



Sutan Sjahrir

## SOUVENIRS OF SJHRIR

Sol Tas  
Translated by Ruth McVey

. . . Je ne me suis pas reporté aux documents originaux. Si j'avais seulement entr'ouvert la bibliothèque Dreyfusarde, ma confession aurait pris l'air ou la prétention d'une histoire. . . . Elle aurait perdu l'entière spontanéité qui fait probablement son mérite.

Léon Blum, préface de "Souvenirs sur l'affaire"

It must have been 1929. I was a student and chairman of the *Amsterdamsche Sociaal Democratische Studenten Club*, when the post brought me a letter from a young Indonesian who had just arrived in Amsterdam and wanted information about socialism and the socialist movement.<sup>1</sup> Right away I was interested. Both in the Socialist party--the SDAP--and in the Social Democratic Student Club connected with it, the colonial question was at that moment the center of attention. We had, however, had little contact with the Indonesians then living in the Netherlands, who in general kept carefully away from Dutch political groups. I thought of the propaganda advantage that we could gain from contact with a real Indonesian--especially if he would speak on behalf of our movement. I therefore jumped on my bike and looked him up.

He was staying in South Amsterdam, in what was then a prosperous middle-class neighborhood, where, so he told me, his sister had rented a flat. As with so many Indonesian families transplanted to Europe, Sjahrir's sister's household had trouble in the beginning trying to fill the new and unaccustomed dwelling-space in a rational manner. That was perhaps the reason why my visit occasioned a small panic, which manifested itself in

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1. Sjahrir arrived in the Netherlands in 1929, enrolling first at the University of Amsterdam and later becoming a law student at Leiden. The Amsterdam Social Democratic Student Club united local student sympathizers of the Netherlands Social Democratic Worker's Party (SDAP). There was considerable tension between the party's cautious leadership and the more radical elements within it, resulting in the periodic formation of leftist caucuses and breakaway groups. The author belonged at the time to this more radical element, as did many of the student adherents of the SDAP. (Tr.)

much giggling and slamming of doors. Evidently I was the first contact between their house and the cold outside world. In the end, I was directed to a room which Sjahrir identified as his own but which seemed to me intended for multiple use. He made the statement, to be sure, with a smile that had more self-deprecation than embarrassment in it. It was that ability to laugh at himself, the debunking of his own person, which immediately made me feel close to him.

I saw a young man, small, slender, and well proportioned. But what struck me most was his face: its features were regular and, above all, full of character. It was a beautiful face, one which buoyed and touched me at the same time. He laughed a good deal, but it was not the laugh of so many Indonesians, an expression of shyness, a barrier against the need to reply. Sjahrir was open, direct; and his idealism was so enthusiastic and honest that it was impossible not to like him at first sight.

Half sitting, half lying on the sofa-bed, he began a conversation in which he was the one to ask questions and I the one to explicate. In my discourse, I stressed the line which I myself preferred--that of the left wing, which supported the Indonesian nationalists on the colonial question--while I hinted over and again that the best way of learning about socialism was to become a member of our student club.

After that visit, I came there often, and I soon understood why it was his sister who had rented the flat. I was confronted in real life with what I had till then only known from books: the tradition of the Minangkabau matriarchate, which places property rights in the hands of the female line. Sjahrir's sister, as small and beautiful as he--but in whose face her character had drawn a harsher line--ruled not only over her husband, a gifted physician, but over everyone in the extended family who came within her reach. And, at times, I was to see a frown crease Sjahrir's forehead, whenever that sisterly regime became too much for him.

I believe that Sjahrir did in fact become a member of our club but then only for a very short time. That is unimportant, anyway. We were already friends from that very first morning. Later Sjahrir told me that I had won him not through my explication (of which I had been not a little bit proud), not through the fire with which I--from conviction and the desire to win a convert--had embraced the nationalist cause, but through the fact that immediately on receiving his letter I had leaped on my bike to snare him. It had impressed him greatly with the activism of the student club. That impression was exaggerated, but then what other use has propaganda?

Personal contact between Netherlanders and Indonesians in Europe was not difficult, especially if politics was avoided. The racism that was characteristic of colonial relations in the

Netherlands Indies and which was an unavoidable consequence of the power relationship there--for a tiny minority had to keep an overwhelming majority under its thumb--found little echo in the Netherlands itself. The Indonesians with whom the Dutch came in contact in Holland did not belong to an economically backward or culturally disadvantaged part of society; on the contrary, they were sons of well-off bourgeoisie or noble officials. They thus possessed a level of refinement that was considerably higher than that of the masses and for that matter than a good part of the Dutch middle class. Thus the almost unavoidable condescension with which we tend to approach members of a disinherited group, however good our intentions, had no chance to develop. The Indonesians who came to the Netherlands as students were treated as complete equals. While in the Netherlands Indies, they were often subjected to petty persecutions by the colonial authorities, but in Holland they could defend themselves with the same weapons as their opponents. They took full advantage of Dutch freedoms and democratic rights, and in the Netherlands they could publish pamphlets and articles that would undoubtedly have landed them in a colonial prison. Hatta, an Indonesian student who came to Holland before Sjahrir, won international renown for being tried by the Dutch government for his publications--but the government lost the case.<sup>2</sup>

The West appeared to the Indonesian students in the Netherlands in an entirely different light, and the contrast with the brutish racism of the colony inevitably made a deep impression on those young and emotionally still very malleable people. This was not only true for Sjahrir, it was especially important for the formation of his particular character. In the same way, much is explained by the fact that until the war Sukarno had never been outside the Netherlands Indies, and thus missed his youth.

It is not true that Sjahrir was conquered by the West. It was different for him: he flowered in the climate of the West; his temperament came to its natural maturation there. I never found in him anything which resembled the stereotype of the "Oriental mentality." He was direct, hated circumlocution, and stood uninhibitedly open to the ideas of others. He wanted to

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2. Mohammad Hatta, the later Indonesian vice president, came to the Netherlands in 1922. He initially studied at the University of Leiden, but later switched to the commercial school at Rotterdam. In 1925 he became treasurer of the Perhimpunan Indonesia (see note 7 below), and in 1926 he became its chairman. Because of the PI's leftist activity and international connections, the government raided the rooms of its leaders in June 1927; in September, a number of its members, including Hatta, were arrested. He was released for lack of evidence of revolutionary conspiracy in March 1928. (Tr.)

learn as much as possible, to get to know as much as possible of science and of life, and he threw himself with equal enthusiasm into study and into discussions and ramblings through Amsterdam. His systematic course work soon petered out, and was replaced by a less orderly if ubiquitous search for knowledge concerning all the problems that then engaged us. And what did not engage us?

Above all, we debated with each other about the colonial question. The problem was real, it was dramatic, it fired our romantic senses and our love of a fight. We--that is to say the students of the left wing, who had gained a certain dominance in Amsterdam thanks to the efforts of their chairman. We were naturally supported by those Indonesians whom we could rope into our discussions, for we were both agreed that the Netherlands Indies had to be free, as soon as possible, right away. I remember the chants we used to raise at party meetings: Indonesia free from Holland *Now!*--sometimes more to bait the older leaders of the SDAP than to please Sjahrir and his friends.<sup>3</sup>

What should come after liberation we could only vaguely imagine, for the power exercised by the colonial regime made such a formidable impression on us that the struggle against it absorbed all our thoughts. But the question of Indonesia's future social arrangements was raised by others in the movement, and first of all by the colonial experts of the right wing of the Social Democratic party. These experts, who were honest democrats but also former Indies colonial officials, opposed all revolutions, and certainly one in the Netherlands Indies, where they themselves had so peacefully worked. But they disguised this rejection by accusing the nationalist leaders of wanting to replace Dutch imperialism by Indonesian capitalism. As usually is the case when people are quarreling over something in the distant future, the formulation of the problem by both sides turned out, in the light of history, to have been false. The question was not whether Indonesia, once it became independent, would become socialist or capitalist, but whether or not it would become a chaos. Naturally, though, we could not know that in 1930.

The standard of living of the Indonesian masses was then so low that the nationalists naturally came to justify their desire for independence--which was an expression of their growing self-confidence--by pointing to colonial exploitation, thus making a social grievance out of a spiritual desire. The dramatic and

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3. The official slogan of the SDAP--the Indies free from Holland --did not include the "now" that the radicals and the Indonesians considered essential, for the party leadership argued at the time that Indonesian society would be prepared for independence only after a relatively lengthy period of tutelage. (Tr.)

tragic situation of the colonized country drove the young nationalists to the left wing, the cautious attitude of the right wing socialists only increasing their impatience. In the joint discussions which we held as Dutch and Indonesian students, the mood was leftist; for the group to which I had belonged had chosen for Marxism and against the reformists. Against the vague, sentimental, ethical views which were then current in Dutch social democracy in the guise of "religious socialism," we placed the clear, courageous, virile--and naturally scientific!--teaching of historical, dialectical materialism. Viewed from the present, it was a bit of Friedrich Engels dressed up as Cyrano de Bergerac--what a fine time we had!

There was a great deal of talk among us about socialism, but very few took the trouble really to study it. Sjahrir belonged to the few. He set out to study the theory of socialism--among others the books of Hilferding and Rosa Luxemburg on imperialism--and submerged himself in the polemics which then absorbed the socialist movement and in which Karl Kautsky, Otto Bauer, and later Hendrik de Man were prominent. Sjahrir was never able completely to free himself later from that rationalist, more or less Marxist camp, in spite of his broad field of interest--or perhaps just because of it. For politics and thus political science was never his great love, and, therefore, he never found the energy to subject his ideas in this field to a deepgoing revision; but more about that later.

In the youthful enthusiasm of our student days we wanted to embrace all humanity, above all the common people, or at least the workers. Sjahrir therefore took a spiritual plunge into the proletariat. He cherished, like so many intellectuals, the idea that the true nature of life and socialism could only be found in the working class and that understanding of the workers and solidarity with them could only be gained by sharing their life. I had no need of such an experiment myself: I came from the family of a worker who, by enormous effort, had struggled upwards to the level of a petty bourgeois, at the same time becoming leader of a trade union. Sjahrir had no feeling for my viewpoint, however. His relationship to socialism was still in the phase of first love, and any hesitation at sharing his pure pilgrimage appeared to him a betrayal of his beloved. It was not the last time that he defined a difference of opinion as an ideological sin, and I believe that it came from the fact that he interpreted contrary behavior as disobedience. That is often the case with people of strong character; and Sjahrir's character was strong. This gave him an early dominance over his Indonesian fellow-students, who anyway took life a great deal more easily than he. That domination strengthened Sjahrir's paternalistic inclinations, which gave me, too, trouble at times.

I lost track of Sjahrir for some time. Later I gathered from his stories that he, in search of radical comradeship, had wandered further and further left, coming to rest at last with

a handful of anarchists who had managed to keep themselves free of all capitalist taint by avoiding any profitable work, and who survived by sharing everything with each other except for toothbrushes (insofar as there were any) but including contraceptives. He re-emerged from this rather quickly and without damage, and afterwards his interest in socialism took more practical forms.

In order to acquaint himself with the life of the labor movement, he went to work for the secretariat of the International Transport Workers' Federation, which then played an important international role.<sup>4</sup> It was under the leadership of a left socialist, Edo Fimmen, a Danton-figure with a Beethovesque visage and hairstyle but with the gentle temper of a Salvation Army recruit. (Fimmen had in fact belonged to the Salvation Army in his youth, and he remained a part of it at heart his whole life long.) Here Sjahrir found congenial surroundings. I don't know what he learned there; an international secretariat is no real labor union and has neither the daily routine nor the problems of one. The Federation held to a radical "Marxist" course at that time, and Fimmen could only strengthen him in his proletarianist notions. But I should add that Fimmen's right-hand man, Jaap Oldenbroek--who was later to become the secretary of the International Congress of Free Trade Unions--already demonstrated a strong dose of realism at that time, which contrasted strongly with Fimmen's romanticism. In any case, in that period Sjahrir got to know the socialist movement of Europe not only as a struggle movement but also as an organizational system geared to bring about practical results. This sort of constructive experience was lacking in nearly all the Indonesian students, who had at best read about organizations. None had lived in one like Sjahrir, even if only for a short time, so that he knew what they were about.

Meanwhile, an atmosphere of crisis developed in the Netherlands itself. The world economic crisis of 1929 had ripped the self-satisfied calm of Holland to tatters, and a giant army of the unemployed broke the power of the labor movement. The prices of the Netherlands Indies' tropical exports plunged on the world market, disrupting colonial society and government finance. An ultra-reactionary governor general came to office in the Indies, and the pressure of the authorities on the national movement became heavier than ever before.<sup>5</sup> All relation-

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4. The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) maintained a position somewhere between the reformist socialist parties and the Communists, and during the 1920's it formed one of the few points where international cooperation between the two movements was sometimes possible. (Tr.)

5. The moderate Governor General de Graeff was replaced by the conservative De Jonge in 1931. (Tr.)

ships became more charged. The nationalist students in Holland, who had their own organization, the *Perhimpunan Indonesia*, withdrew more and more into themselves.<sup>6</sup> Through Sjahrir, I had gotten to know one of the PI leaders, Hatta, surely the hardest working of all the Indonesian students, who had gained fame as a result of his trial by the Dutch government and who had also acquired respect in the Netherlands by his great--sometimes too great--seriousness. My friendship with Sjahrir and Hatta meant that I did not lose contact with the Indonesians, but by now there were two distinct worlds--the Dutch socialist movement with its left wing, and the Leiden milieu of the PI. There were other ties between the two worlds besides my acquaintance: Fimmen and Hatta, for example, knew each other because both had taken part in a congress of the League Against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression together with many other nationalist leaders who were later to make a name for themselves, such as Nehru from India and Senghor of Senegal.<sup>7</sup>

The Communists began to build cells in the League, and they also did so in the *Perhimpunan Indonesia*. The construction of cells took place in the usual sneaky manner and was thus most successful. A radical wind blew through Leiden, sweeping with it especially those who knew socialism only from coffeehouse talk. Eventually, the Communists managed to get the upper hand in the *Perhimpunan Indonesia*, their first deed then being to throw out everybody who disputed their influence.<sup>8</sup> This brings

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6. The organization was founded as the *Indische Vereeniging* in 1908; it committed itself to nationalism and changed its name to *Perhimpunan Indonesia* (Indonesian Association) in 1923. By 1925-26 it had entered into relations with the Dutch and Indonesian Communists and with the Comintern, though it remained radical nationalist rather than Communist in character. Officially, it was open to all Indonesians resident in the Netherlands, but in practice it was devoted to the student population. (Tr.)
  7. The League Against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression (LIGA) was founded in 1927, largely as a result of the efforts of the German Communist Willy Münzenberg. Its first congress was held that year in Brussels; Hatta led the *Perhimpunan Indonesia* delegation and was made a member of the congress presidium. In 1929 he took the *Perhimpunan Indonesia* out of the LIGA, arguing that it had become too exclusively Communist. (Tr.)
  8. Hatta was replaced as PI chairman in 1929; his immediate successors were figureheads, real power lying with the executive member Rustam Effendi, who was secretly (later publicly) a member of the Communist Party of Holland. Contact between the SDAP and the PI became minimal at this time, among other reasons because the SDAP decided not to send representatives



me to the memory which is etched most clearly in my mind.

One day in 1931, I read in the paper that the Perhimpunan Indonesia had expelled two members, Hatta and Sjahrir.<sup>9</sup> It was a report of only a few printed lines, but the importance of it struck me at once. The PI was significant not because of its size but because it could express things that were suppressed in the Indies and so had become the unofficial spokesman for the Indonesian nationalist movement. Hatta, who had become the most authoritative--or rather the only authoritative--figure among the students in the Netherlands, had as a result acquired stature as an Indonesian national leader. The expulsion was therefore a direct attack on his political line (Sjahrir was still rather unknown at the time).

I took the first train for Leiden in search of my friends. In a large room at the residence of a wealthy Indonesian, Hatta was sitting on a chair, his hands on his knees, staring out in front of him. Behind stood a couple of Indonesian students, nervously chatting. Hatta told me the tale of the cell formation--which I knew about already--and the final intrigue. It was clear that he was deeply concerned over the damage which might be done his reputation. For in Indonesia no one, naturally, knew precisely what the Perhimpunan Indonesia had become, still less what Communist cell construction was. His story was interrupted by a burst of laughter. It was Sjahrir, who sat on the piano, his legs dangling. His laugh had a sarcastic tone. Now Sjahrir was younger than Hatta and that counts in a student milieu and doubly in an Indonesian one. But he could not conceal his annoyance at all that despair. "What difference does it make?" he broke out. "Last week Hatta and I resigned from the PI; we didn't want to have anything more to do with a Communist organization. You can't kick someone out who's already left." And he added, "We are not going to protest the decision of the PI executive. We'll let it be known we'll have nothing to do with the PI." His outburst stopped Hatta's keening.

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to PI meetings if Communist deputies were also to be allowed to speak there. Left SDAP members attempted to maintain informal contact with non-Communist PI members, but this soon became impossible owing to pressure by the dominant factions in the SDAP and PI leaderships.

9. Hatta was expelled from the Perhimpunan Indonesia on November 27, 1931. In May he had announced that he would no longer be politically active; however, he subsequently led the attack on the decision to dissolve the PNI (see note 11 below), and the Perhimpunan Indonesia leaders charged him with trying to split the revolutionary movement. At the time of the expulsion, Sjahrir was secretary and vice chairman of the Perhimpunan Indonesia. (Tr.)

That scene has always stayed with me. Sjahrir was the only one of that company who had not flown into a panic. He was not intimidated for one minute by official or quasi-official declarations, by communiques or other formulae, not afraid for one second of the maneuvers directed against him, and still less concerned for his reputation. That mixture of self-confidence and realism, that courage based on the absence of any ambition or vanity, marked the man. The occasion may seem small (though it was not for those young students, whose futures were involved in the affair), but that is not important: whoever has once stood his ground in a crisis will do so in the future. And the other way round. What a person can learn from his life experience is limited: you can't learn to grow beyond your natural limits, and in a crisis those limits appear.

Sjahrir and Hatta, who had been united in the struggle against the Communists, thereafter went their way together. They made a curious pair, very unlike in character, and they could not avoid irritating each other from time to time. Sjahrir would be annoyed by Hatta's bourgeois conventionality, but Hatta was a much more conscientious and systematic worker, and Sjahrir's swift dippings into science must have bothered him in turn. They had a few basic qualities in common, however. Both were serious. Sjahrir had nobility of character, and Hatta possessed a deeply-rooted common sense; those two qualities have more in common than might be thought at first. They therefore came to each other again and again, in spite of their separation by the war--the period which Hatta spent at the side of Sukarno--and in spite of the Islam and the narrower nationalism of Hatta.

Their first difference with Sukarno dated from 1931 as well. The most accomplished agitator in the Netherlands Indies had already been arrested and released from prison.<sup>10</sup> He continued unswervingly in his activity, although the reaction of the Indies government became increasingly harsh. For the ultra-leftist admirers of Sukarno, that was a reason to cheer him on all the more. But Hatta and Sjahrir were not at all impressed, and whenever they discussed the events in Indonesia, their comments grew more and more irritated. I myself, as spokesman of the left wing of the student union, was deeply absorbed in radical argumentations, and it was an enlightening experience for me to see how those two young men discerned the danger of demagoguery and took a position against it in defiance of the atmosphere prevailing about them. They maintained that Sukarno's irresponsible agitation took no account whatsoever of real

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10. Sukarno led the Partai Nasional Indonesia, or "Old PNI," which had been founded in June 1927. At the end of 1929, he was arrested, together with other party leaders, on charges of revolutionary activity. He was released from prison at the end of 1931. (Tr.)

power relations. He created expectations in his audience which he could by no means fulfill and he gave the Netherlands Indies authorities an opportunity to intervene against the nationalists, which they did with an increasingly hard hand. Nothing positive, nothing permanent could be achieved in this way and the number of victims became ever greater. When Sukarno was arrested, his fate had everyone's attention; but what was done to his followers was much worse, and the press scarcely had a thought for them. In this manner, the cadre of the nationalist movement--which needed all it had--was destroyed. The loss was not immediately noticeable, since Sukarno was always able to shout up great crowds with his hypnotic oratory, but the movement which he led became more and more a heap of loose sand.

This disturbed Sjahrir and Hatta all the more because they were convinced that cadre forming had become *the* great problem of the nationalist movement (a conviction which was to be confirmed tragically after the revolution). "If Sukarno goes on this way," Sjahrir once said to me, "there soon won't be any possibility left for cadre formation. Everyone will then be in a mess." "Besides," Hatta added, "with his activity he is creating a climate of oppression in which no one will be able to carry on any work." So they wrote letters to the Indies in which they pressed for moderation and urged Sukarno and his allies to give more thought--and certainly to provide more opportunity--for cadre forming, for political and organizational education. But that was naturally all in vain, for Sukarno had no personal interest whatever in such advice--what he needed was excitement and applause.

To the public, Sukarno was the most active nationalist figure and also the most well-known. To break with him was thus no small decision; but cooperation seemed impossible to the two students, and they decided to go their own way. That way was education, cadre forming. If it was necessary to establish a new party for this purpose, they would do that, but it was only in order to create a vehicle for cadre formation.<sup>11</sup> Hatta and

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11. Following the arrest of Sukarno, Sartono took over the chairmanship of the PNI. He and his colleagues decided that although the party was still not officially proscribed, its opportunity for activity had become so restricted that it would be wiser to reconstitute it in a less provocative if still nationalist form. They therefore dissolved the PNI in April 1931 and formed the Partai Indonesia (Partindo). Hatta attacked this move sharply in articles sent to the press in Indonesia, arguing both that the PNI should not have been given up so readily and that the new party was based on wrong principles. Those PNI members in Indonesia who did not feel at home in the Partindo initially formed "free groups" (Golongan Merdeka), which were brought together in the Pendidikan Nasional Indonesia ("New PNI"), formed in

Sjahrir were convinced that it would be years before independence could be realized, and they knew that the national movement was not prepared for it intellectually, technically, or organizationally. They thus wanted to use the long period which they saw lying before them for the formation of a political elite. Once Sjahrir brought up the suggestion that I should accompany them to the Indies, in order to take part in the formation of a cadre school. Hatta would teach economics there; Sjahrir and I would somehow divide sociology, politics and organization between us. Nothing much came of the proposal, if only because it was clear that the Indies government would never let me into the colony.

And so Hatta and Sjahrir went back to the Indies; Sjahrir first, Hatta after him.<sup>12</sup> Sjahrir's decision to go back was made rather unexpectedly and in haste. He never was an exact organizer, and so there vanished, together with the books he sent home, a small part of my library, including unfortunately a work that I had borrowed from the University, Rosa Luxemburg's *Akkumulation des Kapitals*. The whole collection was confiscated by the Indies government on arrival and never reappeared. This meant that I, pursued by the administration of the University library, had to embark on an exhausting chase through the second-hand book market in order to acquire a copy of the unfindable work. It was my atonement for the sins of my government.

Both Sjahrir and Hatta were worried about returning, and as far as Sjahrir was concerned, he had few illusions about the fate that awaited him there. His departure from us had nothing of the joyful return to the homeland, but more of a mission to a danger zone. And that indeed it turned out to be. However carefully Hatta and Sjahrir acted, no constructive work was possible in the atmosphere of oppression which they found in the Indies, which was worsened by Sukarno's powerless but fanatical bellowing. The party which Hatta and Sjahrir set up was banned, like Sukarno's, but whereas Sukarno was sent to a normal prison, Hatta and Sjahrir landed in Digul, the concentration camp in

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December 1931 in Jogjakarta. As its name indicates, the new association stressed study, and it aimed at creating a trained political cadre rather than acquiring mass membership. Sukarno, on his release from prison at the end of 1931, attempted to mediate between the Partindo and New PNI in order to reunite the revolutionary movement, but opposition was too great on both sides, and in August 1932 he acknowledged his failure and chose for the Partindo. (Tr.)

12. Sjahrir returned to Indonesia in February 1932 and assumed leadership of the New PNI. Hatta arrived in August 1932 and immediately announced his decision to join that party. He thereupon replaced Sjahrir as its chairman. (Tr.)

New Guinea, where their health quickly declined as the government intended.<sup>13</sup>

After some time, however, especially when it became known that Sjahrir was threatened with tuberculosis, the two--thanks to our agitation in Holland, we liked to think--were removed from Digul, and Sjahrir was sent to Banda.<sup>14</sup> I again began to receive letters from him, but after a time the correspondence faded out. There were personal reasons for this, but others as well, as I shall now describe.

In 1935 I had established a journal, *De Nieuwe Kern* (*The New Elite*) together with my friend Jacques de Kadt (or rather he with me, for he had an established name and I had none), in which we sought a revision of socialist ideas.<sup>15</sup> In 1933 De Kadt and I had, together with the rest of the left wing, left the SDAP and established the Independent Socialist Party (OSP), of which De Kadt became the first and I the second secretary.<sup>16</sup> But in two years, we had both abandoned the new party, for it had become apparent to us that a small, extremist splinter party had no justification whatsoever in Netherlands politics and could only lead to adventures disguised by Marxist verbiage. We decided not only to break with the party but to go further and subject Marxism, which had turned out to be so misleading a guide, to a critical investigation. In *De Nieuwe Kern* the current ideas about Marxism were therefore attacked. For polemics

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13. Sukarno was arrested in August 1933; he was interned first in Flores and later at Bengkulu. Sjahrir and Hatta were arrested in 1934. (Tr.)
  14. Sjahrir was transferred to Banda in 1936; he was released in 1942 as a result of the Japanese invasion. (Tr.)
  15. De Kadt developed into a leading essayist; he published among other things Van Tsarisme tot Stalinisme (From Tsarism to Stalinism), Het Fascisme en de Nieuwe Vrijheid (Fascism and the New Freedom), and many collections of articles on political, literary, and philosophical subjects. During the war he was in Indonesia; after his return to the Netherlands he published De Indonesische Tragedie (The Indonesian Tragedy). (Author's note.)
  16. The Onafhankelijk Socialistische Partij was formed following a split in the SDAP caused by the resignation of left-wing leaders at the party congress of 1932. The rumor that Hatta intended to stand for the Dutch parliament as a candidate of the OSP was the cause of a major controversy in the Indonesian nationalist movement in 1933-34. The party did not do well electorally and soon dissolved, its more radical members joining the syndicalist Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP). (Tr.)

are the weapon of scientific progress, and I cannot see how one can criticize so aggressive a doctrine as Marxism without oneself taking up strong positions.

But Sjahrir, isolated in Banda, had remained with the ideas of his student years. In his ears there still rang the polemics that we as young Marxists had carried on with the reformists, who had attempted in their own way to confuse the anti-colonial struggle. For him, to leave Marxism meant to leave the radical struggle, or at least that was more or less the spirit in which he wrote me. It was another betrayal of his beloved. I answered him that you can very well be anti-bourgeois and anti-Socialist (nowadays I could write nonconformist), without necessarily clinging to Marxist dogma; and that on the contrary a nonconformism which did not rely on agitation, as did Marxist propaganda, was more solid and thus more effective. But I received only an irritable reply to this. I was evidently not capable of countering the influence on him of others who clung firmly to the conventional radical theories.

It became worse when we published an article by Sjahrir (under a pseudonym) in our journal, in which he defended the dialectic. I don't remember how we got hold of the piece. We placed it because we needed a polemic on the dialectic, and it was followed up by two articles by de Kadt under the expressive title "The Mouldering Whatnot" (*De vermolmdde étagère*), which did not leave much of Sjahrir's argument standing. Sjahrir was furious. He had not been very happy with his creation, and he was shocked when he saw it printed, especially when he learned of the heavy fire which de Kadt had directed against it. He turned his anger over the matter against me. I had not thought for a moment that he had not intended the article for publication, but his unhappiness was understandable.

Sjahrir was not a man of science; he had neither systematic nor original elements in his generalizing ability, which are what characterizes the scientific man. He was dependent on others for his scientific ideas and thought processes, though he had great interest in and respect for science, and he gave it an important place in his own intellectual life. But one cannot ask more of a politician; this is already much more than the average one can manage. The special thing about Sjahrir was his realism and his courage, and the fact that he tried his best to unite these elements with his cultural background. He had leadership qualities and he was a good teacher, but he was not at home in a theoretical journal. That is, of course, no intellectual value judgment. The significance of Sjahrir's work lay in the first place in his political decisions and secondly in his political articles. In this he was a clarifier, an educator, and a mature intellectual of much more than average significance. But it was years before he realized that we had not been completely in the wrong in 1936.

From the few letters which I received I got the impression that he was not unhappy in Banda. He could devote himself there to two passions in which he had only begun to indulge in the last years of our acquaintance--playing with children and teaching. "I really find teaching the greatest work there is," he once remarked to me, and his comment impressed me, for helping young people to shape themselves is one of the noblest tasks of society. What struck me still more, however, was the way in which Sjahrir could play with children. It could not be called relaxation; it was a passion, an act of release. It was as if he, playing with children, vanished into a world without tensions, quarrels, and problems.

This revealed to me a new side of Sjahrir, and the few reports that I got from Banda lent strength to that impression. At the bottom of his heart, Sjahrir did not love politics. He engaged in it from a feeling of duty but not from interest. He was not fascinated by that remarkable, turbulent, passionate phenomenon--sometimes noble, often dirty, but utterly human--which we call politics. He had no feeling of vocation. In his youth that was not noticeable; politics and science were discovered by him simultaneously and for a long time went together, and everything was done with the same boyish vitality which was its own reward. But later, when the stakes, the seriousness, and thus the worries began to increase, when his vitality had been sapped by introspection, his internal resistance increased and with it his nostalgia for a child's world. It is dangerous to engage in politics solely from a feeling of duty: no trade can be carried on well without enthusiasm, and the "trade" of politics did not have Sjahrir's.

During the war, de Kadt was in Indonesia and was put into a concentration camp by the Japanese. Shortly after the Japanese surrender, Sjahrir looked him up in the camp, after which a relationship was established between the two which had no mean influence on Sjahrir. When they first met, everything in the country had become unstuck, but Sjahrir had acquired such a dislike of the Indonesian nationalists who had worked with the Japanese that he had no desire to cooperate with them.<sup>17</sup> As de Kadt pointed out, it was those nationalists who held the leadership of the revolution, and Sjahrir's refusal would mean that he would have no part in it. Whether Sjahrir's revulsion was a momentary mood is something I cannot judge, but it was not the reaction of a born politician.

In the fall of 1945, fate suddenly placed me in contact with Indonesia again. I had become foreign affairs writer for

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17. During World War II, Sjahrir refused to cooperate with the Japanese occupation forces and spent the time in retirement, cultivating a group of young followers in Djakarta who were to become active in the Indonesian revolution. (Tr.)

a daily that, like all Dutch newspapers, had been reconstituted after liberation. The five years of German occupation had caused a sharp break in Dutch society: a generation of politicians, writers and journalists was pushed aside and a new one took its place. The new generation had little experience, and most of its writers had paid no attention to politics before the war. In that first period after liberation, when everyone was trying with feverish haste to provide himself with a political character, we were almost completely isolated from news about Asia and especially about Indonesia. The Dutch officials based in Australia who were making a desperate and useless attempt to impose the past on Indonesia, saw not the slightest need to keep the Dutch people informed.<sup>18</sup> The Indies were a vacuum that we filled with concern. And that almost complete ignorance caused by the circumstances of the time explains how it was possible that the Dutch people embarked with almost no protest on a trail that was to lead them into tragic conflict with the young Indonesian revolution.

The number of people in the communications media at that time who had ever heard of Sukarno could be counted on one hand; the name Sjahrir said nothing to anybody. In that situation I was called one day by my chief editor. A telegram had come-- Reuters or AP--which reported a conversation between Lt. Gen. Sir Philip Christison, Allied Commander-in-Chief for the Netherlands Indies, and Sukarno.<sup>19</sup> The report, which had already been tossed into the wastebasket by the editors but which had been fished out again by a man with a sense of news, struck me like a thunderbolt. It was the first real news of what was going on in the Indies. If a man of Christison's position found it worthwhile to talk with Sukarno, the man who had been thrown into prison by the Dutch, then we could reckon that the Dutch were through in Indonesia. The war of independence was under way. And when I was asked who would lead that revolution, I said Sjahrir, a name that meant nothing to the others there.

My prediction had nothing magical about it. I was certain that the leadership of the revolution had to come from the group of Indonesians whom I had known as a student. I had seen them at work. I knew that there was one who could not be panicked by any crisis and very few people have that gift. When the

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18. The Netherlands Indies government had been evacuated to Australia following the Japanese invasion of 1942; it continued to function there in exile until the return of Dutch forces in late 1945. (Tr.)

19. This would seem to be the meeting of October 7, 1945, when Sukarno presented General Christison with a memorandum on the Indonesian situation. Christison was from the British army, the initial occupation of Indonesia having been allotted to British forces. (Tr.)



revolution in Indonesia broke out, the same qualities were demanded of the mature Sjahrir that he had shown himself to possess fifteen years before. He was not intimidated by the action of the established governments with which he suddenly had to deal; he did not let himself be captured by the formalistic bickering of the Dutch politicians; he didn't panic even when his life was in danger. He had nothing to lose because he sought to win nothing for himself.<sup>20</sup>

The reports of the revolution which we received in Holland from foreign and Dutch journalists were so fragmentary and one-sided, and indeed so often stupid and sensationalist, that it was difficult to form a reasonable idea of what was going on. We got our best information from friends returning from Indonesia. In this way I got a picture of the struggle which Sjahrir was carrying on, and of his courageous and clear insight into the confused circumstances there. As was to be expected, he towered above his surroundings. What made Sjahrir into a leader was not only his insight, his unselfishness and his courage. It was also the strength of his personality--and such strength requires a certain degree of intolerance or insensitivity. Good qualities (as well as bad) are only effective in politics when they are displayed with force, when their effect is imposed on others. Sjahrir had the willpower to impose himself, so long as he was interested; and in that tumultuous historical moment which is called the Indonesian revolution, he *was* interested.

Perhaps the high point of his career was the publication of his pamphlet *Our Struggle*.<sup>21</sup> Whoever reads that pamphlet today can scarcely comprehend what it demanded in insight and courage. For it appeared at a moment when the Indonesian masses, brought to the boiling point by the Japanese occupation and civil war, sought release in racist and other hysterical outbursts. Sjahrir's pamphlet went directly against this, and many must have felt his call for chivalry, for the understanding of other ethnic groups, as a personal attack. Sjahrir's activity saved Indonesia from chaos at that moment, for what Sukarno brought about with his Guided Democracy was only a pale shadow of what threatened Indonesia in 1945. At that moment Sjahrir was great, but I could only appreciate this from a distance.

I was not to see him again until 1948, when he arrived in London to seek international support for the war with the Netherlands. He asked me to come over, together with a few other Dutch

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20. Sjahrir became prime minister of the Indonesian republic in November 1945; he headed three cabinets, the last of which fell in June 1947. (Tr.)

21. The pamphlet, Perjuangan Kita, was published in November 1945. For a version in English, see Sutan Sjahrir, Our Struggle (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1968). (Tr.)

acquaintances. Almost twenty years separated us from our youthful memories, which were buried under exile, war, and civil strife. We shared the painful consciousness of having grown older, together with the question: what had remained of our old friendship?

He came into the room at Claridge's with a bound. The tension which had been growing in me was released with the stupid remark: "You've gotten fat!" He grimaced, but after some hesitation and a few awkward gestures, contact was established again. I found him greatly changed. Because he had become stouter (later he told me that this had begun in Banda, when he had to struggle against tuberculosis), his face had become fuller; it had lost the concentrated beauty which had once made me think of a classical carving. His features had become rougher. He spoke faster, more decisively, and with the certainty of someone who is accustomed to take decisions and bear heavy responsibilities. All this had existed embryonically in his appearance as a young man, but now it had developed enormously. A new tone had also been added, the tone of someone who does not expect to be contradicted. For the first time I found in his manner a quality which he had never shown as a young man: impatience. He was undoubtedly overworked--or rather overburdened--at that time, weighed down by responsibilities, tensions, and justified fears. But that does not completely explain the hardness with which he now dealt with his surroundings.

It was the first time that I met Subandrio, who functioned as Sjahrir's personal secretary.<sup>22</sup> He was treated as an office boy in my presence. That was for me in complete contradiction to the picture that I had had of Sjahrir, and it shocked me more than anything else. Undoubtedly Subandrio was a miserable careerist, a Judas who would always betray his master for the sake of promotion. But I have to ask myself whether the vengeance that Subandrio showed later toward Sjahrir did not have its origin in the humiliations that he meekly underwent in London. If so, Sjahrir's behavior was dearly paid for. For prison under Sukarno's Guided Democracy accomplished what the Dutch colonial jails did not--it killed him.<sup>23</sup>

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22. Subandrio, who had been a member of Sjahrir's wartime group, was in charge of the Indonesian representation in London during the revolution. The office attempted to gain international recognition for the Republic, and when sovereignty was transferred from the Netherlands to Indonesia it was granted embassy status. (Tr.)
23. Sjahrir was imprisoned in 1962 on political charges. After suffering a stroke, he was allowed to go to Switzerland for treatment in 1965; he died there in 1966 at 57 years of age. (Tr.)

I saw him a few times in Indonesia after the revolution. The first time was in 1955, when the elections were held which had been announced with so much hope and which were instead to mark the beginning of developments so fateful for Indonesia. He had changed again. He had lost much of his impatience, and the hardness had been replaced by a calmer decisiveness. But in losing his tenseness, he had lost a good part of his dynamism. In his appearance, his speech, his argument, he had come to a reflectiveness that sometimes bordered on a lack of interest. He still interrupted his conversation repeatedly with a laugh. It was a laugh of deprecation--but no longer of self-deprecation.

Sjahrir's great time had passed and with it his role. He had played a decisive part in the first years of the revolution, the turning years, when he was the only one who did not panic but who saw clearly and went his way unafraid. He could survive in the maelstrom because his strong personality had a greater hold on the situation than did an army division, and because he could establish temporary hegemony with the help of an elite. He had that elite; it was the core of the PSI and those--for example the army officers--who sympathized with that party, or rather were influenced by it.<sup>24</sup> But he was lost as soon as Indonesian political life began to be organized.

Sjahrir could never completely free himself from the traditional concepts of socialism; he never could judge the historical basis of Western socialism with an uninhibitedly critical eye. Had he done so he would have come to the conclusion that none of the requirements which enabled the rise and spread of Western socialism were present in Asia, and certainly not in Indonesia. Socialism cannot live as an isolated undercurrent in that world;

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24. The PSI--Partai Sosialis Indonesia--was formed in February 1948 as a result of a split in the Partai Sosialis between a minority wing led by Sjahrir and a majority wing led by Amir Sjarifuddin. The Partai Sosialis had itself been formed by the amalgamation in December 1945 of Sjahrir's People's Socialist Party (Partai Rakjat Sosialis), which he had founded a month before, and Sjarifuddin's Partai Sosialis Indonesia. During 1948, Sjarifuddin's Socialist Party moved towards merger with the Communists and advocacy of all-out national liberation war against the Dutch, while Sjahrir's PSI turned increasingly to accommodation with the United States as a necessary and acceptable source of outside support against the Dutch. The PSI was influential in the first postrevolutionary Indonesian cabinets and had close ties to the army leaders who were in office until the attempted coup of October 17, 1952. The party did poorly in the elections of 1955, except in Bali, where it had acquired the support of powerful traditional leaders. It was banned in August 1960 as a result of refusing to accept the conditions of Guided Democracy. (Tr.)

it can only be fruitful as a stimulating idea working on mass organizations. A socialist party can only become a splinter group in a country like Indonesia, and Sjahrir should have gone with his friends into one of the major parties in order to work as a ginger group for socialist ideals. But which party? The PNI? Too much of Sukarno clung to it, and Sjahrir was not enough of a professional politician (in the Leninist sense, that is someone for whom politics comes before everything else) to overcome his repugnance at that. The struggle for a place in the PNI sun would have been fierce, though it is not impossible that in the long run he might have formed a wing which could have made his position secure. The Masjumi? Sjahrir was too secular, and in that early period the Masjumi was still firmly clamped to the sectarian doctrine of the Islamic state. Only later would the leadership and cadre of that party acquire a character that would bring it very close to Sjahrir and his group (for why really call the PSI a party?). It was only natural that this closeness would lead to cooperation; and that cooperation would have had a greater historical influence if Sjahrir had been able to proceed from a more powerful party position.

Did this problem sometimes disturb him? In our first meeting in Djakarta after the war, in 1955, he told me that a leader of the *Nahdatul Ulama* had come to him to ask if he would not place a few intellectuals from his group at the disposal of the NU, which had practically no cadre. It was a possibility for acquiring influence over this still amorphous grouping and to lead the opposition to the demagogic and corrupting tendencies which were making themselves evident in it. "But I couldn't help him; my people find it much too boring to deal with people of that level," Sjahrir added cheerfully.

I remember, too, that Sjahrir, just returned from a propaganda tour through Bali, told me with great satisfaction about the warm reception he had had everywhere and of the patience with which the large audiences listened to his quiet noninflammatory speeches. "All my speeches were lessons," he said, not without pride, and he prophesied a good number of votes for the PSI. Alas, a few days later the general elections brought a rude awakening. Indonesia was not Bali; but Sjahrir, withdrawn into his own circle, had not been conscious of that.

Sjahrir did have characteristics that could have made him a charismatic leader. I believe that the reason he did not really become one and did not succeed in maintaining his popularity does *not* lie in the fact that he was a mediocre speaker. Was Gandhi an orator? Nehru? Nyerere? But, as I once wrote Sjahrir, somewhat awkwardly, you can't become a leader of your people if you don't share any of their prejudices. Somewhere there must be an element of contact, warm and complex as the human body. Whoever rejects this out of a rationalistic hygiene is in danger of declining into isolation. With Sjahrir's

followers, who possessed neither his originality of character nor his modesty, this attitude became exaggerated into a caricature of arrogance, typical for an elite grown sterile. As for Sjahrir himself, Schiller has written that a person who has given sufficiently of the best of his time has lived for all time. For a brief period--a few years--Sjahrir led his people with the insight, the courage, and the nobility of a great man. That is a contribution so rare that it cannot be judged.