

THE NEW JAVA*

Idrus

Translated by Thomas John Hudak

People are no longer good at crying, only complaining. Each complains because life is difficult. Rice is now 3 rupiah per liter, *gado-gado*¹ a quarter of a rupiah for a small packet. Everywhere people talk about rice, about the harshness of life. And each blames Japan.

"Java is famous for its rice. Why are we short? Nothing like this has ever happened before."

"The Japs are the same as the Dutch, wiping out everything we've got. But even more than the Dutch, they exploit us with sweet faces."

No one listens to such words any longer, they have become commonplace.

On main streets, in front of restaurants, yes, everywhere, people are seen half naked and half dead. They beg for leftovers. They don't simply eat people's leftovers, but dog food has become delicious too. Every day people appear sprawled out in the middle of the street. Crowds swarm about, and if anyone asks, "Why is he sprawled out over there . . . ?" someone answers, "To make a living."

A teenager sits under a tree, completely naked, like a horse or some other beast. When anyone passes, he hides part of his body. But what can he hide with the palms of two hands? Teenage girls look at him and laugh as if there were something ridiculous about him. The young man could not walk around, he could not beg, he still had a sense of . . . shame! He just sits day after day under the tree. Only when it's really dark does he dare venture out. His eyes ceaselessly search the river near where he sits. And when a dead chicken or dead . . . human being drifts by, he rushes down, pulls it up on the bank, and . . . eats it. For this young man too the end was death, not from lack of food, but from overeating . . . carcasses.

Many streetwalkers too have starved to death, for their business has gone slack like everything else. Thousands of young girls have applied for jobs as streetwalkers, searching for money . . . to buy rice for their families and relatives. And thousands of men vie for these girls. In the end, the girls die too, their flowers withered, no longer settled on by the bees.

Even those young men who still have clothes to wear cannot escape this danger. All are ashen. They masturbate . . . to stifle their hunger. In the end, they too die. According to the doctors, from excessive masturbation. . . .

* I wish to thank Professor Ben Anderson for his valuable suggestions for this translation.

1. *Gado-gado*--a salad-like dish made with a peanut sauce.

The newspapers are filled with news about the war, but these newspapers are void of the above-mentioned items. As though the above events never took place in Jakarta or in other places. Every day, reporters are sent off in all directions to check out the conditions around the city, but all they write about is . . . Co-Prosperity.

Rice is hard to find, each person receives only one-fifth of a liter a day. But the Japanese receive five liters a day. Their leftover rice goes to their housemaids and their houseboys. These housemaids are prosperous indeed but this prosperity must be paid for with their womanhood; and when their Japanese master becomes bored with them, they . . . starve to death.

The Java Service Association² holds a big meeting. In this meeting, questions are posed by the Japanese, and these questions must be answered by those in attendance, just like in a schoolroom. From the Japanese come the questions:

"What is the most appropriate way to serve the government?"

"How most appropriately can harvests be increased?"

The bigshot attendees mull these questions over, but each speaker fails to answer them, as though they were really difficult.

They bring up the hard life of the common people. Each speaker declares, "The Java Service Association leadership must be changed. They know too little about the situation of the common people." Others in back titter and whisper, "Sure, how can they know about the state of the people, when their stomachs are fat from their sacksful of rice."

On the second day of the conference, the Japanese bring up more questions. And at the end of their remarks they advise the attendees to discuss only their questions, as though what the people had been saying the day before was totally useless.

In Malang the pawnbrokers pay four rupiah for one rice sack. The government needs sacks to carry rice to Japan, the people need sacks to cover their genitals.

In Jakarta too it's a struggle to find coffee. But people in Bantam almost drown in coffee. People in Bantam too die from hunger, for they cannot live on coffee alone.

In Bandung the streets are filled with Eurasian women peddling . . . their bodies.

Life is hard. Everywhere people complain, but no one is bold enough to open his mouth. A government emissary just returned from a trip around Java sends his report to the government. That night on the radio it is announced that even though the life of the common people is hard, they do not complain. They endure everything with patience, a sign of devoted service coming from pure hearts. And at the end of the broadcast the announcer finishes by saying that the Japanese government is very touched to see the sincerity of all the common people of the island of Java.

Tokyo lies to the north, very far from the island of Java; but when Tokyo needs rice, it becomes very close. A telegraph operator works for a moment or two, and two days later rice arrives in Tokyo by plane.

Planes are used for kamikaze missions and for . . . transporting rice.

2. "Jawa Hokokai"--a Japanese-sponsored organization for control of the population.

Every morning one could see orphans filing along Noordwijk³ from church to their quarters. Their faces are all deathly pale, their bodies thin . . . from lack of food.

People deal on the black market to supplement their official salary. They have been forbidden to do so by the government. But even the Japanese themselves deal on the black market--a different kind of black market. The government compels the people in the *kampung*⁴ to give all the scrap iron in their homes to the government. But this scrap iron falls into the hands of shady Japanese dealers and then is sold for a higher price to the government. They cheat, even without a capital base of their own.

Life is hard in Jakarta, in Surabaya, in Plered, all over the island of Java. Everyone raises his hands to heaven, begging for a blessing from God the Almighty, as though God has forgotten to give them a livelihood. Every year the rice in the fields grows golden ripe and each year it is milled. . . . Is God really the one to blame?

3. Noordwijk--a large thoroughfare in central Jakarta close to the presidential palace.

4. *Kampung*--an urban ward.