical in its policies and was mainly an Indo-European organisation. Under the leadership of S.F.E. Douwes Dekker, a relative of Eduard Douwes Dekker, the author of *Max Havelaar*², the organisation moved further to the left and in 1912 the name was changed to *Indische Partij*. This party included such important socialists as Soewardi Soerianingrat, and Tjipto Mangoekoesomo. The party, as well as the *Insulinde* movement, later called *Nationale Indische Partij*, represented efforts by some Eurasians to identify with the Indonesian educated élite. However, they only got limited support from that side and soon realised that their interests lay with the Dutch, rather than the Indonesians.³

The *Indische Partij* might have played the role of a Creole party in Indonesia and might have formed a liaison between the Indonesian people and the Dutch if the Colonial Government had recognised it as such. But instead the government put extreme pressure on the Indo-Europeans to leave the *Indische Partij* indicating that their government jobs might be at stake. This, combined with the fear of the Eurasians of the rising Indonesian intellectual élite, drove the Indo-Europeans in a conservative direction and in 1919 they formed the *Indo-Europees Verbond* (Indo-European Union), with the aim to preserve their traditional privileges.⁴

Another socialist movement was the *Indische Sociaal Democratische Vereeniging* (Indonesian Social Democratic Association), founded in May 1914 by the Dutchman Hendrik Sneevliet. A former member of the Dutch reformist *Sociaal Democratische Arbeiders Partij* (Social Democratic Workers Party),

¹ Vlekke, p. 352.

² *ibid*, p. 352. The slogan of the party was *Indonesia for those who live here*, which was directed against those Dutch who had moved to the colony with the sole intention to make as much money in as short a time possible, and then return home. The party was intended to be multi-racial but became more purely Indonesian later on.

³ McVey. *Indonesia*, Van Niel, p. 293. Also Dr. C Smit. *De Indonesische Questie*. (The Indonesian Question), p. 4.

⁴ Wertheim. *Effects*, p. 70; de Kadt, p. 31. The Colonial Government deported the leaders Douwes Dekker, Tjipto Mangoekoesomo, and Soewardi Soerianingrat from Indonesia and thus made the existence of the *Indische Partij* impossible.

Sneevliet followed in Indonesia a more radical political line. After the Bolshevik Revolution, Sneevliet sought to join his party with the Komintern.

The inability of the *I.S.D.V.* to adapt the anti-religious tendencies of Marxism to the teachings of Islam, combined with the failure to overcome the language barrier, confined the movement to Europeans and some Indo-Europeans, with a very few Indonesians also being members. Its importance lies in the fact that several important members of the *I.S.D.V.* were also members of the *Sarekat Islam*, and it was their radicalism that pushed the *Sarekat Islam* more to the left.

In May 1920, the Semarang socialists formed the *Perserikatan Kommunist di India*, the P.K.I., the communist party of Indonesia, which will be discussed separately. By that time, Sneevliet was no longer active in Indonesia as he had been ordered out of the colony after an abortive attempt to bring about a mutiny among the soldiers and sailors in Indonesia.⁵

The tiny socialist movements were highly sectarian and although the *Insulinde* party and the *I.S.V.* cooperated for a short time, ideological conflicts broke up this alliance quickly.⁶ It showed that even the tiny socialist movement in Indonesia was vulnerable to the sectarianism of their big brothers in Europe. But that was not the only reason for their poor performance on Java and elsewhere. What was more important was that the Marxist movements on Java were not Indonesian in character. Not only were their aims firmly based on Western ideologies, but as already pointed out, they were led by Westerners as well. It was therefore essentially an alien movement. As a result the Marxist parties failed to attract a sufficient number of the new Indonesian élite. Some of these felt that Marxism was in conflict with their Islamic beliefs, but more often they mistrusted a Dutch led movement. This mistrust was clearly shown in the writings of Mohammed Hatta, one of the most important nationalist leaders, who claims that the Indonesian nationalists mistrusted the Dutch socialists, and the Dutch socialist party, the *S.D.A.P.* He wrote that it was "common knowledge", that "the S.D.A.P. was willing to accept the colonial inheritance..... When they have captured state power, their aim will not be to make Indonesia independent but to continue colonial imperialism to protect the welfare of the Dutch workers."⁷ Hatta in his scepticism was more correct than, for instance, Virginia Thompson who claims in *Government*



PKI in 1925

⁵ Vlekke, p. 357. See also: Sal Santen. *Sneevliet, rebel*. Amsterdam: N.V. de Arbeiderspers. 1971. Igor Cornelissen. "Het Leven ter Linkerzijde. Sal Santen herinnert zich Sneevliet, rebel". (Living to the Left. Sal Santen remembers Sneevliet, Rebel). *Vrij Nederland*, 23 October, 1971, p. 27. In Holland, Sneevliet had been involved in the split in the socialist movement between the reformist Social Democratic Workers Party and the more radical Social Democratic Party, or Tribunist, as they were called. Between 1921 and 1923, Sneevliet represented the Komintern in China.

⁶ Ruth T. McVey. *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, p. 18-19

⁷ Mohammad Hatta. *Verspreide Geschriften* (Collected Writings) p. 479. From an article published on 15 December 1928 in the journal *De Socialist*. See also, McVey. *Rise*, p. 4-5. Hatta mentions how the first *Radical Concentratie* of 1918 was led by a Dutchman, Ir. Cramer, and that it was a social-democratic movement aiming at reform rather than independence. Furthermore, it was willing to adhere to parliamentary action, and as the *Volksraad* had no real power, the whole movement was rather futile. In 1922, when the reactionary policies of the new Governor-General Fock created discontent once again, a second *Radical Concentratie* was formed. But inner-party strife between Indonesian Nationalists, Indonesian Communists, and Dutch Socialists, made it as ineffective as the first. (p. 390-391)

and Nationalism in South-East Asia (p. 129), that when British and Dutch systems are compared, the British system organised representative (sic) government along communal lines, whereas the Dutch policy was more varied and native nationalists were far more likely to find their most powerful allies among sympathetic radical in the administration in the mother country. It was not that the Indonesian élite was not receptive to socialist-marxist ideas, as few of them had any capitalist connections.⁸ What they objected to was the downgrading by Dutch radicals of Indonesian nationalism.⁹

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⁸ Kahin, p. 49.

⁹ Verdoorn, p. 14-16.