THE COMMUNIST UPRISINGS OF 1926-1927 IN INDONESIA: KEY DOCUMENTS

Edited and with
an introduction by

HARRY J. BENDA
and
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TRANSLATION SERIES

Modern Indonesia Project

Southeast Asia Program
Department of Far Eastern Studies
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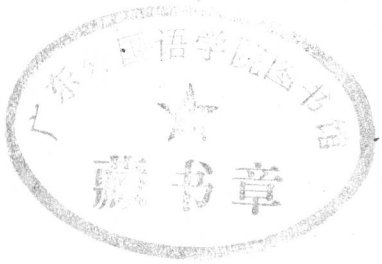

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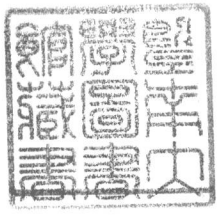

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PREFACE

The rebellion of the Indonesian Communist Party in 1926-27 was a significant event which had a considerably greater impact on Indonesia's subsequent political development than the actual strength marshalled by the Communists might suggest. Very little has been written about the rebellion and its backround, and the documents necessary for its study have been extremely difficult of access, even to those who read Dutch. We have felt that translation and publication of the three reports here presented would be useful to those seeking a fuller understanding of this period of Indonesia's modern history -- one which has remained nearly as obscure as it is important. The Introduction should help the reader see these documents in their proper context and give him a fuller appreciation of the nature of the rebellion and the conditions which nurtured it.

The two editors -- Dr. Harry Benda, Associate Professor of History at Yale University, and Ruth T. McVey, Research Associate in the Cornell Modern Indonesia Project -- have both done extensive research in modern Indonesian political and social history, Ruth McVey being currently engaged in completing a major study of Indonesian Communism during the period 1920 - 1927.

The first of the three documents here presented, the report of January, 1927 by the Governor General of the Netherlands Indies, was not secret, but enjoyed a very limited circulation, primarily in the Volksraad (the largely advisory council of the Netherlands Indies) and the Dutch Parliament. Its full official title is: Politieke Nota over de Partij Kommunist Indonesia: Rapport Waarin is samengevat wat gebleken is omtrent de actie der Partij Kommunist Indonesia, (Nederlandsche - Indische Kommunistische Partij), sectie der 3de Internationale, vanaf Juli 1925 tot en met December 1926. / Political note concerning the Indonesian Communist Party: Report wherein is summed up information which has come to light concerning the action of the Indonesian Communist Party (Netherlands Indies Communist Party), a section of the Third International, from July, 1925 up to and including December, 1926. /

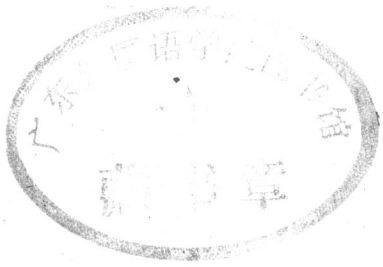
The second document, generally referred to as the Bantam Report had a very restricted circulation, and today apparently only a few copies exist. Its full official title is: Rapport van de commissie voor het onderzoek naar de oorzaken van de zich in de maand November 1926 in verscheidene gedeelten, van de residentie Bantam voorgedaan hebbende ongeregeldheden, ingesteld bij het Gouvernements-besluit van Januari 26, No. 1[x] (Weltevreden: Landsdrukkerij, 1928). / The report of the Commission installed by Government decision No.1[x] of January 26, 1927, to investigate the causes of the disturbances which took place in various parts of the residency of Bantam in November, 1926 (Weltevreden: State Printing House, 1928)./

The third document, the political section of the West Coast of Sumatra report, has as its full and official title: De Gang Der Kommunistische Beweging Ter Sumatra's Westkust, Deel I (Politiek gedeelte) Rapport van de Commissie Van Onderzoek ingesteld bij het Gouvernements-besluit van 13 Februari 1927 No. 1 a (Weltevreden: Landsdrukkerij, 1928). [The course of the Communist Movement on the West Coast of Sumatra, Part I (Political Section), Report of the Investigation Committee appointed under the Governmental Decree of February 13, 1927, No. 1 a (Weltevreden: State Printing House, 1928).] This was marked "Geheim: Voor den Dienst" [Secret: for the Service] by the Netherlands Indies Government, and not until shortly after the conclusion of the war did the Dutch Government grant permission for publication of the valuable sociological section of the report based upon the analysis of the highly respected Dutch scholar, Dr. B. Schrieke. This important service was provided in the first volume of Indonesian Sociological Studies: selected writings of B. Schrieke, W. van Hoeve and the Institute of Pacific Relations, (The Hague, 1955). Apparently however, neither the Netherlands Indies Government nor the Dutch Government has ever granted permission for the extremely important political section of this report (that part which is here presented) to be declassified and released to the public. I wish to express my appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Indonesia for having granted me permission to publish this document.

The Cornell Modern Indonesia Project is indebted to Mrs. Elizabeth Meijer for translation of the Governor General's Note and the Bantam Report, and to Professor Harry Benda for translation of the political section of the West Coast of Sumatra Report.

George McT. Kahin
Director

Ithaca, New York
November 15, 1959



Introduction

I

The revolts in West Java and on the West Coast of Sumatra dealt with in the documents translated in this volume were, at one and the same time, traditional and modern phenomena. They were traditional in the sense that such predominantly rural uprisings had punctuated Dutch colonial rule in the Indies for several decades, if not for centuries. In many respects - not least in the part played by local Islamic leaders - the events of the 1920's not only closely resembled the rural unrest of earlier times, but they seemed to flow from the same, or at least very similar, causes as had inspired their predecessors. The distinguishing modern features of these insurrections lay in both their size and the character of their leadership. Unlike the revolts of the earlier centuries, those of the twentieth were not limited to one region or even to one island; and it was only in the twentieth century that a central leadership, largely urban in origin and inspired by modern ideologies and organizational tactics, had sought to direct traditional peasant unrest into new channels. In fact, the events of 1926-1927 were unique only to the extent that they were Communist-led, for it is equally true that, as such, they constituted not a beginning, but rather the end of what might be called the proto-nationalist phase in modern Indonesian history. That movement had started with the meteoric rise of Sarekat Islam two decades before, and it was the last sparks of that earlier mass movement which some communist leaders fanned into short-lived and suicidal insurrections in the mid-1920's.

In the context of colonial history, the rebellions of 1926/27 mark a decisive turning point. They irrevocably closed a chapter in colonial policy, even if its demise was never officially proclaimed or admitted by the Netherlands. The policy that was quietly being interred, the so-called Ethical Policy, enunciated by young Queen Wilhelmina in 1901, had inaugurated a new era in Dutch colonial thinking. Its originators had sought to replace the exploitation of earlier times, whether governmental or private, by an etatisme aimed, on the one hand, at building a protective wall between the population and Western enterprise, and, on the other, at introducing reforms designed to accelerate the social, economic and political evolution of Indonesia under govern-

mental aegis. It is true, of course, that the implementation of both these aims had encountered stiff opposition from vested economic interests at home and from equally vested bureaucratic and other interests in the colony. But the men of Leyden (Leyden University was the center of the Ethical movement, and its Indological Faculty was providing Indonesia with increasing numbers of expertly trained and liberal-minded administrators) had fought a valiant, and by no means unsuccessful, battle for the acceptance of their paternalistic liberalism in the Indonesian civil service, in the Netherlands parliament and in public opinion in the metropolitan country, if not in the colony itself. The first world war had, moreover, signally aided the spread of liberal notions concerning colonial administration and the concomitant ascendancy of the Ethical movement was reflected in the persons selected to serve as colonial minister and governor-general, and in the reforms - implemented or envisaged - in the colony during and immediately after the war.

Before long, however, the pendulum started to swing away from welfare policies, innovation, experimentation and liberalization. As a result of perturbing Indonesian developments, the Ethical movement and its propounders increasingly found themselves on the defensive from the early 1920's on. Little by little the pre-Ethical conservatism in colonial policy - even though it came to use an at times misleadingly modern vocabulary - gained the upper hand. When the Communist-led rebellions took the authorities and European investors and residents by surprise, the men of Leyden were accused of having brazenly conjured up the very monster that was threatening Dutch authority in the islands. Dutch liberalism in matters colonial was not, it is true, dead; but it never was able to recoup its strength sufficiently to affect the post-rebellion colonial policies of the Netherlands to a marked degree.

To what extent, we may well ask, were the critics of the Ethical policy correct in blaming its propounders for the turbulence of the 1920's? To the extent only that reforming zeal had indubitably accelerated Indonesian social and political evolution. In fact, the men of Leyden had not only been overly hasty in their grandiose plan for the rapid modernization of Indonesian society at all levels, including the village level; they had also, perhaps, sinned in naively assuming that their social engineering could proceed along evolutionary channels which, in turn, could be controlled and guided from above. They had, in other words, failed to realize that the new era, however skillfully and paternalistically induced, would tend to lead to a chain reaction of change

not all of which would be desirable - from either the Dutch or the Indonesian point of view - or for that matter foreseeable and hence controllable. When, therefore, the twentieth century produced an increasingly revolutionary climate in Indonesia, the Ethici found themselves in the unenviable position of sorcerors' apprentices unable to stem the tide of violence and turbulence engulfing their good intentions and unable, too, to disclaim responsibility for their unwanted offspring.

Yet, while Ethical reformism may well have been the unwitting midwife of revolution in Indonesia, it was by no means the evil deus ex machina (any more than was communism) of its vehement critics. It is only too obvious that these critics chose to ignore that the revolts of the 1920's, as much as the preceding unrest under the aegis of Sarekat Islam during and immediately after World War I, were basically no more than modern versions of traditional unrest, especially peasant unrest, in the islands. Essentially, agrarian unrest was the well-nigh inescapable concomitant of economic and social forces generated by the collision of Western enterprise and colonial rule with the traditionally static societies of the Indonesian peasantry. The resulting social disintegration had gained momentum during the nineteenth century, when modern Dutch political and economic control had started to penetrate the archipelago ever more profoundly.

If the enemies of the Ethical movement thus to all intents and purposes refused to recognize the real causes of the recent revolts - even though these were by no means ignored by the two commissions of inquiry appointed by the colonial government - they seemed to be equally oblivious of the fact that it was impossible effectively to insulate Indonesia from the outside world, and that, to a large extent, the Indonesian revolts - soon to be followed by others elsewhere in Southeast Asia - were but one of the signs of a larger Asian awakening in the twentieth century. If progressive colonization had helped to loosen the traditional ties of Indonesian life, outside events, whether in the Middle East or in other parts of Asia, had generated an atmosphere of restlessness and change, a potentially revolutionary climate, from which Indonesia could not be excluded, irrespective of the specific colonial policies followed by the Netherlands in the islands.

The impact of Western economic and political control had, for generations, been silently undermining the fabric of Indonesian society. In spite of the traditional 'indirect' rule practised by the Netherlands, the authority and prestige of the Javanese nobility, the priyayi, had suffered a steady

decline under Dutch rule. Nominally still vested with their age-old prerogatives, and at some periods (notably during the Culture System, between 1830 and 1870) in fact granted additional arbitrary powers, the priyayi elite had nonetheless in fact been degraded to a hereditary bureaucracy entirely dependent on Dutch support. In subsequent decades, priyayi prestige - and to a lesser extent that of traditional heads in the other islands - was being progressively eroded when private entrepreneurs, in search of land leases and agricultural labor, by-passed the aristocracy and sought direct contact with village heads, and when administrative centralization - vastly accelerated by the welfare policies of the Ethical era - more or less openly and more or less impatiently tended to relegate the indigenous bearers of traditional authority to insignificance.

This gradual breakdown of the Indonesian political hierarchy took place in a peasant society whose isolation was likewise waning under the impact of new economic vistas. Opportunities to produce and sell cash crops, as well as opportunities to seek wage employment in European estates and urban enterprises broke through the walls of the closed Indonesian community of the past. Would-be entrepreneurs and laborers - a nascent middle class and a nascent proletariat - were contracting out of the prescriptive adat of their ancestral environment, seeking new avenues for social promotion and personal expression, opposing the status quo and its representatives and thus constituting a potential clientele for political radicalism. Admittedly these newly emerging social strata formed but a tiny minority within an as yet more static agrarian landscape; yet the commotion they brought with them, the feeling of change generated by, and through, them was bound to spill over into wider layers of the peasantry. Rural unrest was bound to grow whenever the new groups saw their ambitions thwarted or, conversely, when these ambitions had caused disruption within their communities. It was bound to erupt whenever the grievances, of whatever kind, could be sharply focussed under a determined leadership able to direct social malaise against a specific adversary.

It was, as we indicated, the kind of leadership that was the really novel feature of twentieth century unrest in Indonesia. At earlier times, the most frequent and, for that matter, the only logical candidates for such leadership had been the local Islamic teachers and scribes. It was they who in pre-modern times had constituted the only elite stratum independent of the priyayi aristocracy in Indonesian rural society, and, as in other Muslim lands, for the greater part living in a world of semi-hostile seclusion from the powers-

that-were. Traditionally, revolts of the Indonesian peasantry against authority, native or alien, had tended to crystallize around the Muslim ulama, and the age-old suspicion of the nobility towards the scribes was paralleled by Dutch fears of Islamic 'fanaticism' throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

As the reports in this volume indicate, the Muslim ulama still played a far from insignificant role in both the Javanese and Sumatran uprisings of the 1920's. But however vital their role at the village level had remained, they were no longer the prime actors in the revolutionary drama. In the twentieth century they had ceded that role to urbanized, partly Westernized, Indonesians, who were not only newcomers on the social and ideological scene of the colony but who also welded the local or regional discontent of earlier times into nation-wide, or at least supra-regional, mass movements without precedent in Indonesian history.

These young men formed yet another new stratum in Indonesian society, an intelligentsia of a socially very heterogeneous origin. Some of its members were recruited from the nascent urban bourgeoisie or the new landowning class mentioned before; but others were descendants of aristocratic families, and others still came from the peasantry and had risen through education, whether Islamic or Western, to some prominence. Their ideological significance lay in the fact that, irrespective of their place on the political spectrum, they were the first important links between Indonesia and the outer world in modern times. In the early part of the century, the new Indonesian intelligentsia had primarily been influenced either by Dutch liberalism or by Islamic reformism. Before long Continental socialism and, especially after the October Revolution in Russia, Marxism came to claim many adherents in the colony. Nationalism proper, largely born among Indonesians educated at overseas, primarily Dutch, universities was relatively late in arriving on the scene, and belongs organizationally to the post-revolutionary period of the mid-1920's.

During the first two decades of the century ideological cleavages between reformist Muslims, liberals, socialists and communists were less pronounced than the radicalism and anti-colonialism which united them. Indeed, so powerful was the trend towards radical action that it appeared to silence potential internal contradictions not only within the new intelligentsia but also those existing between the urban newcomers and the orthodox ulama in the countryside. This blurring of the lines typified the early leadership of

Sarekat Islam, whose mass support - reaching some two million 'members' in 1918 - stemmed from peasants led, as of old, by local ulama, but which was yet guided by a conglomerate of 'national' leaders comprising modern Muslims (among them the movement's charismatic leader Tjokroaminoto) and atheistic communists. As will be later seen, the marriage of convenience between reformist Islam and communism was officially ended in the early 1920's. But both reports in the present volume show that that divorce was achieved more completely at the summit than in the country at large. In Bantam Residency as well as on Sumatra's West Coast communist leaders had been able to elicit widespread Islamic support, particularly among the less sophisticated orthodox village scribes. In Bantam, most Islamic Sarekat leaders had held aloof from the insurrections, whereas in Sumatra some reformist zealots had worked hand-in-glove with the communists.

In the eyes of Dutch administrators, especially those hostile to the Ethical policy, the appearance of the new intelligentsia - of whatever ideological orientation - and the ease with which it had to all intents and purposes been able to arrogate to itself the leadership of the Indonesian masses caused profound alarm. Even among the Ethici, who were eagerly awaiting a positive Indonesian response to the educational, social and economic stimuli of their programs, the growing turbulence of these early responses created something of a shock. But what to the men of Leyden appeared to be regrettable if in many ways perhaps unavoidable growing pains of a rapidly maturing Indonesian society seemed to the conservatives the beginning of the end of Dutch control in the archipelago. The debate between these two interpretations was gaining momentum during the early post-war years which witnessed the mass agitations, petitions and demonstrations of the Sarekat Islam. The violent upheavals of November, 1926 and January, 1927 to all intents and purposes ended it, with conservatism emerging triumphant.

Fundamentally, the conservative critics - soon reinforced by the persuasive arguments of Dutch legal scholars of the Indonesian adat, or customary law - argued that the rebellions had demonstrated the dangers inherent in a loosening of Dutch administrative control, and in particular in the progressive undermining of traditional native authorities (the priyayi aristocracy on Java and the chiefs in the other islands) that had accompanied the reforms of the recent past. Losing faith in its traditional leadership, so the critics argued, the peasantry had fallen prey to the newcomers, the new intelligentsia, and had been swept along in the tide of revolution against its own will, if it had not - as both reports

attest - frequently been coerced to join by means of terrorism. In this reading of the facts, the gradual undermining and, in the Ethical era, the virtual abandonment of 'indirect rule', the cornerstone of Dutch colonial policy of earlier times, had created a dangerous vacuum between ruler and ruled; it was this vacuum that had served as an opening wedge to the radical 'rabble rousers' of the Sarekat Islam and, quite recently, to the communists. Both commissions hinted that the priyayi corps might have been ignorant of the impending storm or, worse still, that it might have failed to report the signs of the gathering clouds to their Dutch superiors. A two-fold alienation - of the people from their traditional leaders and of the priyayi from the Dutch - thus clearly lay at the bottom of all the colony's recent ills.

This analysis of the causes underlying the insurrections logically led to the reorientation in Dutch colonial policy which we have already referred to in passing. Though outwardly the Netherlands did not abandon the welfare theme of the Ethical era, and though the institutional structure erected in the preceding years was retained, the 'agonizing reappraisal' of the 1920's was to leave the constitutional shell designed in the Ethical era emptied of its most essential content matter. The far-reaching powers vested in the governor general and the wide powers of arrest in the hands of the police with its rapidly expanding Political Information Service, which had already increasingly impeded political activities before the insurrections, were now broadened to include exile, banishment or imprisonment of anyone suspect of radical leanings. These repressive measures were accompanied by the strengthening, often the artificial propping, of the authority of the traditional elite groups in the archipelago. This seeming return to 'indirect rule' in actual fact was to serve as a cloak for more stringent Dutch control behind the façade of the priyayi and their counterparts in the outer islands. The primary aim was, quite clearly, to preserve, or rather restore, the 'closed community' of the Indonesian village as much as possible, and thus to insulate the Indonesian peasantry from the urban agitator.

The new colonial policy was not, however, without its intellectual rationale. Repression and even retrogression of the new trend could partly be rationalized by the notion formulated by Dutch legal scholars who themselves were all but 'reactionaries' - that it was dangerous to force social engineering on the Indonesian community from above as long as that community was not yet ready for it. Rather than attempting rapid Westernization by means of education, welfare

programs of vast dimensions and political experimentation with quasi-democratic and quasi-national institutions, the various Indonesian group communities, all with their own distinctive adat, traditions, mores, and established authorities, should be allowed to grow organically - and under continued overall Dutch tutelage - into more modern and viable polities.

Whatever the attractions and merits of this colonial philosophy, it seemed to dovetail only too conveniently into the conservatism of the Dutch colonial bureaucracy, of parliamentarians in the Netherlands, and of public opinion, especially among the European and Eurasian inhabitants of the colony whose aversion to Ethical reformism had turned into panic during the revolts. In terms of short-term effectiveness, repression and the new 'indirect rule' seemed to yield the desired results. The waves of unrest, fanned for the last time in the abortive insurrections, subsided, and rural apathy - already, as we shall presently see, on the increase before the events of the mid-1920's - became well-nigh universal in the wake of the insulation of the peasantry from urban leaders. Economic disaster, following the world-wide depression of the 1930's, forced the Indonesian peasant to concentrate on problems of sheer survival, and thus quelled the last remnants of latent political radicalism in the countryside.

The most stubborn agitators, communists and others, had either fled the colony or had been exiled to the Boven Digul detention camp in New Guinea. The era of turbulence in colonial Indonesia was a matter of the past. Rust en Orde (Tranquillity and Order), outwardly at least, were to reign supreme until the end of Dutch rule. It was in this era that Indonesian nationalism proper had to make its hesitating debut and to suffer the restrictions of police surveillance and administrative conservatism bequeathed to it by the traumatic events analyzed in the reports in this volume. Little wonder that so many members of the Indonesian intelligentsia, whether 'secular' nationalist or Islamic in their orientation (the communists having been virtually eliminated or reduced to utter impotence), frustrated in their social, political and ideological aspirations, were to welcome the soldiers of Greater Japan with a sigh of premature relief, if not with enthusiasm, in March, 1942.

II

Having briefly sketched the significance of the communist-led revolts of 1926 and 1927 in the context of colonial history, we will now try to assess their intrinsic meaning.

Our subsequent account of communist organizational activities will lend substance to our thesis that these revolts were primarily Indonesian, internal uprisings in which international communism and its spokesmen in the colony played tangential, rather than originating or causal, roles. It is understandable that the commissions appointed by the colonial government to inquire into the causes of the revolts were doing their utmost to stress the evil influences of an alien world conspiracy upon Indonesian events; yet both commissions - and in particular that entrusted with the Sumatran inquiry - presented more than sufficient materials to show that if some communist leaders had succeeded in instigating the outbreaks (and as will be seen they were in a small minority, and acted without approval from Moscow), they had not created, but had found fertile soil for revolutionary action in parts of Indonesia at that time.

The locales of the two major uprisings require a short comment, primarily for the purpose of barring too hasty generalizations about the Indies at that time. The communist leaders, it is true, had aimed at a large-scale rebellion, which was to have engulfed many parts of Java and Sumatra, but it may have been more than accident that open and more or less sustained insurrections were limited to Bantam Residency at the western end of Java and to the Minangkabau region on the West Coast of Sumatra. Neither region, however, was (or for that matter is nowadays) typical of Indonesia, or even of Java. While exhibiting vast differences between them, they yet shared certain characteristics which facilitated the spreading of radical agitation.

Both areas were, by Indonesian standards, fairly wealthy, fairly thinly populated, and, in addition, free from Western estates. The relative wealth stemmed from private entrepreneurship in both regions; in ever increasing numbers, individual Indonesians had in recent decades moved into agricultural production of cash crops which in the post-war years had tended to yield good - though by no means steady - profits. The economic condition of the colony had, moreover, been steadily improving since the short-lived recession of the early post-war years. Taxation, as both reports make clear, had not noticeably burdened either the Minangkabaus or the Bantamese - at any rate, it had not risen *pari passu* with the increasing accumulation of wealth.

Bantam was not only distinguished from the rest of Java by its relative wealth and low population pressure. One of its outstanding characteristics was, indeed, intimately connected with its prosperity, for Bantam was Java's individual-

istic province par excellence. Settled over the centuries by a variety of immigrants from other parts of the island, Bantam had not followed the rest of Java in copying the communal and familial pattern which is the backbone of the Indonesian peasant communities elsewhere. The absence of this traditional bond of integration had, at one and the same time, allowed economic individualism to flourish without inhibitions and made Bantamese society unstable, unruly, and difficult to govern. What the region lacked in social cohesiveness it made up for with a fanatical Islamic orthodoxy. Apparently stubborn individualism had combined with religious fanaticism to create an atmosphere of sullen opposition to colonial rule which could easily be ignited into insurrection by both communist and Muslim leaders.

If Bantam is a good example of anomie rooted in the absence of integrative social forces, the Minangkabau region is an equally good example of a 'closed community' exposed to the disintegrative pressures of the modern world. Where individualism seemed to flow naturally from the heterogeneous character of Bantamese society, it erupted with increasing vehemence in the tradition-bound matriarchal village republics of Sumatra's West Coast. Once modern communications had linked the area to the outer world and thus opened up possibilities of catering for the export market, many young Minangkabaus - among the most energetic and most intelligent of Indonesians, whose share in the republic's elite groups is far out of proportion to their community's size - had thrown themselves with gusto into new economic opportunities. Others had thronged into education, religious as well as Western. Before long, the newly rich (or semi-prosperous) and the newly literate (or semi-literate) found themselves at loggerheads with the established authority of the adat chiefs and established mores, especially the communal adat concepts regarding land tenure and inheritance laws. These new frictions, heightened by the spread of Islamic reformism in recent decades, had been superimposed on the long-standing feud between adat authorities - allied to the Dutch since the Padri War of the nineteenth century - and Muslim ulama. Obviously, there was enough ferment, enough pressure on age-old institutions by malcontents, to render the Minangkabaus susceptible to radical propaganda and insurrectionist activities. Indeed, the Sumatran rebellion, in spite of its territorial limitations, was bloodier and of longer duration that its Javanese predecessor, and the military had to be called in to pacify the area.

What, then, was it that had attracted Bantamese and Minangkabaus to the cause of rebellion in the 1920's? For

all but a very few of those swept into the insurrections it certainly was not communism as such, nor yet a vague longing to live under a Soviet system of alleged plenty and equality (for we must not forget how little had at that time been achieved by the Bolsheviks and how much less most Asians knew of Russia then). Communist party propaganda, as long as it had strictly adhered to the Marxian gospel, had fared very poorly among the bulk of the rebellions' supporters - the second of the concentric circles of the communist party's following, as we shall presently call it. Wherever communist leaders had managed to rally to their cause large-scale support they had done so by playing on the grievances and ill-defined aspirations of Indonesians in many walks of life, though significantly enough rarely among the poorest strata of the population.

The revolts were certainly not bred in misery among poverty-stricken or exploited peasants and laborers living under the yoke of Western imperialism. Tenancy, population pressure and the proletarianization of coolie labor - generally the most common causes of agrarian unrest in Asia - were absent in both areas that had nurtured the insurrections. Rather than despair it was very likely hope that had inspired so many Indonesians to believe in the cause of revolution; or rather, variegated, and contradictory, hopes of different classes and groups, that seemed to converge. These hopes, together with the frustrations accompanying their tardy fulfillment, had led thousands of Indonesians into the communist-led uprisings.

What seemed to be in the air was the feeling of change. To some, mainly the beneficiaries of economic and social improvement, change was perhaps too slow, too obstructed by alien overlords, foreign capitalism and their native allies. To others, change had taken place too fast and too incomprehensibly: they desired a return to allegedly better, more tranquil, more orderly days; and, once again, they could place the blame for all their grievances on the colonial power. The communists, close to all these accumulated ill feelings, were ready to promise everything to everyone: More riches to the rich, no taxes to the poor, more mosques to the pious, more jobs to the semi-literates.

If frustration and anti-Dutch sentiment were, then, the twin pillars of the insurrections, nationalism proper was as yet by and large absent from the events of the mid-1920's. These were proto-nationalist revolts rather than nationalist risings. The slogan reverberating in Bantam and in the Minangkabau was "Kemerdekaan!" (Freedom) rather than the

"Indonesia Merdeka" (Free Indonesia) of later years. The notion of an Indonesian national state was, in other words, weak, or even unborn, among either the leaders or the followers of the revolts. The freedom for which they were fighting was an anarchistic, individualistic freedom - a freedom from colonialism, a freedom to attain personal goals, rather than an ordered freedom in a new national polity.

III

The three accounts of the Indonesian uprisings translated in this collection throw light on the role of the Communist Party in the revolt from differing angles: the Bantam report concentrates on the sources of support for the party among the general population of the area; Schrieke's account of Communism on the West Coast of Sumatra concerns itself chiefly with the activities of local and regional Communist organizations; and the account issued by the Governor General describes the activities of the party's central leadership and its relations abroad. This variety of approach provides us with a broad picture of the rebellion's social and political background, one of the few glimpses we have into the sources of Communist activity in an Asian land. At the same time, the accounts overlap enough so that to some extent we can check their accuracy by comparing them, a precaution which is particularly necessary in the case of the reports concerning the activities of the central party leadership in preparing for the revolution. This is perhaps the weakest point in the accounts, since Dutch knowledge of the party's activities gained largely from police reports and the confessions of minor party officials, was none too accurate or complete; but since at the same time the reports do sketch the history of an area and period of Communist activity about which we know all too little, we should perhaps treat the histories presented here as much with tenderness as with care. (1)

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(1) The account issued by the Governor General is a particular sinner in this matter, partly because its compilers were governed by an evident desire to paint the uprisings as the product of a well-directed plot by Moscow in their selection of materials to report. There does exist a more detailed version of this report which notes more extensively the sources for its information and makes greater mention of variant accounts of the events leading up to the revolts; this edition, however, was allowed only very limited circulation and has not yet been released for general publication.