
SUDARPO SASTROSATOMO

(JUNE 30, 1920–OCTOBER 22, 2007)

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Sudarpo Sastrosatomo, who died on October 22, 2007, was an important member of the group of young people who gathered round Sutan Sjahrir during the Japanese Occupation of Indonesia and who, during the struggle for independence and after it, made an important contribution to the political life of the early Republic. In 1948, this group formed the core of the Indonesian Socialist Party (PSI, Partai Sosialis Indonesia). Unlike some of their predecessors who had studied in The Netherlands in the 1920s, this later generation had pursued tertiary studies in the Indies, where they were able to enjoy an active student life.

Sudarpo, one of a family of nine, was born in 1920 in Sumatra, where his father held a clerical position in the Dutch administration. After his father's death in 1929, the family moved back to Java, and he and his elder brother, Soebadio, had their secondary education in Yokyakarta, attending a General Secondary School (Algemeene Middelbare School, AMS). In the late 1930s, they moved together to Batavia, where they began their tertiary education, enrolling in the Medical Faculty. Here they began to become actively engaged in student life. They both became members of USI (Unitas Studiosorum Indonesiansis, Indonesian Students' Union) and also of the slightly more radical PPPI (Perhimpunan Peladja-peladjar Indonesia, Union of Indonesian Students), Indonesia Muda (Young Indonesia), and of other similar groups. They helped to form Baperpi (Badan Perwakilan Pelajar-pelajar Indonesia, Indonesian Students' Representative Body), and they interacted with several of the student *asramas* that had sprung up in Batavia. The outlook of these groups was not uniform, but they were broadly liberal or radical.

It was during this period that Sudarpo and his brother came under the influence of Sjahrir, recently returned from exile, and in his company they began to develop their political views, essentially social democratic in character, and differing from extreme left-wing positions and also from the radical nationalism of some of Pemuda (Youth) movements of the time that advocated direct action. Among other things, they became critical of Sukarno's leadership style and of his cooperation with the Japanese Occupation regime, which led them, in early 1943, to take a rather extraordinary step. The Sastrosatomo brothers, together with Soedjatmoko, another member of the Sjahrir circle, went to confront Sukarno directly with their views. He received them and tried to charm them, but the bluntness of their attack pulled him up. He then listened and thereafter remembered the occasion without rancor.

After a couple of years, Soebadio, whose interests lay in the direction of political theory, dropped out of medicine and switched to law. Sudarpo remained in the Medical Faculty. But both faculties had their share of radical student activity. In the Medical Faculty that radicalism expressed itself in 1943 in two student strikes, one protesting against the Japanese requirement that the students attend a daily flag-raising ceremony and bow in the direction of Tokyo, and a further requirement that they have their heads shaved. The second arose as a result of a face-slapping incident. These were minor incidents and were resolved by the negotiating skills of the dean of the faculty. However, as a result of the strikes, eight students were expelled from the faculty, including Soedjatmoko and Sudarpo.

These two withdrew from political action for a time, but they remained in close contact with Sjahrir. After the Proclamation of Independence (August 17, 1945), they played a part with him in one significant incident. In the early weeks after the Proclamation, Sjahrir felt the need for a change in the constitutional practice of the infant Republic. While recognizing the symbolic importance of Sukarno's leadership, he believed that Sukarno was nevertheless compromised by his earlier collaboration with the Japanese. Sjahrir therefore believed it would be desirable to separate the ceremonial from the executive functions of government. This could be done within the existing provisions of the constitution that had been drafted in anticipation of independence. His proposal was that the president should be persuaded to stand back from immediate political leadership and accept a prime minister and government responsible to the Central Indonesian National Committee (Komite Nasional Indonesia Pusat), established immediately after the Proclamation. Sukarno was absent from Jakarta at the time, but Hatta, as vice president, agreed to the suggestion and asked Sjahrir to form a government. The existing government at first refused to accept the change, and Sjahrir sent two young men—Soedjatmoko and Sudarpo—to find Sukarno and bring him back to Jakarta. The two located the president, who returned with them and agreed to accept the new dispensation.

Sudarpo in succeeding years remained close to Sjahrir. He joined the PSI when it was formed in 1948. Together with Soedjatmoko, he helped to launch a Dutch-language weekly, *Het Inzicht* (Insight), whose title was designed as a reply to the Dutch journal, *Het Uitzicht* (Outlook). He also served as a public servant in the Defense Department under Amir Sjarifuddin, and was involved in negotiations with the Dutch in Indonesia and as an Indonesian representative at the United Nations.

After the transfer of sovereignty in 1949, he became, for a couple of years, a member of the newly established Indonesian Embassy in Washington. But his political interests began to decline now that independence had been achieved. By the time of Indonesia's first election in 1955, it was clear that the PSI was no longer part of the mainstream of party political activity. By then Sudarpo had already launched himself into business activity. He established his own trading firm, then joined a Dutch-owned local shipping company, became its managing director, turned it into an Indonesian company, and eventually into the major shipping firm, the Samudera Corporation. Here he was to devote his considerable talents—including his political talents—throughout the years of Suharto's New Order.