



## HONOR TO A FRIEND, BAMBANG KUSNOHADI

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The July 3, 1973 issue of *Merdeka*, a Djakarta newspaper, carried a small advertisement, authorized by the "Keluarga Bung Karno" (family of Bung Karno), announcing that Bambang Kusnohadi passed away in the early hours of June 27, 1973. Who was this young man?

Little is publicly known about Bambang despite the fact that he was one of the leading exponents of the Indonesian youth and student movement in the days of Guided Democracy. Bambang lacked the flamboyant personality common to other celebrities; this may account for the obscurity of his background as a political figure. Usually he kept aloof from parties and social functions and he had an inherent reluctance to meeting the press, and to being interviewed.

However, a mutual friend remembers him as a jolly fellow-student at the SMP (junior high school) in Pati, Central Java, around 1946-47. At that time his father, Mr. Kadarusman, was working with the forestry service in Tjepu, a region famous for its teak woods. According to this friend, Bambang was always ready to entertain the audience on the piano whenever there was a school fête. Indeed, Bambang was a music lover, and one of the most precious pieces of furniture at his modest residence was a semi-antique piano.

In subsequent years, Bambang was active in the T.R.I.P. (Student Army) until the cessation of hostilities with the Dutch at the end of 1949. After matriculation, Bambang moved to Surabaya, where he attended lectures at the local Law Faculty (at that time still a branch of Gadjah Mada University in Jogjakarta). By 1953 he was president of the student council of the Law Faculty. His active participation in student activities led to his becoming one of the founders of the GMNI (Gerakan Mahasiswa Nasionalis Indonesia--Indonesian Nationalist Student Movement), the first university student organization which advocated the active involvement of students in political life. The GMNI was part of the infrastructure of the PNI (Partai Nasional Indonesia--Indonesian Nationalist Party) and in later years became the rallying point for a core of "angry young men" within the PNI ranks. These young men were imbued with the ideal of restructuring the party to make it live up to the teachings of its founder, Sukarno, and to become the vanguard party of Indonesia.

From that time onwards Bambang resided in Djakarta, and transferred to a part-time program at the University of Indonesia. For several years he also worked at the Bank Indonesia. In April 1956 the first Asian-African Student Conference was held in Bandung, exactly one year after Indonesia had hosted the Asian-African Conference. Bambang was a member of the 30-odd man Indonesian student delegation while still quite junior in student politics.

After 1957 he remained as President of the Executive of the GMNI being easily re-elected at congresses held in 1959 and 1961. In 1959

the GMNI became affiliated with the PPMI (Perserikatan Perhimpunan<sup>2</sup> Mahasiswa Indonesia--Union of Indonesian Student Associations). In the spring of 1960 Bambang joined a PPMI delegation which visited China at the invitation of the All-China Students' Federation.

During these years Bambang consolidated his position within the party, supported by radical young party cadres. As in the other political parties the PNI's "established" older generation was very reluctant to accept a situation in which its position threatened to be systematically eroded. This meant that Bambang had to maneuver skillfully in order to survive.

The first showdown between the radicals and the establishment within the PNI occurred with the issuing of the *Appeal of July 1960*, often referred to as the "Red Book." In signing this highly critical statement Bambang was fully endorsed by the GMNI executive. Many signatories were later disciplined by the party and forced to recant. With other GMNI leaders, Bambang did not back down. He was therefore suspended from the Executive Board of the party and lost his position in the Secretariat of the DPA (Dewan Pertimbangan Agung--Supreme Advisory Council), then chaired by Sartono, a prominent elderly PNI figure.

The party tried to punish Bambang in another way. In April 1962 an emergency congress of the GMNI was convened, and Hardi, the PNI Secretary-General sponsored a rival candidate for Bambang's position. This move, however, failed; Bambang was re-elected by an overwhelming majority. Meanwhile at the national level, his position actually improved since he was appointed a member of the MPRS (Madjelis Permusjawaratan Rakjat Sementara--Provisional People's Consultative Congress) in August 1960 and then became president of the PPMI at its Fifth Congress in July 1961.

So far, Bambang was winning the battle of the inner party struggle, but on another battlefield he was losing. At the end of 1962 the heart ailment from which he had long suffered grew worse, and he had to undergo treatment abroad. Through the good offices of the International Union of Students he was able to rest at an international student health center in China during the spring of 1963. After that time, he never again had proper treatment. Because of the constant pressures of political activities and engagements, he suffered further collapses in 1965, 1968 and 1971, the last one resulting in the paralysis of half his body. This was one of the fatal blows which brought his life to an end when he was only 42.

In many respects Bambang was a controversial figure. In leading PNI circles, where a climate of "communistophobia" usually reigned, he was considered something of an outsider. His dislike of the servility and toadying readily displayed by party colleagues towards people in authority earned him their enmity. A faithful disciple of Sukarno, Bambang never hesitated to cooperate with communist counterparts in such political groups as the Peace Movement, the World Festival of Youth and Students, etc. For them in turn Bambang was definitely the prototype of the reasonable nationalist. The inclusion of his name on the list of Lt. Col. Untung's Revolutionary Council on October 1, 1965, meant the end of his political career in post-Sukarno Indonesia.

Immediately after Bambang took over the reins of the PPMI the federation changed its course. At the end of 1961 the PPMI decided to

re-affiliate with the Prague-based IUS. In May 1962, at the height of the Trikora struggle, the PPMI hosted a meeting of the IUS Executive Committee in Djakarta, together with an international solidarity meeting for the liberation of West Irian. For the PPMI the year 1961 marked a watershed for it saw a complete reversal of the long decline in the Indonesian student movement which since the early 1950's had accepted that students should remain "just students"--preserve themselves from political entanglements.

For these and other reasons Bambang's ideals could never be reconciled with those espoused by the "1966 Generation," who favored a more pragmatic "Back to the Campus" movement. And it is evident that in the eyes of New Order supporters Bambang was nothing but an Old Order die-hard. For people like Bambang, active participation by students in political events was essential for it was his conviction that the younger generation was morally obliged to fight for political change and rejuvenation in every field.

Soon after the abortive coup of October 1965 the PPMI broke up: its right-wing factions declared the federation disbanded, and forced the birth of KAMI with the blessing and tacit guidance of the then Minister of Higher Education, Sjarif Thajeb. At first, Bambang was persuaded to expel the leftist CGMI, Perhimi, Germindo, etc., from the federation. But even though he realized the critical situation, Bambang did not back down on his principles. It was his conviction that decisions as important as these should be submitted to a congress, and that the congress could only be organized when the upheavals in the wake of the coup had receded.

Bambang remained loyal to Sukarno. He attended the cabinet meeting in Bogor of January 15, 1966 which tried to solve the problem of student unity. After General Suharto's seizure of power with the renowned "Super-Semar" Mandate of March 11, 1966, he was arrested for a couple of weeks. He remained in custody for questioning in his capacity as personal aide to Achmadi, until then Minister of Information. On the day of his release he cynically told his captors that it might be better to detain him a bit longer, as he had not yet been screened for his role in youth and student political activities. Apparently he was sick of the arbitrary persecution and rough treatment given political activists from the Sukarno era. In later years he was to appear several times again before the Teperpu (Team Pemeriksaan Pusat--Central Screening Authority).

After 1966 Bambang retired completely from politics. His wife Mary had to tackle the problem of earning a livelihood for the family, because it was hard for someone with his political background to get a position. The condition of his health was a liability too. Bambang had never finished his legal studies, and in 1969 he enrolled for the Master of Economics course at Trisakti University. Although he enjoyed studying again, the state of his health prevented him from making a real effort to get his diploma.

For someone who was an admirer of Sukarno, it must have been frustrating to witness how the "holy" alliance between students and the military systematically dethroned Indonesia's Great Leader of the Revolution. Bambang refused to participate in the efforts of certain party cadres to save the PNI from total banishment by "purging" the party's ideology of Marhaenism, Sukarno's teachings. In this respect he was no more than consistent, as the persons involved were mostly men against whom he had fought in the past to get the PNI purified of petty bourgeois ideology.

Bambang is survived by his wife Mary, three grown-up children, brothers and sisters, and both his parents. The sorrow of his sudden departure is also shared by his comrades: John Lumingkewas, Lucien Pahala Hutagaol, Hardojo, Warno Supono, Kartjono, Ernst Utrecht, Sutamto, and many others. For them there remains only the remembrance of a character who was respected by friends and opponents alike.