



Adam Malik

(Deppen)

IN MEMORIAM: ADAM MALIK (1917-1984)

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The great survivor is dead. Though Adam Malik was by no means the only politician to hold high office under both Guided Democracy and the New Order, he was by far the most distinguished and successful. Others were political hacks with no true political coloring, or representatives of specialized constituencies not involved directly in the conflict between Sukarno and the army; but Malik had been a central figure in the formulation of Guided Democracy and a close counsellor of Sukarno. Moreover, having chosen against that leader in the crisis following the coup of October 1965, he was not thereby completely discredited in the eyes of his former colleagues. For many of his old leftist associates he remained a patron: a leader who would still receive and could occasionally aid them, who could still speak their language, if only in private, and who still--in spite of his evident wealth, Western admirers, and service to a counter-revolutionary regime--seemed to embody what remained of the Generation of '45, the fading memories of a radical and optimistic youth.

To survive so successfully, a man must either be most simple and consistent, or quite the opposite. No one could accuse Adam Malik of transparency, yet there was a consistency about the image he cultivated. From early youth he appeared as a radical nationalist, a man of the left; and however unsympathetic the regime to that viewpoint he never allowed the pursuit of ambition completely to cloud that picture. He had a fine sense of how far one could go (which was farther than many politicians dared) and he had a sense of history that told him Indonesia needed a continuing memory of its revolution. The need for such a symbol was also felt by the military rulers of the New Order, who realized that reminders of the army's revolutionary past would not suffice. This enabled Malik to function as something of an official gadfly, criticizing the New Order's failure to live up to the nation's ideals at the same time that his high office assured people of the regime's intention to do so.

In a way, Adam Malik's ability to straddle two regimes has drawn attention away from what may have been his greatest contribution to Indonesia's national development. This contribution he made very early in his career. In 1937, when he was just twenty years old, he founded the nationalist news agency Antara, and led it through the turbulent years of war, revolution, and struggling democracy until it was taken over by the state. The need for an independent news service had been widely recognized by Indonesian nationalist intellectuals, but it was the young and relatively uneducated Malik (he had attended only the Dutch-language primary HIS school in his native Pematang Siantar) who had the dedication and business sense needed to keep the infant agency alive. Antara was a vital link in the mental chain that connected members of the emerging indigenous middle class of the colony, making the idea of Indonesia seem the natural focus of modern elite identity. Without that connection a unified independent state might not have emerged from the archipelago's far-flung and varied societies, and it almost certainly would not have survived.

At the time he founded Antara, Malik was already deeply involved in politics. As a teenager in East Sumatra, he had joined Sukarno's Partindo party and become a member of its local executive. Later, in 1940-41, he was a member of the national executive of the moderately leftist Gerindo. Secretly, he had joined the PARI group, an underground movement begun by the exiled leftist Tan Malaka and dedicated to pan-Indonesianism and social revolution. In spite of the provocation which his views and his journalistic role posed to the colonial regime, he avoided prison until December 1941, when he was banished to Nusakambangan. He was freed a few months later in the wake of the Japanese invasion; for the next three years Antara flourished as part of the official Dōmei news network. Characteristically, Malik used the occupation both to extend his radical nationalist contacts and to make connections with sympathetic Japanese. He kept his Japanese links alive in a quiet way after the war, and later, during Guided Democracy, his constancy was rewarded with the favor of wartime associates who were reestablishing themselves in Indonesia as businessmen. In the last years of that regime, when Malik was under intense pressure from the Communists, these old friends' support was more than welcome.

During the war Malik involved himself with the young militants associated with the Asrama Indonesia Merdeka at Menteng 31. Through them he had a role in the Rengasdengklok Affair which precipitated the proclamation of the Republic. He thus participated in Indonesia's central symbolic event and was identified with the group which embodied the "pemuda-spirit" of the revolution. He himself was hardly the type one associates with the flaming-spirited pemuda, being fiery neither in appearance nor demeanor. He was, however, an intimate colleague of the more flamboyant Menteng 31 leaders, notably Sukarni and Chaerul Saleh, who had also been involved in Tan Malaka's PARI before the war.

Tan Malaka had been a great name in Indonesian leftist circles as Indonesia's arch-revolutionary, but he had been exiled more than two decades before and was largely unknown to the populace. He had returned secretly during the war but remained hidden and politically inert in West Java. His initial appearance after the revolution's outbreak had the caution born of long years on the run; but he was immediately adopted by radical nationalist politicians needing a hero who could match Sukarno-Hatta in stature and would oppose compromise with the Dutch. Malik, through Antara and his own writings, worked vigorously to package the old revolutionary in a way that would appeal to a new generation of militants. He was prominent in the Persatuan Perjuangan, the political front which Tan Malaka headed, and, after this was dissolved in early 1946, he founded the Partai Rakyat to continue its aims. When matters came to a head between Tan Malaka's supporters and the government in the Affair of July 3, 1946, Malik rather uncharacteristically found himself unprotected and under arrest; but he soon arranged an escape, and in 1948, when the affair was forgotten in the government's new need for Tan Malaka's following to oppose the Communists, Malik combined his Partai Rakyat with other pro-Tan Malaka groupings to form the Murba party. When the Dutch siezed Yogya at the end of 1948 he again found himself briefly in prison--but this, in a life of high political risk, was the last time.

After Tan Malaka's death and the end of the revolution Malik continued to devote energy and finances to enhancing the memory of the leader and of the revolution's pemuda spirit. It seemed an exercise in nostalgia: Indonesia's parliamentary democracy was not a congenial environment for hero-worship, and Malik was neither a political organizer nor a charismatic leader. His Murba party was less an organization than a mood, a collection of ex-revolutionaries who could neither find a place in postwar Indonesia's social hierarchy nor

accept the discipline of the Communist protest against it. But it was useful to Malik as an entourage, as a reminder of revolutionary service, and, most importantly, as a symbol of an alternative political approach--one which accepted neither the muddle of parliamentary politics nor the behemoth of Communist organization. It was on the need for another road that Malik counted. One reason for his failure to make a mark in Indonesia's parliamentary politics was simply that he did not believe in it. He did not think the country could solve its problems by party compromises or that it could accept the economic condition assigned it by the transfer of sovereignty. To his mind Indonesia needed strong leadership and could get it only by reviving the spirit and the constitutional arrangements of the early revolution. By the late 1950s this opinion had come into its own.

The turn to Guided Democracy brought into sudden prominence three leaders whose political careers had languished in the parliamentary period--Adam Malik, Muhammad Yamin, and Chaerul Saleh. All identified with radical, nonparliamentary nationalism, but they had not previously found favor with Sukarno because of their association with Tan Malaka, the President's great rival in revolution. The old offense was forgotten, however, in the need to have just such men formulate and legitimize a new, antiparliamentary regime. Under Guided Democracy Malik was made ambassador to the Soviet Union, a key post in a period when Indonesia was turning from the US to the USSR as a principal source of economic and military aid. Very quickly he acquired the reputation of one who knew how to handle foreigners, socialist or otherwise, combining an apparently frank and businesslike approach with a keen instinct for what would persuade his interlocutors to do what he wanted them to.

He returned to Indonesia in late 1963 to find his position both enhanced and endangered. Sukarno made him minister of trade and, more importantly, one of his confidants; but he had lost control of Antara to a pro-PKI management, and the Communists pressed hard against him and the Murba grouping. The PKI, seeing in Malik and in Chaerul Saleh (Yamin having died) a baneful influence on Sukarno and a potential source of fascist leadership for the country, devoted themselves with increasing effectiveness to isolating them. In the final year of Guided Democracy Malik worked to direct Indonesia's ideological course towards an implicitly anti-Communist "Sukarnoism," and in the heated conflict over this issue he developed links with two groups within which he had previously had few admirers--the military and Western diplomatic representatives. The coup of October 1965 thus posed Malik a choice: to continue a nationalist role, attempting to mediate between the President and the army to create an anti-Communist Sukarnoism, or to commit himself fully to his new sources of support, backing a military leadership that would open Indonesia to foreign capital.

Chaerul Saleh, facing this question, was unable to believe Indonesia could stray far from its revolutionary origins and, choosing Sukarno, ended his days in prison. Malik was of an altogether cooler temper: he knew when the romantic day was done and accommodated himself to the country's new masters. In the first years of the New Order he was, with General Suharto and the Sultan of Yogyakarta, one of the "triumvirate" presented popularly as Indonesia's leadership. Real power lay entirely with Suharto, but the Sultan symbolized stability and respectability and Malik both pragmatism and the revolutionary past. He was successively minister in charge of foreign trade, foreign minister, and speaker of parliament. His reputation as a pragmatist and a friend to capital grew until it seemed hard to believe that the elegantly suited gentleman, a noted collector of porcelain, had once been a noted revolutionary. Still,

he received friends from the old days, and he systematically if cautiously urged greater attention to social justice. To some this was fascism with a human face, a window-dressing designed to enhance Malik's and the regime's standing with liberal opinion at home and abroad without conceding anything of substance. It was, however, the only humanitarian light showing from a leadership consumed by the desire for political security and economic gain.

In 1978, following the resignation of the Sultan as Vice-President, Malik succeeded to the post. Symbolically he was ideal: a Muslim Batak, he could with Suharto embody the balance between Java and the Outer Islands that had been portrayed in the old *dwi-tunggal* of Sukarno and Hatta. A civilian, he balanced the military. He could both portray the continuing representation of the revolutionary past and the pragmatic opening to the West and Japan. He had stature at home and abroad and, while he was not among Suharto's closest advisers, his word had sufficient weight that he formed an important alternative route to and source of influence on the decision-maker in the palace. Consequently, his largely symbolic office provided him with an important role.

In 1983 Malik retired. His health, he said, was poor--and since he died the following year, this was very likely the case. At the time it was widely speculated that he felt Suharto's regime to be too set in its ways for any meaningful reform of either policy or leadership, and that, if he wished to preserve his stature as an Indonesian national figure, it was time to leave. Perhaps that was true: Malik's reformist utterings rang increasingly hollow in a regime that seemed less and less open to change. He had not lost his ability to take a long look at Indonesia's situation, and he set his course accordingly. In any case, he left the political scene with his reputation largely intact: he had managed to be a pillar of the New Order without becoming simply its tool, to preserve memories of his revolutionary past while creating a new, "development-minded" image. He had been one of the most accessible, intelligent, and balanced leaders in two hard regimes; and he knew when it was time to bow out.