

IN MEMORIAM: R. M. SARTONO

Daniel S. Lev

When R. M. Sartono died in October, 1968, his public political career had already ended. In the aftermath of the coup of 1965, he was instrumental in bringing General Suharto and the PNI leaders together in an effort to "unify" the party and to give it a more significant role in the new government. This effort ultimately failed and, in a sense, was merely the last of many failures, no fault of his own, in Sartono's long political life.

Before the war, Sartono presided over the disbanding of Sukarno's PNI and then of Partindo. After the transfer of sovereignty in 1949, he regarded as the most important and fruitful years of his public life those which he spent as Speaker of Parliament. But, in 1960, Parliament, too, was suspended. He was deeply embittered by this, and stayed out of the government for a few years, until he was finally prevailed upon to assume the Vice-Chairmanship of the Dewan Pertimbangan Agung (Supreme Advisory Council).

Sartono's experience in the DPA was a great disappointment to him. Why he agreed to accept the position is not completely clear to me, but some of the reasons which have been advanced may help to explain the sort of man he was. It may have been partly, as certain critics have suggested, that the old *prijaji* could not really stay away from important office for long. But I think there was probably more to it than that. For one thing, Soekarno had urged him to do it; and despite their personal and ideological disagreements, Sartono still felt considerable loyalty to the man. PNI leaders also urged him to accept, no doubt in the hope that his old friendship with Soekarno would work wonders for the party cause. Whether or not Sartono believed that the other party leaders were right in this tactic, he remained loyal to the party. He probably also felt that he might be able to do something for Indonesia in the DPA, that his services might be useful and should be rendered. What he may not have fully understood, however, was that parliamentary politics had really gone by the board. His commitment would not let him believe that, and the result was that the operations of the DPA in the last two or three years before the coup confused and irritated him.

His commitment was to the parliamentary system. A cynical view might have it that this was because the old Parliament was "his" institution. In the context of post-war politics in Indonesia, such an interpretation has some appeal. But with Sartono, as with few others, a great deal more was involved. He deeply believed, and often said, that organization was the key to politics and to the state, and that in Indonesia the development

of effective negotiating and bargaining institutions was imperative if the state was to remain whole and relatively peaceful. He took the function of control seriously and, in the early 1960's, often dismissed out of hand, and with some irony, all the glib talk about "social control."

In the same way, Sartono took financial responsibility very seriously, and was frequently infuriated by lax budgetary procedures in the government. Time and again, he proposed, without success, a more up-to-date and effective public financial accountability act, not only in Parliament, but later in the DPA, much to the distress of several Cabinet ministers. When Parliament was suspended in 1960, it was--in the tradition of parliaments--over a budgetary issue, in which Sartono strongly rejected Cabinet interference in the work of a parliamentary committee. When the old Parliament was replaced by the DPR-GR, Sartono refused to have anything to do with it. In fact, he refused every other position offered to him at the time, though at one point, it is said, he led Subandrio to believe that he would accept an ambassadorship somewhere in Africa, on condition that Subandrio himself and Muhammad Yamin, whom Sartono had disliked since Gerindo days, also become ambassadors to small African states. During his weeks of anger after the suspension of Parliament, Sartono once told me that he might accept a position on the Supreme Court, if it could be made into an institution capable of exercising some control. But he did not, apparently, try to get the appointment.

Sartono came from the Mangkunegaran and had the self-confidence of the high-born prijaji, as well as the commitment to rationality of the professional advocate. He was basically an "administrator" type of politician. He consciously waved a few symbols when he thought it necessary, particularly in speeches to party members, but he never seemed very comfortable doing so and was not always very good at it. Almost from the beginning of his involvement with the PNI, he was reluctant to participate in the messier bickerings within the party. He may have felt it beneath him. In later years, *seseputuh* (elder statesman) was the most comfortable position for him, and he worked best from it. During the last decade of his life, he sometimes spoke with the gesticulations of a Semar, though he was too handsome a man to play the part fully.

Sartono's honesty was, I think, unquestionable, and this too may have been, at least in part, due to his sense of class and his sense of political responsibility. Corruption was simply too degrading, though he understood it in others. He seldom spoke abstractly about it. Sartono rather prided himself on paying all his taxes regularly, and the house in which he lived was comfortable and in good taste, but not particularly well-furnished.

Sartono was respected by most groups within his party and within the government, but his advice was not always heeded. He

preferred to leave the wielding of power within the party to others, and his influence was thereby severely limited. For years, he insisted that the PNI must rejuvenate itself by bringing in younger people and pushing them quickly to the top, but, of course, the counter-pressures were much too strong. He knew this, and it angered him, in the same way that he knew that regional PNI leaders were basically opposed to land-reform, and was angered by that.

Sartono's "radicalism" had integrity, though he usually expressed it softly, except to some of the lower ranking party members. Even then he refused to go to rhetorical extremes. He was capable of deep anger against the international and domestic economic inequities that he believed to be fundamental to Indonesia's condition. He was also, as diplomats often discovered, quick to defend Indonesia's rights and dignity. Interestingly enough, Claro Recto was among the few foreign politicians of whom I heard Sartono speak highly.

Sartono may have been a man for other, less wild, times, but he never lost his self-respect, I think, nor his dignity.