



### Menudju Tjita Baru

Copy of a woodcut made by S. Sudarto while a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Jogjakarta in 1955. The copy is made available through the courtesy of Mr. Djumadi, former director of the Academy, and Mrs. Claire Holt.

TWO STORIES OF THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION

Idrus

Translated by  
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Fujinkai<sup>(1)</sup>

The Fujinkai group of kampung A was holding a meeting. The day before Mrs. Sastra had been very busy, as if she were marrying off her daughter. She had borrowed chairs from everyone and had made a number of calls to the members. For Mrs. Sastra this Fujinkai meeting was an important event in her everyday life.

"She's very enthusiastic," remarked one member to another.

Mrs. Sastra got up and made a speech to open the meeting. In a voice which sounded like the meowing of a cat shivering with cold, Mrs. Sastra explained that she had been ordered by the authorities to call this meeting to discuss certain problems.

One of the members, sitting across from where Mrs. Sastra stood, muttered under her breath:

"Of course! If there hadn't been an order from the authorities, she wouldn't have dared!"

While continuing her speech Mrs. Sastra glared at this member. Her expression was sour while the other member's was scornful.

Mrs. Sastra went on with a slight quaver in her voice. She spoke for a long time, and yet what the authorities had ordered discussed at the meeting still had not been mentioned. All the members were yawning, like soldiers at a quiet battle-front.

Ten minutes ... twenty minutes went by, and still Mrs. Sastra talked on. Her mouth, which looked like a squirrel's snout, opened and closed like the hole in a pair of bellows. Her nostrils were as wide-open as a fish-net under water. The black hairs inside were visible, like the tentacles of a squid. As she spoke her spittle oozed between her teeth, dribbling on to her chin like snot from a child's nose.

One of the members got up and said with embarrassment:

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(1) A women's organization set up by the Japanese during the Occupation.

"Mrs. Sastra, I'd like permission to leave. There's so much to do at home."

Mrs. Sastra felt offended and in an angry voice she asked:

"Why, Mrs. Walujo? The meeting isn't over yet. We've just begun. At home you just work for your own. Here we're working for the common welfare."

Mrs. Walujo appeared to be thinking something over. Then she said firmly:

"I'm very sorry, Mrs. Sastra."

Mrs. Walujo looked at her watch, tiny as a bee, and then continued:

"I've got an appointment with the chicken-vendor at 6 o'clock sharp. I want to trade some old clothes for some chickens."

Mrs. Walujo nodded to Mrs. Sastra and to all the members, and then went out. Once outside she said between her teeth:

"For the first and the last time." And in a mocking tone she added: "Hm, common welfare, indeed!"

The other members looked uneasy, like someone face to face with his divorced wife.

Mrs. Sastra still went on talking. She cited all the contents of the newspapers over the past few days. She expressed her appreciation to the Japanese navy for having won a brilliant victory on the seas east of Formosa. She paid homage to the Japanese soldiers who had died like heroes on the island of Piliou, gave thanks to Dai Nippon Teikoku<sup>(2)</sup> for Indonesia's future independence,<sup>(3)</sup> and thanks once again for the rice distribution which was so well organized by the Military government, i.e., one-fifth of a liter per person per day.

Another member got up. She seemed a real kampung [lower-class] girl. She spoke Indonesian haltingly, like an old woman. Her blouse was faded and threadbare. Her chest was like the waters of Lake Toba -- not a ripple anywhere. Now and then she coughed. Softly she said:

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(2) The Empire of Greater Japan.

(3) This reference dates the time the story is supposed to take place to after September 7, 1944. On that date the Japanese Premier made his famous promise that Indonesia would get her independence "in the future."

"Mrs. Sastra, one-fifth of a liter isn't enough, you know. Where will the rest come from? My husband can't work anymore. His hands were cut off by the Japanese because ..."

She felt very reluctant to finish her sentence, but she wanted to stir Mrs. Sastra's compassion. Perhaps Mrs. Sastra could help. So she forced herself to go on between her coughs:

"Because he took a liter of rice from his boss' house. He was forced to do it, you see. Otherwise, Salim is an honest man. Please help me, ma'am. My two children eat a lot because they're in the growing stage."

All the members took pity on the woman. But Mrs. Sastra said firmly:

"Mrs. Salim, I can't help you. It's already been decided and we have to obey orders. Times have changed. In the old days we could question the decisions of the authorities. But now the time has come to obey. It's much better this way. If we went on as we used to do, everything would take a very long time. But Dai Nippon does things differently. Everything goes quickly. They have been here only two years, and we've already been given our future independence. We must work, Mrs. Salim!"

Mrs. Salim seemed on the verge of tears and she asked: "So it's down to one-fifth of a liter? Even less than a quarter? If that's the case I'd better go now. There's a lot of work to be done at home."

Very slowly, like the announcement of a defeat for Dai Honei<sup>(4)</sup> Mrs. Salim walked to the door. When she got home she burst into tears. Mrs. Sastra laughed derisively at Mrs. Salim. She said:

"That's what happens when kampung people attend a meeting. They discuss irrelevant things and ask irrelevant questions! Ha, ha, ha!"

Mrs. Djoko and Mrs. Surja, who were sitting at some distance from Mrs. Sastra, were busy talking. Mrs. Djoko said:

"Djoko looks very pale now. I feel so sorry for him. He works hard every day and when he comes home all he gets is rice-porridge. I'm a bit better off: I buy everything that goes by the house: gado-gado,<sup>(5)</sup> fried ontjom,<sup>(6)</sup> anything to still my

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(4) Japanese military Government Headquarters.

(5) A kind of salad with peanut sauce.

(6) A cake made of peanuts after the oil has been extracted.

hunger. Sometimes it comes to one rupiah a day. Poor Djoko!"

Mrs. Surja did not have such a difficult life. Her husband was a member of the local Shu Sangikai.<sup>(7)</sup> She said, rather arrogantly:

"For us things are pretty much as usual. We lead just the same sort of life we did before. Surja has a permit to go anywhere he wants. From Banten he brings home coffee. From Tjirebon rice or Kooa cigarettes. Usually the rice he gets is more than both of us can eat. Well, how can we help it? We sell the surplus. Sometimes we get up to two rupiah, seventy cents a liter. Yes, it covers the expense of going to the Warnasari show."

Mrs. Djoko rose and said to Mrs. Sastra:

"Mrs. Sastra, is this all we're to discuss at this meeting? Thank you very much indeed. I'd like to ask permission to leave."

Mrs. Sastra was startled. From her bag she took out a piece of paper and in a voice like a cat meowing from the cold she said:

"Wait a moment, Mrs. Djoko! What I've been saying was only an introduction. The actual purpose of the meeting is ..."

Mrs. Sastra opened the folded piece of paper. She continued her speech:

"Here it is. This coming December 8 it will be exactly three years since Japan declared war on America by attacking Hawaii. This event should be commemorated. The duties of the Fujinkai have already been determined, as follows: together with the members of the Fujinkai of other kampung, we are to pay a visit to some sick Japanese soldiers. For this visit we'll have to make them some cookies. Making these cookies will involve some expense. Ladies, let me put it briefly and say: the purpose of this meeting is to appeal to your generosity, ladies, and ask you to contribute some money for making the cookies. At least two and a half rupiah a family. I don't think that's too much for you ladies, is it? What's two and a half rupiah anyway? Just imagine that you're buying a liter of rice! I'm sure you won't feel it an imposition. Anyway I'll let you know later when we have to start work."

The members of the Fujinkai of kampung A whispered to each other. One of them said out loud:

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(7) The Residency Advisory Councils established by the Japanese.

"The two and a half rupiah are another story. But why did you give such a long-winded introduction just to tell us that we have to dig still more deeply into our pockets? Just cross my name off the membership list of the Fujinkai! I don't care if people say that I don't have the right spirit."

Mrs. Sastra was frightened. In a trembling voice she said:

"Mrs. Samiun, please don't be so easily offended. We have to be patient nowadays. You really misunderstood me. I feel I must tell you right here even though it's a secret, that everything I have just said was passed on to me from higher up. It all came together with the order to hold this meeting. I worked very hard yesterday to memorize it all, word for word, Mrs. Samiun!"

Mrs. Sastra wiped the sweat from her forehead. The meeting was adjourned without any further mishap.

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Och ... Och ... Och

Sukabumi is well-known for its cool climate, but people who were standing in line in front of the ticket window at the railway station were half dead from the heat. On their backs, their necks and under their arms, their clothes were wet with perspiration. A little to one side, close by the feet of that line of people, stretched another line -- of black flies, like cough drops, sucking up spittle. Some of the spittle was liquid and clear; some was as solid as thick cream. Now and then a cough was heard, followed by the noise of solid liquid falling. The flies crowded round the freshly spat spittle like people buying freshly fried bananas.

The person coughing was a thin young man who looked like a dead branch. He was standing in the middle of the queue. The man standing behind him asked:

"Tuan, why are you coughing? It is not dusty here, is it?"

The young man answered:

"Even in the cleanest room I cough. I've just come back from Patjet.<sup>(1)</sup> I'm on my way to Djakarta."

The man behind him said, while taking out his handkerchief:

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(1) A small town where there is a sanatorium.

"If you have t.b. don't spit on the ground! It's dangerous for other people, after all!"

The young man coughed again and from his mouth came solid milk, in the middle of which were red spots, like the Japanese flag.

The first person in the queue was an Indonesian whose clothes were all in rags. He stuck his hand, which was covered with scabies sores, into the hole in the ticket-window, and repeated several times:

"Djakarta, one, fourth class."

The ticket-seller looked rather annoyed at the man and said:

"If you can't wait you can leave!"

The man answered angrily: "I've been waiting for half an hour, and I still haven't been attended to. Others have gotten priority over me." And he pointed at a station attendant who was behind the ticket-seller. The latter became angrier and said loudly: "That's none of your business! It's my affair! If you want to be served fast, you can buy from the back door. Pay half a rupiah extra."

The Indonesian was silent. He shook his head and said sullenly: "I can't blame you. Everybody is trying to add a little money to his income now." After saying this he looked at his bag which was filled with rice, and slowly added: "Me too!"

A Chinese had left his place in the queue. He wiped the beads of sweat off his forehead with his Pyramide<sup>(2)</sup> handkerchief. He stood beside the Indonesian, but the latter became angry. He said abruptly:

"With all due respect, tuan, don't get out of line. If you do, everybody will want to do it too. Eventually there'll be a crowd. And that'll make it difficult for the ticket-seller."

The Chinese answered with a sneer:

"Don't talk so much. Do you know who I am? I have a permit from the sikutjo."<sup>(3)</sup> And to the ticket-seller he said:

"One ticket second class. Djakarta."

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(2) Brand-name of the finest kind of handkerchief on the Indonesian market.

(3) Title of a village or ward chief under the Japanese.

The ticket-seller looked surprised and said:

"The second class car is reserved for the Japanese, tuan, and for people ... who have a permit from the sikutjo."

The Chinese laughed loudly. Staring at his fingers which clasped a five-rupiah bill, he said:

"Here you are, tuan, the permit. The fare to Djakarta is only two rupiah and sixty-five cents. The rest ..."

The ticket-seller quickly took the money from the Chinese and said gently: "Here, tuan, second class. Djakarta."

The train departed, leaving Sukabumi behind. The Chinese, sitting in the second class car, laughed, and smiled sweetly at a young Eurasian girl. In the third and fourth class cars people were crying because of the crush. The conductor walked from the third to the fourth class car. He came to a group of people who were standing close to the steps.

"Have your tickets ready," he said.

Everyone took out their money. Pretending to be angry the conductor said: "Why did you get on this train without tickets? How did you manage to get into the station?"

One of them said: "The ticket attendant at the station gate got ten cents from each of us, tuan."

The conductor did not say anything more. He took the money, put it in his pocket, and then said slowly:

"Next time you buy tickets, right?"

At a small station the train stopped. Several young men, all of them naked to the waist, got on the train. Only their caps indicated that they were members of the keibodan.<sup>(4)</sup> All the passengers were inspected. If they found rice they took it and carried it away. Those who had been discovered carrying rice with them were beaten, even if they were women.

There was a package of rice on a seat. One of the keibodan asked: "Whose is this?"

His hand was already gripping the package. A policeman approached the keibodan and said grandly: "That's mine, but you can have it."

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(4) An auxiliary police force set up by the Japanese whose duties included searching travelers for contraband goods, mainly foodstuffs.



The keibodan saluted the policeman and said embarrassedly: "I beg your pardon; I thought it belonged to somebody else."

Then all the keibodan got off the train. On the platform there were heaps of parcels filled with rice which they had confiscated from the passengers. One of them whispered to another: "Is tuan Murakawa here?"

The other shook his head and from his wide mouth came the following whispered words:

"He went to Bogor this morning. He won't be back till this evening. Let's just divide this rice among the five of us. Leave a little here to show that we have done our duty to-day."

As the train was about to depart an Arab got on. When he saw how crowded the train was he exclaimed:

"Masja Allah!"(5)

Behind this Arab walked a young man. His clothes were in tatters and he had a wooden left leg. He limped up the steps of the train. The Arab asked: "Where do you want to go? Can you stand on your foot for a long time?"

The one-legged youth answered politely:

"I'm going to Djakarta, tuan. There's nobody here who will give me alms anymore. Just let me sit on the steps, tuan."

The train started up again. The policeman in the fourth class car watched a certain young woman with a bent back for a long time. Like Don Juan the policeman approached the woman and asked: "How old are you, miss?"

The young woman was astonished. She answered:

"Thirty-three, why?"

"Nothing. It's just a great pity. So young, and already with a bent back!"

He put out his hands, felt the woman's back and said: "Why, your back's very soft, miss!" He thought for a moment, then continued: "Rice, eh? Miss, I hate to see a young woman with a bent back. Please pour your rice into my sack. Later on, in Djakarta, we'll measure it out again to see how many liters are yours. Don't worry, we won't be bothered by the keibodan anymore!"

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(5) The equivalent of "Good God!"

The policeman laughed. Embarrassed, the young woman opened her chemise. She poured her rice into the policeman's sack.

Near the Bogor station the train was going very fast. The hand of the one-legged youth lost its grip. He fell off the train and was killed. The train stopped. The conductor made some notes. Then the train moved on again.

The Arab who had watched the whole incident took out his handkerchief, and wiped the sweat from his eyebrows. Now and then the following words escaped his lips:

"Astagfirullah! Astagfirullah!"(6)

An Indonesian standing beside the Arab said:

"I'd rather see him die like this than on the banks of the Tjiliwung in Djakarta."

The Arab was annoyed, it seemed, and said more loudly:

"Astagfirullah!"

At a small station past Bogor the train stopped for a moment again. The conductor quickly got off the train and walked toward a certain house. A man was already waiting there. As soon as he saw the conductor he asked:

"How did it go, Rim? Any luck?"

Karim shook his head. "So-so, Sur. But I only managed to get one hundred and fifty rupiah. So I expect a tip from you."

"That's your own fault, Rim. I told you my share would have to be a hundred and fifty, didn't I? Three dozen genuine Koh-I-Noor!(7) You know the present market price is sixty rupiah a dozen! Here's ten rupiah. I can't give you more than that!"

Karim, while accepting the ten-rupiah bill, asked:

"Anything else for Djakarta?"

"Yes, salvarsan shots. Will they sell in Djakarta?"

"Oh yes, people are looking all over for them, Sur. In short, all the boys in Djakarta have syphilis. But don't make it too expensive, please!"

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(6) The equivalent of "God forgive me!"

(7) Probably a brand of imported German pencils.

Then conductor Karim returned to the train, carrying several bottles of salvarsan for injections.

Not long afterward the train arrived at the Gambir station. People jostled one another to be the first to get out of the station.

Close to the Gambir station gate a young woman was crying her heart out. Asked what was the matter, she replied:

"My rice. My fifteen liters of rice was taken by that policeman!"

People looked left and right to see if there was a policeman around with a sack of rice. There was no policeman in sight.

The young woman went on crying until her tears were as dry as her purse.