

Intellectuals and Nationalism in Indonesia

A Study of the Following recruited by
Sutan Sjahrir in Occupation Jakarta

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PREFACE

The purpose of the following pages is to examine the character, ideas, and attitudes of one section of the youth of Jakarta during the Japanese Occupation and immediately after, to consider its place in the history of nationalist thought, and to reassess its contribution to the struggle for independence.

The group in question was composed of those who gathered about Sutan Sjahrir and who were later to form an important element within the party led by him, the Indonesian Socialist Party (Partai Sosialis Indonesia--PSI). Radical changes have taken place over the years in the way students of the Indonesian Revolution have perceived Sjahrir and his followers. Thirty-five years ago the fashion was to see them as belonging to the mainstream of the independence struggle. A decade later the demise of the PSI had changed that perspective. The elections of 1955 showed that, for all its considerable influence in parliament and the bureaucracy, the party had no significant constituency in the country at large and in 1960, because of its alleged involvement in the rebellions of 1958, it was banned. Since then observers have tended to read back the later impotence of Sjahrir and his circle into the wartime and immediate postwar years, to play down their significance even then and to see them as not central, or at least as not of long-term importance, in the history of the Republic.

It is time to reconsider those judgments and a study of Sjahrir's younger followers during the Occupation forms part of such a reassessment. They were not an accidental collection of people. Convinced from the beginning that the Japanese Occupation was a temporary phenomenon, Sjahrir actively sought out sympathetic individuals, mainly tertiary students and ex-students, with the intention of preparing them for a future struggle for independence, and it was their relationship with him which defined them and distinguished them from other circles to be discerned in the ferment of Occupation Jakarta. It is thus reasonable to speak of a circle or group, though there are problems in identifying its boundaries with precision. It was necessarily informal and its members enjoyed varying degrees of closeness and intimacy with him. The difficulty of deciding who should be regarded as members of the group and who should be excluded from it will be discussed in its place; but in broad terms it can be said that we are concerned with people most of whom were born between 1918 and 1922, who had received a tertiary education in the Indies, unlike many of their predecessors who had studied in Dutch universities, and who were attracted by Sjahrir's particular brand of social democratic thinking.

Sjahrir's younger followers are interesting for a number of reasons but the present essay is concerned with two in particular.

They are important, first of all, it will be argued, as representing a significant strand in the history of Indonesian nationalism and as having a distinctive contribution to make to the struggle for independence and to the subsequent political life of the Republic. If they are to be

seen as deliberately recruited by Sjahrir, they were recruited to a particular political tradition, whose origins must be sought over a dozen years earlier.

1931 saw the beginning of what was to be a long-standing division within the Indonesian nationalist movement. A few years before, in 1927, the Indonesian nationalist party (Partai Nasional Indonesia--PNI) had been formed in the aftermath of the abortive Communist risings in West Java and West Sumatra, and it quickly established itself as the main voice of what has been called "secular" nationalism, secular in the sense of not seeking a base either in Islam or in the all-embracing ideology of a Communist party. By devoting itself explicitly and solely to the common struggle for independence, rather than to the service of a wider ideological commitment, the PNI, under Sukarno's spectacular chairmanship, was able to attract what might otherwise have been incompatible elements. Its momentum, however, was to be checked two years later when Sukarno was arrested, tried, and convicted for contributing to the disturbance of public order.

During Sukarno's period in prison some of those who had been uneasy about the whole idea of a mass party broke away to form a new organization, the Club Pendidikan Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Education Club). The influence behind this move was that of Mohammad Hatta, the acknowledged leader of Indonesian students studying in the Netherlands. Hatta believed that the struggle for independence was likely to be a long drawn out and weary business. He was critical of the style and content of Sukarno's leadership and held that the urgent need was not for oratory, attempts at mass mobilization, or the maintenance at all costs of a superficial unity but for careful analysis of the colonial situation and the painstaking education of nationalist leaders. On the eve of his return to the Indies he sent out Sjahrir ahead of him to direct the formation of the new Pendidikan Nasional Indonesia. When Sukarno was released from prison at the end of 1931, he was thus faced by a divided nationalist movement in place of the apparent unity he had brought about between 1927 and 1929.

To Sukarno, the differences between himself and Hatta seemed unimportant when compared with their common aspirations, but he failed to close the gap which separated them and it became clear that the lines of division cutting across the movement were more fundamental than he had believed. What was at stake, it seemed, was not just a matter of personalities nor of minor differences of strategy but of opposing conceptions of the nature of the struggle. In 1934 all three leaders, Sukarno, Hatta, and Sjahrir, were exiled from Java and the Indies Government enforced stricter controls over all nationalist activity. Pendidikan members, however, retained their sense of identity and the ideas of Hatta and Sjahrir remained as a distinct element in nationalist thinking.

We are concerned here with a part of that story. When Sjahrir was brought back from exile by the Dutch at the beginning of 1942 he set himself deliberately to take up the threads of 1931-1934 and to bring the Pendidikan back to life. This was to be done in part by making contact with former members of the party who had escaped exile and in part by seeking out suitable representatives of a new generation of nationalist youth. An examination of the latter group is thus part of the longer history of a distinct stream within Indonesian nationalism.

Secondly, because of the Western education experienced by all the members of the group, and because of their highly intellectual character,

they provide a case study of the roles of intellectuals in transitional societies. Being left-wing in outlook and to a considerable extent theoretically inclined, they were affected by the major crises of left-wing thought in the period under discussion: Spain as a symbol of the sharpening divisions of the thirties, the popular front, the cold war, and the Two Camps doctrine of the late forties (the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union falls outside the period with which we are dealing). How did they react to these events? At a more basic level, these were the people who, because of their training, had to face in their own lives what might be called "the challenge of the West." Did it pose for them problems of identity? How far did their experience match that of Western-educated intellectuals in other colonial situations? In particular, were they open to the common charge that, having been steeped in Western culture, they lacked roots in their own society?

The following pages will question recent judgments about the importance of the group. It is the view of the present writer that, in spite of some later realignments and changing of sides, the split of 1931 and 1932 was an important and long-term split, that Sjahrir, in gathering a coterie about him during the Japanese Occupation, was concerned to revive the Pendidikan tradition, and that the inheritors of that tradition were of quite central importance from the mid-forties to the early fifties. Even after its loss of formal influence, this stream continued--and continues--to represent a significant element in the complex of political outlooks in Indonesia.

The exploration of Sjahrir's recruitment of a group of followers during the Japanese Occupation and of the character and attitudes of the group is based, in large measure, on interviews with its surviving members. A highly articulate body of people, they clearly enjoyed recalling their youth, remembering particular experiences, and thinking back on the issues that had preoccupied them and the ideas that had excited them as students. For many of them it had obviously been a golden age, perceived all the more vividly now because the world they had hoped for had never come into being. There is, perhaps, a good deal of nostalgia in their memories of what it was like to be a part of a crucial period in their country's history and no doubt some misjudgment about the parts they played. Oral history is a risky business, given the fallibility of human memory and the tendency for interviewer and subject alike to collaborate in re-shaping the past in the light of their later perspectives. The dangers of such a method are discussed below. Nevertheless, provided it is kept in mind that memories are documents of the present and not of the period with which they deal, it is important to gather these recollections while members of the generation in question are still alive.

There is, of course, an element of autobiography in this study. Being roughly of an age with my subjects I am aware of the fact that the political and theoretical matters which preoccupied them in the late '30s and early '40s were the preoccupations of my own student generation, albeit in a very different, and very sheltered, setting. And like them I am remembering what it was like then, and remembering in a very different world in which different perspectives and different concerns no doubt give shape to what is remembered.

* * *

I am indebted to all of those in Indonesia who allowed me to interview them, or who discussed with me, in an informal way, their memories of the

1940s. Their names are listed in Appendix B. In particular I am grateful to Mrs. Poppy Sjahrir, who gave me an account of her wartime experiences and her meeting with her husband, to Soebadio Sastrosatomo, Maria Ullfah Soebadio, Murdianto, Soedjatmoko, Aboe Bakar Loebis, Ali Budiardjo, Miriam Budiardjo, Roeslan Abdulgani, Sitorus, and Andi Zainal Abidin who gave generously of their time and memories and who discussed frankly with me the kind of conclusions I was reaching, and to Hazil Tanzil and Mrs. Sjahroezah, who helped me to recover details of the life of Djohan Sjahroezah.

The original idea of the study emerged from discussions with Herbert Feith and Jamie Mackie. Since then many people have read and commented on successive drafts of the manuscript. Jane Drakard has brought to the role of "gentle reader" a critical eye and has followed the progress of the work from start to finish. Herbert Feith has continued to argue points of interpretation with enthusiasm. George Kahin shared with me his own direct and first-hand knowledge of Sjahrir and his followers during 1948 and 1949. Siti Nuraini Barnett, David Chandler, Herbert Feith, David Hill, John Ingleson, George and Audrey Kahin, Jacques Leclerc, Aboe Bakar Loebis, Anton Lucas, Tony Milner, Soebadio Sastrosatomo, and Tony Reid have read drafts of the work or parts of it at various stages of its preparation and their reactions have saved me from many an error. Surviving defects are, of course, my own responsibility. I am grateful, too, to Rudolf Mrazek who is himself working on Sjahrir and who gave me permission to quote from an unpublished article. A debt of a different kind is owed to Ben Anderson whose approach to the study of modern Indonesia has been a stimulus to me as to others. The fact that I take issue with him in Chapter I, and seek to effect a reconsideration of some of his judgments, should not be allowed to obscure that debt. The Australian Research Grants Scheme and the Monash University Special Research Fund gave financial support without which the inquiry could not have been carried out. Finally, Joy Tuckett coped nobly with successive drafts of the manuscript and uncomplainingly incorporated my innumerable revisions.

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NOTE ON THE SPELLING OF PROPER NAMES

Over the years a number of changes have been made in Indonesian spelling conventions. Early in the history of the Republic it was decided to change the Dutch "oe" to "u" in official use. Subsequently further steps were taken to bring Indonesian and Malay conventions into line with each other, with Indonesian adopting the following forms:

"c" replaces the former "tj,"
"sy" replaces "sj,"
"j" replaces "dj,"
"y" replaces "j."

In the following pages the new conventions have been used for place names (Jakarta, not Djakarta, Aceh, not Atjeh, Surabaya, not Surabaja), but this is not so easy for the names of individuals who may have their own preferences for the old or the new spelling. For this reason no attempt has been made to impose a consistent usage. The current rules have been followed where there is no other guide. However where a person is known to have a preference for the old usage (Aboe Bakar Loebis, Soedjatmoko) that has been respected. Again, the old spelling has been used for persons, now dead, who are better known in that form (Sjahrir rather than Syahrir, Tjokroaminoto rather than Cokroaminoto). Sukarno rather than Soekarno follows the President's declared wish even though he always signed himself Soekarno. In at least one case a person has chosen to use a mixture of the old and new conventions within the one name (Ahmad Subardjo Djoyoadisuryo).

In some cases these changes of convention give rise to doubts about the identity of an individual. On p. 64 is a reference to Soedjono Djembloeng, an associate of Djohan Sjahroezah. In that case the use of the old spelling, taken from Dimyati's article, leaves no doubt about the name. On p. 63 is a reference to Sujono, an old Pendidikan member and also an associate of Djohan Sjahroezah. There is no way of telling whether this name is given in the new spelling (= old Soedjono or Sudjono) or in the new (= new Suyono). If the former, there is the further question: is this Soedjono Djembloeng or another Soedjono?

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

It has always been a matter of national pride that independence came to Indonesia not as the result of a negotiated transfer of sovereignty, though the process was completed in that way, but through a struggle of heroic proportions in whose fires the nation itself was forged. The revolution, indeed, is central to the Republic's perception of itself. To call it a revolution is, of course, to beg a number of important questions. What is a revolution? Is the concept, developed in modern thought on the models of the French and Russian revolutions, applicable to a nationalist struggle for independence? Or must a revolution involve also a transfer of power from one social class to another and a subsequent social transformation? For Indonesians looking back to the birth of the nation, however, such questions do not arise. For them there is no question but that the events of 1945-49 constituted a revolution, a revolution that is seen as the supreme act of national will, the symbol of national self-reliance and, for those caught up in it, as a vast emotional experience in which the people--the people as a whole--participated directly.

For historians of modern Indonesia, too, the revolution has its symbolic role to play, encapsulating one view or another of the nation's past, present, and future. But for historians the symbol has been less firmly fixed and unchanging. Some accounts, seeing the revolution as the natural product of the years of colonial rule and the nationalist resistance that organized itself before World War II, have dealt with it primarily as a struggle for independence and have focused sympathetically on the older nationalist leadership which presided over the conflict. Others have been concerned rather to explore different ideological strands within the revolution--nationalist, social democratic, Communist, Islamic--or have examined the shifts of power that accompanied the struggle or considered the possibilities it provided for fundamental social change. Others again have observed the progress of events at the local level and have examined the way in which national issues became entwined with the pressures of local circumstances.¹ For some it is the similarities

1. George McT. Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952) is the leading representative of the first approach; B. R. O'G. Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution: Occupation and Resistance 1944-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), offers a close study of the first year of revolution, with a strong emphasis on the ideological strands to be observed within it; A. J. S. Reid, *Indonesian National Revolution, 1948-1950* (Melbourne: Longman, 1974) offers a general survey addressing in particular the origins of later political alignments and the failure of social revolution; J. R. W. Smail, *Bandung in the Early Revolution, 1945-1946* (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1964), A. J. S. Reid, *The Blood of the People* (Kuala

between the Indonesian experience and the forces of nationalism elsewhere that command attention and for others it is the distinctiveness of the Indonesian case.

Shifts of emphasis and changes in interpretation spring from a number of causes. Most obviously they result simply from the passage of time and the events that have unfolded since. The strains and stresses of the parliamentary experiment of the early fifties, the achievements or excesses (according the point of view) of Sukarno's Guided Democracy, the economic miracle or oppressive authoritarianism of Suharto's New Order (again according to the point of view), the rise and subsequent destruction of the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia--PKI) and the Army's acceptance--or seizure--of a central political role, all combine to affect later assessments of the constellation of forces which were present during the struggle against the Dutch. Later students of the revolution have the advantage, denied to their predecessors, of knowing what actually followed it. But in part the changing fashions of interpretation reflect the preferences and sympathies of the observer. Those more in tune with the European-style, social democratic thinking of Hatta and Sjahrir are likely to differ in their approach from those attracted to the populism of Sukarno, or to the PKI's drive towards social revolution (if indeed that was the goal of the PKI). And at a further remove are the conceptual frameworks within which historians work. Is an explanation of the twists and turns of Indonesia's modern history to be sought in the personal contributions of event-making individuals--the charisma of a Sukarno or the economic rationality of a Suharto--or in the changing balance of competing political interests or in the form and workings of political institutions which might, or might not, be appropriate to Indonesia's political realities? Or should one look to profounder forces, including cultural forces, which might be held to underlie the overt actions of the figures on the political stage?

In practice, changing fashions of interpretation probably owe something to all of these factors. That is not to suggest, however, that it is all simply a matter of fashion--that it is open to historians to choose one interpretation rather than another according simply to taste. Matters of fact and of judgment are involved as well. It is true that some historiographical disputes may be more apparent than real in that they reveal differences on the part of historians about what is worth studying rather than about what actually happened; but competing accounts, for all the admixture of differing prejudices, political preferences, alternative conceptual frameworks, and differences in focus that are likely to be present, are usually concerned also to assert or deny statements about what was in fact the case. "Fact" and "judgment" are themselves slippery notions. Judgments are made and facts are perceived differently by different observers for the reasons already outlined. Nevertheless, at the heart of any historiographical inquiry, in addition to sorting out

Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979), and A. Lucas, "The Bamboo Spear Pierces the Payung: The Revolution against the Bureaucratic Elite: North Central Java in 1945" (PhD dissertation, Australian National University, 1980) are examples of regional or local studies. Audrey R. Kahin, ed., *Regional Dynamics of the Indonesian Revolution: Unity from Diversity* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985) presents an account of local conflicts in eight regions and draws together a number of threads uniting the local and the national struggles.

the elements of value and perspective, there must also be a concern with evidence, and with accuracy in discovering what was the case.

The present essay takes as its point of departure what has perhaps been the major interpretative revision of the revolution: B. R. O'G. Anderson's 1972 revision, in his *Java in a Time of Revolution*, of the perspective established in 1952 by George McT. Kahin in his *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*. It is a revision which owes something to events that occurred between 1952 and 1972, but there are also differences both in analytical method and in ideological preference which affect what is observed, how it is observed and how that is worked into a total picture. Kahin's focus was on the prewar leadership; in his account, the radical challenges of the Persatuan Perjuangan of 1945-1946 and later of the Indonesian Communist Party were external to the mainstream of revolution. Anderson allowed the validity and centrality of these more radical streams in the political mix of the revolutionary years and his judgment of the dynamics of the revolution is very different in consequence.

* * *

Amongst the casualties of Anderson's revision of Kahin's account is Sutan Sjahrir, three times prime minister of the Republic in the first two years of the revolution, and the group of young men and women--and older ones too--who constituted his following. Kahin's sympathy for that group has not always been shared by later students.

Disagreements about the role of Sjahrir and his followers have focused on a number of related issues. First there have been differing judgments about the activities of Sjahrir during the Japanese Occupation. According to what was for many years the received view, at the very beginning of the Occupation the nationalist leaders, Sukarno, Hatta, and Sjahrir, after their return to Batavia from their respective places of exile--Sukarno from Bengkulu and Hatta and Sjahrir from Banda Neira--reached an agreement that the two well-known leaders, Sukarno and Hatta, would work openly with the Occupation government, moderating Japanese actions where that could be done and using public office under the Japanese to advance the nationalist cause whenever possible, while the lesser known Sjahrir would work in a clandestine way, keeping in touch with the older and more prominent leaders, but concentrating essentially on creating an underground movement of resistance to the Japanese authorities. Charles Wolf, translator of Sjahrir's letters from exile, spoke of him "organizing and directing a resistance underground that operated all over Java during the occupation."² In late 1945 Sjahrir became a vehement public critic of Indonesian leaders who had collaborated with the Japanese.³ It was therefore important, in the received view, to emphasize the fact that Sjahrir had been a party to this agreement and that he had favored the playing of a public role by Sukarno and Hatta. Sjahrir, writing in 1947, was himself careful to acquit Hatta in particular of the charge of collaboration. For Hatta, Sjahrir agreed, working with the Japanese was inescapable and he was

2. Charles Wolf Jr., "Introduction" to Sutan Sjahrir's *Out of Exile* (New York: Day, 1949), p. xii.

3. See Sutan Sjahrir, *Our Struggle*, published as *Perdjoeangan Kita* in 1945, trans. B. R. O'G. Anderson (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1968), p. 29.

prevailed upon to accept a public position by *force majeure*.⁴ Sjahrir did not offer the same defense of Sukarno, but arguably it was as applicable to him as to Hatta and some of the pro-Hatta argument carried over to him.

The testimony advanced in support of this version of events is impressive. Sjahrir himself gave an account in these terms of the meeting between the three men in Jakarta after Sukarno's return from Sumatra in 1942.⁵ So did Sukarno, though he was recalling events many years later.⁶ So, in essence, did Hatta in his memoirs, also written long after the event.⁷ At the secondary level, Kahin, drawing on his contacts with Sjahrir and others during the revolution, gave authoritative support to this interpretation.⁸ Others, however, without specifically rejecting the account of the compact made by the three leaders in 1942, have questioned the idea that Sjahrir assumed the role of a genuine underground leader. During the Occupation he remained visible, moving between Bandung and Jakarta. He was one of the occasional lecturers in the courses offered in the Asrama Indonesia Merdeka, an asrama set up in October 1944 under the patronage of Rear-Admiral Maeda, the liaison officer in Jakarta between the Japanese 16th army and the Makassar-based naval administration of the eastern islands of the archipelago. Sjahrir maintained regular contact with a wide circle of friends, including student friends, in Jakarta. They were able to meet him at his house which became something of a center for political discussion. His contacts were made and maintained with discretion but there does not seem to have been any excessive air of secrecy about the coming and going of his friends. One of his activities was clearly illegal. He listened to foreign broadcasts and thus kept in touch with the progress of the war as seen through other than Japanese eyes, and he encouraged some of his followers to do the same. He, and his friends also, maintained contacts with like-minded people in other parts of Java. Insofar as there existed, in consequence, a loose network of people who kept in touch with each other, passed on information about local developments and served as channels of nationalist propaganda, there were risks involved. But Sjahrir himself must have been visible to the Japanese and, since he remained free from arrest during the whole period of the Occupation, it would seem that he appeared unimportant to them. By the same token the groups with which he was in contact did not, in terms of organizational coherence and sophistication, represent an underground resistance of the kind to be found at the time in occupied Europe, or, for that matter, in the Philippines, Malaya, and Vietnam where local nationalist groups cooperated with the Allies. This does not mean, however, that the group and its activities were without significance.

A second set of issues at stake in the historical revisions of the revolution concerns Sjahrir's standing as a national leader. In Kahin's

4. Sjahrir, *Out of Exile*, p. 242. For a brief discussion of the moral issues involved in the collaboration question see J. D. Legge, *Sukarno: A Political Biography* (London: Allen Lane, 1972), pp. 155-60.

5. Sjahrir, *Out of Exile*, pp. 245-46.

6. Sukarno, *Autobiography as Told to Cindy Adams* (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1965), p. 173.

7. Mohammad Hatta, *Memoir* (Jakarta: Tintamas, 1979), pp. 414-16.

8. Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution*, pp. 104-6.

view he was influential in the days preceding the proclamation of independence and after it. He was the architect of the November 1945 shift from the presidential system laid down in the initial Constitution of the Republic to a parliamentary system, a shift, achieved not by constitutional change but by the adoption of a convention by which the Constitution would operate in a parliamentary fashion. And then as prime minister he was the man responsible for steering the infant Republic through the shoals that surrounded it, gaining a degree of recognition for it from the outside world, and pursuing a policy of negotiation with the Dutch and indeed demonstrating great skill in shaping the course of those negotiations.

In this interpretation the policy of negotiation represented the maturest political wisdom. The weakness of the Republic and its need to find allies in the international community in order to counter the Dutch view that the Indies were legitimately the property of the Netherlands, made it essential that the Indonesian Government should appear as a moderate, rational, and competent government. American sympathies, in particular, were most likely to be enlisted by the argument that a successful non-Communist nationalist movement offered the best safeguard against the advance of communism in Southeast Asia. Sjahrir's opponents within the Republic, who criticized his moderation and his willingness to enter into discussions with the Dutch and who wanted, instead, an uncompromising resistance to the Dutch presence, were seen as a threat to that image of moderation and competence. The principal such challenge came in 1946 when Tan Malaka brought together a united front, the Persatuan Perjuangan (Struggle Union), in opposition to the policies of the first Sjahrir government. The Persatuan Perjuangan presented a "Minimum Program" which demanded "100 per cent merdeka," a concept involving a rejection of all negotiations while the Dutch were still in Indonesia, and the seizure of Dutch property. In Kahin's interpretation the Minimum Program, though initially claiming to be a means of mobilizing support for the government, was in fact a cover for Tan Malaka's ambition to unseat Sjahrir.⁹ It could be argued that it was, in any case, an unrealistic program. Its demands were likely to throw the Republic into chaos just when there was a prospect that progress might be made through negotiation. The success of Sjahrir in resisting the radical challenge thus showed the strength of moderate nationalism and gave the Republic a chance of consolidating its domestic authority and its international standing before the Dutch police action.

In presenting this picture Kahin drew heavily on his own close personal contacts with Sjahrir and with those associated with him. It was natural that his assessment of Sjahrir's role and his interpretation of Sjahrir's policies should reflect that close connection. In the preface to the paperback edition of *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (1970), Kahin frankly discussed the advantages and disadvantages of such a close involvement with the principal actors in his story. On the one hand there was the danger that a sympathetic account might easily become a distorted and biased one. Against that must be set the exceptional opportunities offered to a privileged observer to gain access to information that would not otherwise have been available and, in general, to have a close first-hand view of the drama as it unfolded. Provided one was aware of the dangers, and provided care was exercised to avoid bias,

9. Ibid., pp. 174-75.

Kahin believed that the advantages of an inside view of events outweighed the disadvantages.

Be that as it may, Kahin's assessment of the role of Sjahrir and of the significance of the political stream that he represented has been challenged, at least by implication, by Anderson's study of the first year of revolution. In Anderson's account, Sjahrir is not of central importance in the events leading to the proclamation and he is indeed quite out of the picture during the crucial two days which preceded the proclamation. Thereafter he remains in the background of the narrative until November. His ascent to the prime ministership comes not as the natural climax to the political maneuvers which preceded it, but unexpectedly, as the result of a "silent coup."¹⁰ Sjahrir and his supporters are not presented as being in the center of the genuine political forces of the Republic but as external to them. They are an alienated intelligentsia, able, for a time, to exercise an influence, but out of touch with the profound undercurrents of popular feeling. And Sjahrir's policies of seeking a negotiated solution are likewise out of tune with the deeper aspirations of those wanting no compromise with the Dutch and an independence in which social change would be an integral part of the struggle.

Anderson achieves his change of emphasis in part by examining different aspects of the revolutionary story and focusing his attention on groups which were not in the center of Kahin's vision. To Kahin the radical youth of Jakarta played an important part in the events of August 1945 and in the months that followed but their activities remained secondary to those of the older generation of nationalist leaders. Anderson sharply altered that focus and brought the *pemuda* (youth) to center stage. In part the revision was achieved by his evocative style which captured the sense of new forces breaking through the structures left by Dutch and Japanese rule, and the *pemuda* expectations of a social revolution brought about by their own spontaneous actions. One example may serve.

For the *pemuda* it was a time of improvisation and exhilaration. Underneath the anarchic spontaneity of their movement, giving it power and conviction, were the fundamental impulses of every revolution. Liberty was *merdeka*, not a political concept of independence or freedom, but an experience of personal liberation. For many it was a release from the disciplined structures of the occupation period--the youth organizations, the offices, and the factories--as these disintegrated in the October days. For others it was a liberation from the apparent fatality of their lives. It was a sense of vast and unexpected opportunities in a time when everything for a while seemed possible and permissible. The *pemuda* rode free on buses, trains, and trams. They forced Japanese soldiers to kneel before them in the dirt. They scrawled their terse slogans on doors and walls. They emptied the tills of unguarded banks, and opened warehouses to the people of the *kampung*. They attacked tanks with sharpened bamboo spears and homemade gasoline bombs. And they killed--

10. According to Anderson (*Java*, p. 187), this description was subsequently used by Sjahrir's enemies. Indeed Subardjo, in his autobiography, refers to it in that way. (Ahmad Subardjo Djoyoadisuryo, *Kesadaran Nasional* [Jakarta: Gunung Agung, 1978], p. 414.)

Dutchmen, Englishmen, Japanese, Eurasians, Chinese, sometimes their fellow-Indonesians.¹¹

It is exciting stuff and to a considerable extent Anderson established his case by the vividness of the way in which he presented the feelings and outlooks of his subjects.

Thirdly, the revision was achieved by the way in which Anderson posed his questions and formulated the issues to be examined. "The mutual frustration of the pemuda, who had revolutionary expectations but no revolutionary leadership, and the middle-class metropolitan intelligentsia, both collaborationist and underground, who were in a position to lead but totally inexperienced in doing so without external support, was to provide the leitmotif of the Indonesian Revolution."¹² To pose the issues in those terms led naturally to a criticism of the intellectuals and a sympathetic account of the aspirations of the pemuda.

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As has already been suggested, these different interpretations reflect the broader analytical frameworks of their authors--and the accompanying differences in preference and sympathy as well. Kahin's liberal inclinations were thoroughly in tune with the outlook of those with whom he was most closely in touch during the revolution. The opening chapters of *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* reveal a humane, anticolonial point of view in which colonial nationalism was seen as a natural product of European imperialism. As the work proceeds the Western-educated leaders of nationalism appear as the natural leaders of the Republic and the guardians and the best guarantors of a stable democratic Indonesia in the future. Things did not work out in quite that way. The constitutional experiment of the early fifties, on which Hatta and Sjahrir and their friends pinned their hopes, collapsed amid faction fighting, corruption, spiraling inflation, and regional separatism, to be succeeded first by Sukarno's Guided Democracy and then by the military authoritarianism of Suharto's New Order. In retrospect, the leading figures of the revolution, and of the party-based governments which followed, appear to have shrunk in stature. Later fashions of scholarship were in any case disposed to look beyond the interactions of parties and pressure groups within the elite to the cultural determinants of political action, focusing on traditional patterns of social order which appeared comparatively stable and resistant to change. The *aliran* analysis of Clifford Geertz, for example,¹³ with its perception of distinct streams within Indonesian society, was taken up and used by students of Indonesian politics who found in the distinctive outlook and behavior patterns of different socireligious segments of Javanese, Minangkabau, Acehnese, and other ethnic groups, much to illuminate the rivalries and alignments of Indonesia's modern political history.

In that kind of perspective the aspirations, in the forties and early fifties, of a small intelligentsia have seemed transitory and irrelevant. By the mid-fifties it was, of course, clear that Sjahrir's influence and

11. Anderson, *Java*, p. 185.

12. Ibid., p. 109.

13. See Geertz, *The Social History of an Indonesian Town* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1965), pp. 127-29.

that of his Indonesian Socialist Party had declined sharply. That was an obvious matter of fact. What is important for the present argument, however, is that, from this later standpoint, adverse judgments about the importance of the "PSI stream" have been applied not merely to the late fifties and after, but also to the period of the Occupation and revolution. Anderson, writing in 1968, agreed that Sjahrir was "perhaps the major influence in creating the intellectual framework within which the governments of the early 1950s approached Indonesia's problems,"¹⁴ but in his own major study of the first year of the revolution he placed events within quite a different framework from that of Kahin, and one less likely to allow a major role to a handful of individuals. Concentrating on the social dynamics of traditional Javanese institutions, he described the popular feelings of disturbance and uncertainty to be found in Java as the Occupation period drew to its close and explored the way in which these perceptions, and the accompanying sense of heightened expectations and of open possibilities, had their place in the Javanese world outlook. For the young of 1945, these traditional perceptions shaped their view of the possibilities of revolution. Against that background Anderson evoked with skill the hopes of those who sought not merely independence but social change as well. To him the old nationalist leadership was concerned to seize for itself the apparatus of State power created by the Dutch. "Revolution" for the members of that leadership meant effecting that transfer of power. But those outside the ranks of the elite saw the revolution as enabling their direct participation in the struggle and as making possible the sweeping away of existing structures and the creation of new channels of power which would enable their direct participation to continue. That sense of the revolution, as presenting infinite opportunities open to those who could create and use them, appeared in his eyes as in some way more real than the sober expectations of the Western-educated intelligentsia and such a judgment fitted his own system of values. Anderson's preferences were indeed as frank and unconcealed as were those of Kahin. Where Kahin tended to sympathize with the outlook of Sjahrir and also with that of the progressive wing of Masyumi,¹⁵ Anderson's sympathies were with the more radical revolutionaries, who were contemptuous of the Dutch-speaking intellectuals of the capital and who saw themselves as representing Indonesia's "real" revolution.

Which was the authentic voice of the Indonesian revolution, however, may be very much open to question. In portraying the possibility of alternative revolution, Anderson subjects the policies and leadership of the "alien intelligentsia" to a close and highly critical scrutiny. He does not bring that same scrutiny to the aspirations of its opponents. But whether the alternative revolution envisaged by Tan Malaka, and by the radical pemuda, could ever have been a genuine possibility, an alternative based in existing social forces, is a very real question. If one were prepared to judge that the plans of Tan Malaka and of the groups making up the Persatuan Perjuangan were not really capable of realization--and such a judgment is certainly arguable--those groups might seem as irrelevant in the long term as the urban intelligentsia.

Kahin and Anderson have been taken here as representative of sharply different approaches to the revolution. Their differences result partly

14. "Introduction" to Anderson's translation of Sutan Sjahrir, *Our Struggle*, p. 15.

15. This sympathy is acknowledged in the paperback edition of 1970.

from the difference in the time of writing (Anderson knew what had happened to Kahin's dream), partly from differences in analytical categories (Anderson thought in terms of cultural configurations within Indonesian society rather than purely political groupings), and partly from differences of ideology (Anderson, reflecting the new left ethos of the late '60s, looked to more radical solutions for Indonesia than those hoped for by Kahin). The result was a very different assessment of the closing years of the Occupation and the first year of revolution. For Kahin, Sjahrir was one of the heroes and his story, tentatively at least, had a happy ending. Anderson saw that Kahin's happy ending was false, but his own account, with Tan Malaka as hero/victim, was still tragedy.

* * *

If Kahin's account was too partial to Sjahrir, Anderson's revision may have swung the balance of interpretation too far in the opposite direction, and it is time to look again at the role of the Sjahrir group in the hope that, from a different point in time and within a different perspective, a fairer assessment of its role may be made. The present study aims to contribute to such a reassessment. Such a project will be open, of course, to the normal hazards of historical inquiry. It will not be free of the influences of hindsight, focus, point of view, sympathies, and preferences of the kind which have affected the work of other students of the revolution. Nevertheless, one reading of the past is not as good as another, and in suggesting and defending a revision of emphasis it is contended that real issues are at stake and not merely legitimate differences of viewpoint.

On February 12, 1948, the followers of Sjahrir were to end an uncomfortable association with other groups by breaking away from the Partai Sosialis (PS) to form the Partai Sosialis Indonesia (PSI). For some years thereafter the PSI remained a very influential element in the Indonesian political scene. It was a participant in governments, both before and after independence (the presidential cabinet formed by Hatta in January 1948, the Natsir cabinet of 1952, the Wilopo cabinet of April 1952, the Burhanuddin Harahap cabinet of 1955), and other members of those governments had links with the PSI or were sympathetic to its approach to the problems of the Republic. The provisional parliament of the Republic, formed after the creation of the unitary state in 1950, was based, in the absence as yet of any electoral test of party appeal, on a rough estimate of the strength of respective parties. Under that arrangement the PSI faction was composed of 15 members out of a total house of 236. This made it equal third in size among the 17 formally recognized groupings in the parliament, outnumbered only by Masyumi (41 members) and PNI (41 members).¹⁶ Its members or close sympathizers also occupied more

16. The formation of the provisional parliament in 1950 followed broadly the arrangements made during the revolution when a Central Indonesian National Committee (Komite Nasional Indonesia Pusat--KNIP) was formed to give representation to the main political groups in the Republic. Appointments were made, and varied from time to time, by the president though with the broad agreement of the leaders of political parties, and KNIP quickly emerged as the effective parliament of the Republic. With the transfer of sovereignty from the Dutch to a United States of Indonesia in 1949, in which the Republic was merely a constituent state, and then with

than their fair share of senior positions in the civil service, holding in particular the secretary-generalships of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defense, and were represented, though not so strongly, in the higher levels of the Army, commanding for a time the position of Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces. Its members included journalists whose influence made itself felt in the leading organs of political opinion, and one daily paper, *Pedoman*, the country's most prestigious in the eyes of many, was in effect a PSI paper.

In spite of its strong influence over men in such strategic positions, the party's direct influence was to be short-lived. Unlike its political rivals, it failed to build for itself a mass organization based on local branches able to recruit members and supply a grass-roots strength. As will be seen below, that omission was not accidental. Leading members of the party had always seen its role as educational rather than organizational, though it was assumed that educational efforts in the long term would create a mass base for the party. In the meantime, the PSI saw itself as a cadre-training party rather than as a mass party, and this weakness was to prove fatal when elections were eventually held in 1955. The party proved to have little electoral appeal. It obtained only 2 percent of the vote and its seats in the House fell from 15 to 5 out of 257 post-election House seats.

The loss of a strong parliamentary base did not mean the end of the PSI's importance. From its other vantage points in the Indonesian polity it continued for a time to exercise influence on both policy and administration. Nevertheless, political currents were flowing in new directions that were not advantageous to it. The gathering crisis of 1956 began to come to a head at the end of that year with a series of separatist movements in Sumatra and the withdrawal of West Sumatra from the authority of the central government. The following year saw Sukarno, theoretically a constitutional head of state in a parliamentary democracy, playing an increasingly direct part in politics. The resignation of the government in March was accompanied by a presidential declaration of a state of emergency and the formation by the president of a new government, and,

the conversion of that federal state into a unitary state in 1950, similar principles were followed in creating parliamentary institutions. After 1950, and pending the holding of national elections, the parliament of the unitary state included representatives from the constituent states in the federal House of Representatives and Senate and representatives of the working committee of the Republic of Indonesia.

There are some minor inconsistencies in figures of *fraksi* and total parliamentary membership of this provisional parliament, probably resulting from changes in *fraksi* membership and changes brought about by death or retirement. The 1954 Ministry of Information publication, *Kepartaian dan Parliamenteria Indonesia* (1954) gives the PSI *fraksi* as comprising 15 members on August 1, 1954 (p. 631) and the parliament as containing 234 members on August 15, 1950, two more being added when the unitary state was formed (pp. 624-25). In *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1960) Herbert Feith gives the provisional parliament as having 232 members at March 5, 1951 and the PSI *fraksi* as 17 strong (p. 128). The same author gives the pre-election house in 1955 as containing 233 members, including a PSI *fraksi* of 14 (Herbert Feith, *The Indonesian Elections of 1955* [Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1957], pp. 58-59).