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# POLICING THE PHANTOM UNDERGROUND

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**Underground** adj. 1. Situated, occurring, or operating below the surface of the earth. 2.a. Hidden or concealed; clandestine. b. Of or relating to an organization involved in secret or illegal activity. 3. Of or relating to an avant-garde movement or its films, publications, and art.—n. 1. A clandestine organization planning hostile activities against or the overthrow of a government. 2. Chiefly British. A subway system. 3. An avant-garde movement or publication.

*The American Heritage College Dictionary* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, Third Edition, 1993).

The government reaction to the “communist” revolts in 1926 was swift and drastic. On November 17, five days after the revolt started in West Java on November 12, 1926, the governor general decided to place “the dangerous communist leaders” in preventive custody in the interests of public safety.<sup>1</sup> The next day, the council of the Netherlands Indies decided to intern “the principal communist leaders on a large scale.” In early December, the government decided not to request the Indies Supreme Court to declare the Indonesian communist party illegal. Whether legally banned or not, the party had gone underground, and its activities had been “camouflaged in all sorts of smaller associations with apparently innocent purposes.” Declaring the PKI

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<sup>1</sup> “Verslag bg. vergadering van de raad van Nederlandsch-Indië, 18 nov. 1926,” in R. C. Kwantes, ed., *De Ontwikkeling van de Nationalistische Beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië: Tweede stuk medio 1923–1928* [hereafter *De Ontwikkeling: medio 1923-1928*] (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, Uitgaven van de Commissie voor Bronnenpublicatie betreffende de Geschiedenis van Nederlandsch-Indië 1900–1942 van het Nederlands Historisch Genootschap, 9, 1978), p. 476.

(Partai Komunis Indonesia) illegal, the council reasoned, was pointless.<sup>2</sup> Finally, on December 30, 1926, the prosecutor general instructed the regional chiefs “to discern in a timely fashion the significance and the threatening influence of the new propagandists and to choose the right moment to render them harmless in the same way as their predecessors.” If this were not done, he wrote, the policy of “eliminating the dangerous core of the movement” by mass arrest and internment would lose its effectiveness.<sup>3</sup>

The policy adopted in late 1926 to combat communism was thus one of political expediency. The government took administrative and police measures to wipe out and forestall the reestablishment of communist cadres. In connection with the revolts, thirteen thousand persons were arrested. A few of them were shot for their involvement in killings; 4,500 were sentenced to prison after trial; 1,308 were sent to Digoel.<sup>4</sup> As the prosecutor general wrote to the chiefs of regional administration on July 30, 1927,

practically speaking the PKI is thus a banned association: there is nothing to speak of any more about an open action of the communists in connection with this association and wherever [there is an attempt to revive] the movement by propaganda among the population, sale of membership cards, etc., . . . it can be put to an end by arresting the agitators, followed by a proposal for internment, if a criminal prosecution does not seem possible.

This was the policy, and, the prosecutor general reminded the regional chiefs, “this government standpoint should be impressed on the consciousness of the population.”<sup>5</sup>

The question was what “this government standpoint” ought to be and how it “should be impressed on the consciousness of the population.” The prosecutor general did not say how, because the methods were self-evident: arrest, imprisonment, and internment. More problematic was the question of “what.” In the short term, it was clear. The government would not tolerate the PKI and its affiliated organizations and trade unions such as the SR (Sarekat Rakjat) and VSTP (railway workers’ union). Government actions in 1927 and 1928 further impressed this standpoint on the popular mind. Sudiro’s Sarekat Rakjat, the PKI section in Pematang Siantar, East Sumatra, and Trisnoadiasmoro’s Centralisatie Indonesia in Surabaya were destroyed one after the other in 1927. Numerous arrests and house searches were made in 1927 and 1928 in connection with local, isolated, largely individualistic attempts to revive SRs and other “communist,” “magico-religious,” “terrorist,” and “criminal” organizations such as Djadjar, Sarekat Item, and Korban Diri.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For the internal debate on this question, see “Procureur-generaal (H.G.P. Duyfjes) aan gouverneur-generaal (De Graeff), 2 dec. 1926” and “Directeur van justitie (D. Rutgers) aan gouverneur-generaal (De Graeff), 10 dec. 1926,” in Kwantes, *De Ontwikkeling: medio 1923-1928*, pp. 494–508.

<sup>3</sup> “Procureur-generaal (H. G. P. Duyfjes) aan hoofden van gewestelijk bestuur,” in Kwantes, *De Ontwikkeling: medio 1923-1928*, pp. 520–521.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), p. 353.

<sup>5</sup> Procureur Generaal aan de Hoofden van Gewestelijk Bestuur, July 30, 1927, Geheim-Eigenhandig-Rondschriften, Mr. 945x/1927.

<sup>6</sup> Poeze, “Inleiding,” in Harry A. Poeze, ed., *Politiek-Politioonele Overzichten van Nederlandsch-Indië: Deel I 1927-1928* [hereafter *PPO: 1927-1928*] (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), pp. lxxviii-lxix.

In the longer term, however, this government standpoint was not as clear-cut as it sounded, because once the PKI and its affiliated associations and unions were destroyed, the organizational foci for the policy disappeared. The enemy consequently became diffuse, hidden, and no longer easily identifiable. This problem was further complicated by governor general De Graeff's "liberal policy of construction" toward Indonesian nationalists which was combined with tough, repressive measures against "underground destructive action." To see this point, one only needs to ask what the government response would be if former PKI and SR activists established a party or a trade union with an explicitly non-communist, nationalist agenda or if non-communist nationalists cooperated with international organizations that were themselves under communist influence. How would the government police the *pergerakan*? How would it remind Indonesians that there were limits beyond which they could not venture without risking internment to Digoel? How did this political policing shape Indonesian popular politics?

### Lessons of the Revolts

One important task ARD (Algemeene Recherche Dienst, General Investigation Service) chief A. E. van der Lely performed during the busy days in late 1926 and early 1927 while directing the entire PID (Politieke Inlichtingendienst, Political Intelligence Service) apparatus to destroy the PKI was to write a "detailed and objective [*zakelijk*]" report on "the PKI organization and its ramifications" and to "give a clear picture of the politically dangerous character of this association and its leaders," as instructed by the governor general on November 24, 1926.<sup>7</sup> As it turned out, he wrote three different versions of this report in these months. The first version, a rough draft composed in haste, was submitted to De Graeff on November 27. On the basis of this document, the prosecutor general argued for "an extensive application of the extraordinary powers upon the core [of the party], the principal leaders working behind the scenes, to prevent a repeat of the recent events."<sup>8</sup>

The second version of the report, fatter, much better organized, but still retaining the basic argument made in the first, was compiled in early January 1927 and submitted to the governor general on January 11. It had a long title: "Political Note concerning the Indonesian Communist Party: Report wherein is summed up information which has come to light concerning the action of the Partij Komunist Indonesia (Netherlands Indies Communist Party), a section of the Third International, from July 1925 up to and including December 1926." De Graeff liked this draft; he instructed the prosecutor general to make 150 copies for internal use and commended van der Lely for his work, which "gives such a clear insight into the general situation and shows that the complaints repeatedly raised these days about the inadequate functioning of the central political intelligence are generally unfounded."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Kwantes, *De Ontwikkeling: medio 1923-1928*, pp. 525-526. The governor general also appointed two committees, one to study the situation in Banten in January 1926 and the other to investigate the situation in West Sumatra in February 1927. But their more regionally focused reports are of less importance for our discussion.

<sup>8</sup> Procureur Generaal aan Gouverneur Generaal, Nov. 27, 1927, Mr. 1174x/1926.

<sup>9</sup> Kwantes, *De Ontwikkeling: medio 1923-1928*, pp. 466-467.

The third and final version, titled like the second but fatter still, with some chapters substantially expanded and four new chapters added, was submitted to the governor general in April 1927. It was also printed for internal use, but served a different political purpose. Since the crisis was now over, in this third draft of the report van der Lely looked to the future and spelled out the political policing strategy that he recommended be used against communism.<sup>10</sup>

Since the second version of the report is available in English thanks to Harry J. Benda and Ruth T. McVey, it will suffice here to note van der Lely's thesis regarding the communist revolts only briefly. In a nutshell, his thesis proposed the existence of an international communist conspiracy. He started both the second and third versions of his report with this paragraph:

The action carried out by the Communist leaders in the period from July 1925 to the end of December 1926 may chiefly be regarded as in rigid compliance with the resolutions adopted at the fifth world congress of the Communist International in Moscow (mid-1924) and at the Djogjakarta [Yogyakarta] conference of Communists (December 1924).<sup>11</sup>

Having thus stated his basic position, he developed his argument through the following stages:

1. The Comintern decided at its fifth congress on reorganization of the parties by means of the cell system (in trade unions, political organizations, factories, workshops, villages, native residential quarters [*kampungs*], etc.) and Bolshevization of the parties.

2a. In compliance with this decision, the PKI decided at the Yogyakarta conference, and instructed its sections in the first half of 1925, to organize criminals in the illegal groups and to carry out propaganda by means of cells and closed meetings and cadre training courses.

2b. In the second half of 1925, the propaganda was carried out mainly in trade unions. "This activity was first and foremost a logical consequence of the decisions taken at the Pan-Pacific Labor Conference held in Canton [in June 1924]." After they met in Yogyakarta and Surabaya in December 1924, the PKI leaders decided to expand trade union activities, intensified propaganda in the unions under their control, and established new unions such as the sugar workers' union, dockworkers' and seamen's union, and the machine-shop workers' union. Surabaya was made the center of communist trade union activities with the establishment of Indonesian Red Trade Union Secretariat (Secretariaat Vakbonden Merah Indonesia) as a section of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat in Canton. This propaganda drive led to the outbreak of numerous strikes in 1925.

2c. The PKI leadership also decided at the Yogyakarta conference to establish a secret propaganda center in Singapore, again in line with the Comintern decision to create a

<sup>10</sup> Geheim Rapport, "Waarin Is Samengevat Wat Gebleken Is omtrent de Actie der Partij Kommunist Indonesia" (Nederlandsch-Indische Kommunistische Partij), Sectie der 3de Internationale, vanaf Juli 1925 tot en met December 1926, Mr. 497x/1927.

<sup>11</sup> Benda and McVey, *The Communist Uprisings: Key Documents* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, Modern Indonesia Project Translation Series, 1960), p. 1; Geheim Rapport, Mr. 497x/1927.

combined bureau of the Comintern and the Red International of Trade Unions (Profintern) there.

2d. The organization of criminals into *anti-riboet bonds* (anti-ruffian leagues) proceeded in the meantime, leading to disturbances such as strikes, riots, arsons, murders, and other terrorist actions. The DO, Double or Dictatorial Organization, was also organized "without doubt linked with an order probably emanating from the PKI executive in the middle of [1925]."

3a. The communist leaders in the Indies and in the Straits had an undeniable hand in the course of events leading to the revolts. This was demonstrated by the fact that at their meeting in Surakarta [Prambanan] in December 1925 they decided in expectation of financial aid from Moscow to provoke disturbances (revolution) which were to begin in Padang and to spread to Java. This decision was opposed by leaders abroad, above all Tan Malaka, who argued that making a revolution did not depend on the acquisition of money but on the strength of the people, which was insufficient and which had to be created by means of mass action, an uninterrupted series of strikes, demonstrations, and so on. But their difference of opinion had to do with the timing of a revolution, and both were fundamentally in agreement about the efficacy of strikes, riots, and revolution.

3b. The PKI largely succeeded in strengthening its disciplined core after the Yogyakarta conference as demonstrated by the fact that the PKI expanded from thirty-six sections with the total membership of 1,140 in December 1924 to sixty-five sections in May 1926.

3c. In the East, unlike in the West, a small group of well-disciplined and well-organized communists can create discontent to ignite spontaneous outbursts and mass rioting against the established state of affairs by promulgating misleading slogans and false promises, for example promises that the population will be freed from taxation and forced labor and will benefit from a redistribution of property. This was the case with the revolts, and to these ends terrorist methods, such as threats and mistreatment, were not neglected as ways to force the population to join the party.

4. The serious disturbances that took place in West Java as well as outrages elsewhere should therefore be considered consequences of the decision taken at the Surakarta [Prambanan] meeting by the PKI executive to create disturbances. It was this decision which directly led to violent propaganda favoring illegal terrorist action, action which was carried out intensively in the areas where the disturbances took place.<sup>12</sup>

Briefly this was the thesis van der Lely sketched out in the first version of his report, fully developed in the second, and retained in the third. This thesis has been debunked by Ruth T. McVey in her now classic study, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*.<sup>13</sup> For the purpose of our discussion, however, what matters is not its historiographical truthfulness, but the fact that it formed the base line from which a new Dutch political policing strategy evolved, initially directed against the communist movement, but eventually directed against any revolutionary movement in the Indies.

<sup>12</sup> Benda and McVey, *The Communist Uprisings: Key Documents*, pp. 1-18.

<sup>13</sup> See Ruth T. McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), chapters 9-12.

There were two major lessons the report suggested. The first was the international nature of communism. The report understood the communist movement in the Indies as externally induced, transmitted from Moscow to the PKI central leadership and then to the native society. It did not see the movement which manifested itself in many different forms, such as rallies and cadre training courses, newspapers, theaters, school education, trade unionism and strikes, "terrorist" actions, and revolts, as embedded in and resulting from colonial, racial, and class relations in the Indies. In the government view, it was "the phantom of external agitation" that was capable of being political and hence threatening.<sup>14</sup> It is only logical, then, that the basic strategy the thesis recommended was to insulate the Indies from the international communist conspiracy and never to allow communist cadres to regroup and revive the party.

This will become clear if we compare the second and the third versions of van der Lely's report. In the third, two chapters were expanded substantially: chapter 3 ("Contact between the Third International and the PKI via the East, with Singapore as principal liaison center") and chapter 6 ("The Mohammedan religion in the service of communist propaganda"). Four new chapters were added. Titled "How the Party executive here in this country, at the instigation of the Comintern, tries to reach not only the peasants and the petty bourgeoisie through the SR, but also endeavors to win over the intellectual leaders of the nationalist currents for the revolutionary movement," chapter 7 emphasized the importance of the Perhimpoean Indonesia (Association of Indonesia) and left-oriented intellectuals and nationalists as active participants in the Comintern strategy for creating "an anti-imperialist bloc" of communists and nationalists. Chapter 8 discussed communist propaganda activity through cells in the army and the police. Chapter 9 dwelt on the influence developments in China might have on the communist movement in the Indies, focusing on the relationship between the PKI and the KMT (Kuomintang), and recommending Dutch officials maintain vigilant guard to prevent cooperation between Chinese "Soviet propagandists" and natives. And finally, chapter 11 discussed "the disturbances in November 1926, the communist organization and leadership, its drive for the party discipline, and how the leadership in Moscow tried to fan the stoked fire."

All the chapters van der Lely expanded or added in the third version were thus concerned with international links through which the Comintern might penetrate into the Indies. Not surprisingly, therefore, the anti-communist strategy he spelled out called for a general quarantine, insulating the Indies from the Moscow-centered Comintern, implemented through the destruction of communist propaganda centers in Singapore and Mecca, vigilant efforts to guard against any sign of "an anti-imperialist bloc" between the Comintern and young Indonesian intellectuals and nationalists, vigilant tracking of communist fugitives abroad, and surveillance of Chinese "Soviet propagandists."

The other lesson van der Lely offered posited the central importance of Tan Malaka in the communist movement in the Indies. In the first version of his report, he argued that "behind the seemingly clumsy and incoherent efforts of resistance against the

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<sup>14</sup> This phrase, "the phantom of external agitation," is taken from Ann Laura Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation in Sumatra's Plantation Belt, 1870-1979* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 55 and 79.

established regime exists a central idea," and quoted two sections ("tactics and strategy" and "concentration of forces on the place and time advantageous for us") almost in their entirety from Tan Malaka's *Naar de Republiek Indonesia* (Toward the Republic of Indonesia), spending six and a half pages in his fifteen page report on these lengthy passages.<sup>15</sup> In the second and third versions, he argued that "[an] insight into the danger of the action carried out by the Communist leaders is given" by Tan Malaka's writings and he retained the quotation on "concentration of forces" from *Naar de Republiek Indonesia*, while replacing the quotation on "tactics and strategy" with a passage from Tan Malaka's another work, *Semangat Moeda* (The Young Spirit).

To understand what "central idea," "insight," van der Lely found in Tan Malaka's writings, it will be useful to examine briefly what Tan Malaka said in those passages. In the section van der Lely quoted from *Naar de Republiek Indonesia*, Tan Malaka discussed his revolutionary strategy:

If we choose Indonesia as our battlefield, then we will find that the full force of the enemy (economic, political and military) is not gathered together in one place, but dispersed.

The military forces are centered in Priangan. The political center is now in Batavia, but this may soon be united with the military forces in Priangan. One can say that the economic center is the Surakarta [Solo] valley, i.e. the residencies of Yogyakarta, Surakarta, Madiun, Rembang, Kediri and Surabaya, where there are large numbers of sugar mills, railroads, ships, palm oil refineries, machinery shops, and other concerns.

To carry out a successful attack on Dutch imperial power, according to Tan Malaka, "we must divide our revolutionary forces and select the place which is most important for our victory." The question was where. Tan Malaka concluded the Solo valley would be best.

There we may more readily expect to be victorious and to be able to hold our position than in Batavia or Priangan. The industrial workers are concentrated in the Surakarta valley, and also the economic resources which can make the victory more permanent. We can consolidate a political victory if it goes hand in hand with an economic victory (embracing factories, agriculture, transport, and banking institutions).

When he chose the Solo valley, he did not mean to suggest that places such as Priangan, the East Coast of Sumatra, Palembang, and Aceh were unimportant. Successful attacks on these places were extremely important for diverting and misleading the enemy, he said. "The strategic blow can then be dealt at a suitable moment in the Surakarta valley." Therefore, in accordance with this strategy, the party should muster its strength, energy and conviction "to put our army into action in factories, workshops, mines, plantations and such concerns, with a view to training our army for the future struggle."

All the troops under the command of the PKI must be subjected to a central authority. . . It must advance if the central authority deems it necessary. . . [I]f the

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<sup>15</sup> Compare Procureur Generaal aan Gouverneur Generaal, Nov. 27, 1927, Mr. 1174x/1926 and Tan Malaka, *Menuju Republik Indonesia* (Jakarta: Jajasan "Massa," 1962), pp. 42-46 and 48-51.

general staff considers it advisable that the troops withdraw, then they must not be ashamed of withdrawal.

If after skirmishes small and large, today in Java, tomorrow in Sumatra, today in the trade unions, tomorrow in the political parties, we have proved that we possess insight, determination, ability and enthusiasm, then the last blow to be dealt will be dealt with by us, with such force, in the right place and at the right time, that Dutch imperialism will fall, and its fall will be heard in all the other colonies in the East.

Van der Lely then quoted a few passages from *Semangat Moeda* to show "a clear picture of the propaganda methods indirectly recommended by the writer [Tan Malaka] for illegal terrorist actions" and "the poisonous character of his propaganda":

But even if we do not place much hope in freeing Indonesia by means of anarchism, anarchism can arise in connection with the people's attitude in Indonesia. . .

. . . [I]f the government blocks up the crater of the movement, the revolutionary fire will break out elsewhere, e.g. the sugar cane will burn, bridges will be destroyed, trains will be derailed, and the Europeans will be murdered.

It is not the PKI which wants this to happen, it is exclusively the will of the people who have been made desperate and have fled from our organization.

For instance when the people, who are fifty-five million strong, choose death rather than a life as slaves and laugh when they see the mounted police with their billy-clubs; when the prisons are broken open and the leaders freed; when the railroad-workers and the ships' crews refuse to transport their leaders to places of exile; when the soldiers refuse to suppress the movement and to shoot at the innocent unarmed masses, when the Europeans go to sleep with a revolver in their hand and do not dare to eat before their food has been examined by a doctor.

This is all proof of the fact that the spirit of revolution has taken firm root, is spreading everywhere and can only be cured by freedom.

Tan Malaka wrote *Naar de Republiek Indonesia* in early 1925 and published it in Canton in April to criticize the PKI plan to abandon the Sarekat Rakjat after the Yogyakarta conference in December 1924 and give his own views on a party program.<sup>16</sup> The passages van der Lely quoted were meant to present his revolutionary strategy, centering on an attack in the Solo valley, to emphasize the importance of retaining the PKI as a cadre party and the SR as a mass base, and to argue for training "our army" in mass action, not for making a revolution.

*Semangat Moeda* was written somewhat later in the same year and published in Manila in 1926. McVey says that Tan Malaka was more cautious in this tract than in *Naar de Republiek Indonesia*; in this later document, he argued that although the party should prepare for revolution, it could not consider beginning one until it was sure the entire population was behind it: "Any Indonesian revolt will be in vain unless the people are ripe for revolution. We must distrust and oppose . . . all forms of

<sup>16</sup> McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, p. 316.

'putsch.'"<sup>17</sup> The quoted passages were thus meant to describe the revolutionary situation to which mass action should lead, not to be a call for anarchist actions.

But van der Lely was not interested in the historical context in which Tan Malaka wrote these passages. He was interested in finding an insight, a central idea, that would enable him to make sense of "the seemingly clumsy and incoherent efforts of resistance against the established regime" and which would not contradict his thesis concerning an international communist conspiracy. It is no coincidence that van der Lely found what he looked for in Tan Malaka's writings. The author had all the credentials van der Lely deemed important. He was the Comintern representative for the Far East. He was the most sophisticated and prolific among PKI leaders. He wrote in Dutch. And he wrote quotable, graphic passages, nicely capturing van der Lely's nightmares. In the political policing world in which van der Lely lived, Tan Malaka emerged as a kind of double, the worthy enemy who shared the Dutchman's fantasies, glorious for one and nightmarish for the other, yet all parts of the same imagined world. Among all Indonesian communist fugitives abroad, Tan Malaka was thus made the enemy number one, and the passages van der Lely quoted from his writings became the most important and best known documents to provide Dutch officials with evidence and insights about the revolutionary strategy and vision of Indonesian revolutionaries.

These lessons offered by van der Lely established the base line from which the government embarked when it set about defining outer limits, boundaries, for the *pergerakan*. As long as the PKI was the target, there was nothing problematic with the strategy derived from these lessons. But these lessons continued to inform and influence the government even after the PKI had been destroyed and the organizational foci for the target of repression had become diffuse. How then did the government set outer limits for the *pergerakan* and how did the political underground emerge in the face of this new government political policing project in the late 1920s and early 1930s? To understand the answers to these questions, we now have to turn to examining three major political policing cases handled by the *hoofdparket*: the SKBI (Sarekat Kaoem Boeroeh Indonesia—Indonesian Workers' Union) affair, Iwa Koesoema Soemantri's internment, and the Pari (Partai Republik Indonesia) underground.

### The SKBI Affair: Setting an Outer Limit (1)

The Sarekat Kaoem Boeroeh Indonesia (Indonesian Workers' Union) was established formally on July 8, 1928, at a meeting held in Surabaya under the leadership of Soenarjo, editor of the Malay language newspaper, *Indonesia Baroe* (New Indonesia). Soenarjo said, according to ARD chief van der Most, who replaced van der Lely in April 1929, that the SKBI was a continuation of the communist Persarikatan Kaoem Boeroeh (PKB, Workers' Union) but now under nationalist leadership, and that its

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 317. *Semangant Moeda* is no longer available as far as I can tell.

purpose was to achieve better working conditions and not to carry out any political activity.<sup>18</sup>

The SKBI held its first public rally on August 5, 1928, in Surabaya, where Soedjiman, former PKI member and then commissioner of the PNI (Partai Nasional Indonesia, Indonesian National Party) Surabaya branch, was elected its chairman. Some of the other SKBI leaders the PID identified in these early days included: treasurer Soenarjo, former SR member, former secretary of the chauffeurs' union in Surabaya and the machine shop workers' union (SBBE) in Malang, and then (i.e., in late 1928) secretary of the administrative committee of the "Bersatoe" Commercial Press Co. and editor of *Sinar Indonesia* (Ray of Indonesia, formerly *Indonesia Baru*) which "Bersatoe" published; secretary Hadji Mohamad Abas, former PKI member and former chairman of the Red SI (Sarekat Islam) in Banyuwangi; Goenardjo, commissioner of the central committee and chairman of its printers' branch, former PKI member and then (in late 1928) commissioner of the administrative committee of the "Bersatoe" Commercial Press Co.; and Askandar, state railway Surabaya station clerk.<sup>19</sup>

In September 1928, however, Soedjiman was ousted as chairman and replaced by Marsoedi, former PKI member and former secretary of the postal workers' union. A founder of the "Bersatoe" Commercial Press Co. and the editor-in-chief of its newspaper, *Indonesia Bersatoe* (Indonesia Unite, future *Sinar Indonesia*), he was released from prison in August after having served eight months in prison for press offenses. After Marsoedi took over the SKBI leadership, its central committee was reorganized, separate branch committees were established for railway workers, printers, dockers, coachmen and others, member training courses (*cursussen*) were started, and its statutes and working program were written and published in its new monthly organ, *Sinar Kaoem Boeroeh* (Ray of Workers), in November 1928. Member training courses were run under the tight control of the SKBI leadership. Members of the executive committee read such texts as *Pedoman PKI* (PKI Directives), *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, and Soemantri's *Rasa Merdeka* (Taste of Freedom), and discussed topics such as "imperialism" and "party discipline" for courses.<sup>20</sup> Texts were then written by the first and second secretaries of the executive committee, and leaders read these texts aloud at the courses. Branches were established in Bangil and Banyuwangi in December 1928.<sup>21</sup>

The prosecutor general wrote in his letter to the governor general in May 1929 that SKBI branches were in Surabaya, Banyuwangi, and Bangil, that a new branch was recently established in Medan by Mr. Iwa Koesoema Soemantri, and that preparations were reportedly being made for the establishment of branches and circles (*kring*) in Magelang, Purworejo, Kutoarjo, Malang, Probolinggo, Kertosono, Mojokerto, and Kotaraja. The largest SKBI base was in Surabaya, the prosecutor general reported, with

<sup>18</sup> Wd. Hoofd van den Dienst der Algemeene Recherche (van der Most), Rapport over de resultaten van het tegen de Sarekat Kaoem Boeroeh Indonesia (S.K.B.I.) ingesteld onderzoek, ten vervolge op mijn voorloopig rapport van 30 Juli 1929, Oct. 17, 1929, Mr. 1017x/1929.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. See also Bijlage III (Staat van leiders en hun antecedenten) in Mr. 627x/1929.

<sup>20</sup> For *Rasa Merdeka*, see Takashi Shiraishi, ed., *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912-1926* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 246-248.

<sup>21</sup> Wd. Hoofd van den Dienst der Algemeene Recherche, Rapport, Mr. 1017x/1929.

450 members, 175 of whom belonged to the branch for railway workers, eighty-one to the branch for dockworkers, and fifty-two to that for printers. A new organ, *Sendjata Indonesia* (Weapon of Indonesia, former *Sinar Indonesia*) started in April 1929 with Marsoedi as editor-in-chief.<sup>22</sup>

Most SKBI leaders were ex-PKI/SR (Sarekat Ra'jat)/trade union activists, and they led the SKBI as PKI/SR/trade union activists led unions in 1924 and 1925. But there were two crucial differences between the SKBI and the trade union movement in "the communist period." First, Indonesians knew that the government would never tolerate any attempt to revive a "communist" movement and associated anything "communist" (such as PKI, SR, VSTP and other communist trade unions) with Digoel. Second, many of its leaders had been marked as "communists" by the PID even before they established the SKBI. Because it was led by these alleged "communists," the SKBI was watched closely by the PID and penetrated by spies and informers from the beginning. The case of Marsoedi, the SKBI chairman, epitomized these problems. He had been under Surabayan PID surveillance since 1927 at the latest. He was mentioned three times in 1927 alone by van der Lely in his monthly political police survey as editor-in-chief of *Sinar Indonesia*, as leader of its largely "communist" publication committee (by which he apparently meant the "Bersatoe" Commercial Press Co.), and as a man who tried to establish a new political party, National Party of the Indonesian People (Nationale Partij Rajat Indonesia). He was also a tainted man. When he was arrested in November 1926, he provided the Surabaya PID with important information which led to the arrest of "several PKI leaders who had eluded the police till that moment." He was released as a reward.<sup>23</sup> He was arrested again in 1927 for press offenses in the publication, *Sinar Indonesia*, which he edited. He served eight months in prison, but was allowed to return to society after that. Perhaps people did not know he had sold his friends in November 1926, but they naturally wondered why such a known communist was not sent to Digoel.

The governor general had been alerted to the SKBI by his adviser, van der Plas. He was convinced of the communist character of the SKBI. In a report he submitted to De Graeff in April 1929, he referred to a decision at the recent Comintern congress in July 1928 to revive the communist trade union movement in the Indies. He also mentioned, based on ARD monthly surveys, that a branch was established in Medan by Mr. Iwa Koesoema Soemantri, "former chairman of the SPPL [Seamen's and Dockers' Union] and the Perhimpoean Indonesia and former representative of Semaoen in the Netherlands, who stayed in Moscow for some time, now more or less aligned with the PNI," and also that the SKBI was in communication with the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat in Canton.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> "Advocaat-generaal (R.J.M. Verheijen) aan gouverneur-generaal (De Graeff), 15 mei 1929," in R. C. Kwantes, ed., *De Ontwikkeling van de Nationalistische Beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië: Derde stuk 1928-Aug. 1933* [hereafter *De Ontwikkeling: 1928-Aug. 1933*] (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, Uitgaven van de Commissie voor Bronnenpublicatie betreffende de Geschiedenis van Nederlandsch-Indië 1900-1942 van het Nederlands Historisch Genootschap, 10, 1981), pp. 212-221.

<sup>23</sup> Poeze, PPO: 1927-1928, pp. 21, 50, 118; Resident van Soerabaja aan Gouverneur van Oost Java, Sept. 20, 1929, Mr. 1191x/1929.

<sup>24</sup> "Nota van Ch. O. van der Plas (td. wd. adviseur voor inlandse zaken) april 1929," pp. 207-212.

Van der Plas knew that the SKBI had not enjoyed much success as a movement. Most trade unions shunned the SKBI, he wrote to De Graeff; SKBI leaders had asked the PNI to take over its leadership, but nationalists, Surabaya study club and PNI members, distrusted “the SKBI promoters and leaders, all somewhat shady figures.”

Their communist past, their action first in *Sinar Indonesia*, later in *Indonesia Bersatoe*, and then in the SKBI, do not tally with the impunity they seem to enjoy, people say. “If they are bona fide communists,” people told me, “we should be crazy to let them take us in a tow and it does not make any sense at all that the government, which sent so many hundreds to Digoel, does nothing against them or they are spies—as we believe—but then we are not so damn as they think.”

SKBI leaders were seen by some nationalists as “agents provocateurs, at least as spies,” van der Plas continued, but still there was a possibility for the PNI to take over its leadership and eliminate elements they distrusted.<sup>25</sup> His report was inconclusive. He did not suggest any definite course of action against the SKBI, but advised the governor general to instruct the *hoofdparquet* to submit a detailed report on the SKBI and its leaders and explain how it was going to deal with it.

Advocate general Verheijen sent a letter to the governor general on May 15, 1929.<sup>26</sup> He agreed with van der Plas that the SKBI was being built “along the lines stipulated by the Third International” and that there was “no certainty that the action of the SKBI would remain within the boundaries set for the maintenance of public quiet and order.” But there was no evidence, he argued, that it was established “at the instigation of Moscow” and that it had any relationship with the Anti-Imperialist League, the Pan-Pacific Labour Union Secretariat, or other foreign organizations. Besides, he pointed out, the SKBI “had carried out no anti-government propaganda and made little effort to move the employees to a recalcitrant attitude against the employers, so that it cannot be attested that the leaders’ conduct now threatens the public quiet and order.” He also dismissed as irrelevant van der Plas’s worry about the PNI taking over the SKBI leadership, saying that the PNI would go into trade unionism anyway and that the destruction of the SKBI might make it easier for the PNI to carry out trade union activities. His position was clear: no intervention for now; it was enough to keep the SKBI under police surveillance.<sup>27</sup>

Verheijen then discussed at length van der Plas’s assertion that “the entire Surabaya group, the PNI members there included, do not trust the promoters and leaders of the SKBI and that they are now seen by a part of nationalists as agents provocateurs, at least as spies.” He pointed out that “the majority of the leading figures of the SKBI” were “members, even commissioners, of the PNI [Surabaya] branch” and that “it is not clear at all to me on what grounds people can suspect that the government is using the leaders of the SKBI as agents provocateurs or as spies.”<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 209-210.

<sup>26</sup> For reasons we do not know, advocate general R. J. M. Verheijen served as de facto acting prosecutor general from May to November 1929 when he was formally appointed prosecutor general.

<sup>27</sup> “Advocaat-generaal (R. J. M. Verheijen) aan gouverneur-generaal (De Graeff), 15 mei 1929, in Kwantes, *De Ontwikkeling: 1928-Aug. 1933*, pp. 212-221.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 220-221.

It is odd enough for the advocate general to argue that the SKBI leaders were not agents provocateurs or spies but genuine activists. Odder still, however, he submitted two Surabayan PID reports to the governor general on May 24, 1929 to show that measures were being taken by the SKBI executive to purge police spies and that there was no evidence, despite the suspicions of Surabayan nationalists, "that the promoters and the leaders of the SKBI acted as a group of spies or agents provocateurs of the government."<sup>29</sup> The first report, written by police *mantri* Soesilo, dated May 15, 1929, said that according to information he obtained from "spy S1 and S2," an executive committee meeting held on May 11, "attended by the executive committee members and several trusted members of the SKBI," decided to purge Marsaid, chairman of the SKBI council, "because he mingled too much with PID agents and was suspected of being a police spy." The other report, written by police *mantri* Oemar on May 16, said that according to "an informer [*berichtgever*]'s information," Marsaid was dismissed from the SKBI on May 12 at a members' meeting "attended by forty people."<sup>30</sup>

These reports show how deeply the SKBI was penetrated by spies. One wonders, then, why Verheijen was so incensed at van der Plas's allegation and so insistent on the SKBI being an organization of genuine activists, not a group of agents provocateurs and spies. The explanation may rest on a semantic distinction. Verheijen merely said that the SKBI leaders were not a group of agents provocateurs, but he never denied that spies and informers had penetrated into the SKBI. Yet one suspects that there was more to it. The *hoofdparket* knew that many SKBI leaders such as Marsoedi, Hadji Mohammad Abas, and Soenarjo were former PKI members. It would have been very easy to intern them to Digoel as "PKI and SR leaders and propagandists" if the government so desired. But there were at least three important factors the *hoofdparket* had to weigh in deciding "the right moment to intervene" in the SKBI.

The first involved memories of the recent past that influenced the government's judgment. Officials remembered the militancy of Indonesian trade unions in the late 1910s and early 1920s. Before the revolts, the VSTP, the railway workers' union, was the most powerful and best organized union under the communist leadership. It was devastated in the 1923 strike, but revived in two years, with seventy-seven branches and 8,293 members by November 1925, a constituency led by young, militant branch leaders who were also involved in the PKI and SR as well as in other trade unions. As a result, Surabaya emerged in 1925 as a major center of communist trade union activity, with nine hundred members in the VSTP, 450 in the postal workers' union, 1,500 in the dockers' and seamen's union, and two thousand in the machine shop workers' union.<sup>31</sup> With the destruction of the PKI, the VSTP as well as other unions under communist leadership collapsed. In their place, a new union, the PBST (Perhimpunan Beambte Spoor dan Tram, Railway and Tramway Officials' Union) was established in July 1927 and registered a membership of 5,500 in August 1927. But it was no VSTP. When its first congress was held in January 1928, a proposal was made to attach the word,

<sup>29</sup> Advocate General to Governor General, May 24, 1929, Mr. 485x/1929.

<sup>30</sup> Mantri Politie afd. PID Soesilo, Geheim Rapport, May 15, 1929, and Mantri Politie Oemar, Geheim Rapport, May 16, 1929, both in Mr. 485x/1929.

<sup>31</sup> John Ingleson, *In Search of Justice: Workers and Unions in Colonial Java, 1908-1926* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, Asian Studies Association of Australia Southeast Asia Publications Series, No. 12), pp. 269, 271, and 296.

"Indonesia," to its name. The proposal was turned down on the grounds that it was not "official." In short, this new union was well tamed. As Petrus Blumberger wrote in 1931, it "keeps itself aloof from the political and strives to stay in the terrain of pure union activity."<sup>32</sup> Given its past history, however, no one could easily dismiss the possibility for the revival of a militant railway union, all the more so because in less than a year the SKBI had succeeded in organizing 150 railway workers in Surabaya, and its propaganda activity was being carried out among railway workers in many cities in Java.

The second factor, related to the first, was the question of a trade union central. Since the collapse of the Red Trade Union Central headquartered in Surabaya in 1926, there was no central body established for the trade union movement. But efforts were being made to establish one, both by the PSI (Partai Sarekat Islam) and nationalists. As Petrus Blumberger wrote, the SKBI positioned itself right in the middle of "the silent struggle for the hegemony over the trade union movement between the Sarekat Islam members and Indonesian nationalists."<sup>33</sup> The *hoofdparket* was watching carefully what position other unions would take toward the SKBI, as shown in van der Most's report dated October 17, 1929, in which he said that the PBST, the pawnshop workers' union (led by Soerjopranoto, PSI leader), the postal workers' union (Midpost), and the chauffeurs' union stayed away from the SKBI.<sup>34</sup>

And finally there was the question of PNI-led trade unionism addressed by van der Plas. The PNI congress held in Batavia in May 1929 decided to place greater emphasis on establishing trade unions and peasant organizations. This action concerned the *hoofdparket*, all the more so because its Surabaya branch under Anwari's leadership took trade unionism more seriously than the central leadership in Bandung.<sup>35</sup> It was most likely this move on the part of the PNI which prompted van der Plas to alert the governor general to the presence and potential of the SKBI. Verheijen dismissed the importance of SKBI for the PNI, but this does not mean that he considered PNI-led trade unionism to be insignificant. He regarded it as a serious force, but nonetheless believed the PNI would go into trade unionism whatever might happen to its relationship with the SKBI.

As we have seen, Verheijen concluded his letter to the governor general dated May 15, 1929, saying that "I am of opinion that the time for government measures to set limits to the efforts of the SKBI, that is to prevent their efforts altogether, has not come yet, in any case for now." The SKBI was not a group of agents provocateurs and spies, as he said. But he knew police spies had penetrated in the SKBI, which meant that the *hoofdparket* would learn about whatever important decisions the SKBI leadership might make. There was no reason to worry that the SKBI might hatch a plot in the dark. It could be destroyed at any moment the *hoofdparket* chose. The governor general could choose the right moment to destroy it and to impress the government's standpoint on

<sup>32</sup> John Theodoor Petrus Blumberger, *De Nationalistische Beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië* (Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1987, originally published in 1931), p. 362.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 363.

<sup>34</sup> Wd. Hoofd van den Dienst der Algemeene Recherche, Rapport, Mr. 1017x/1929.

<sup>35</sup> John Ingleson, *Road to Exile: The Indonesian Nationalist Movement, 1927-1934* (Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979, Asian Studies Associations of Australia Southeast Asia Publications Series, No. 1), pp. 90-94.

the popular mind. Besides, the organization could be an ideal bait. Leave it for a while. If railway workers, dockers, printers and other workers joined the SKBI, let them. If the PBST, the Midpost, and other non-communist unions joined the SKBI, let them. If the PNI agreed to take over the SKBI leadership, let them. The *hoofdparket* would intervene at the right moment, and destroy any militant union, any political trade union central, and the PNI once for all. The only thing he wanted to avoid for the moment was a premature intervention at the instruction of the governor general, instigated by that meddlesome van der Plas, because he knew De Graeff would not want to destroy the PNI, if the crack-down were occasioned by agents provocateurs and spies.

The *hoofdparket* thus kept watching the SKBI. In a report submitted to the governor general on July 18, 1929, ARD chief van der Most noted stagnation of SKBI activity: no public rallies and member training courses had been held since June; its organ, *Sendjata Indonesia*, had stopped publication because of financial difficulties; and workers appeared to be in no mood to join the SKBI under Marsoedi's leadership. In Bangil, the branch membership had grown to a mere forty members. A circle was established in Sidoarjo, supported mainly by state railway and sugar factory workers. Another branch was established in Yogyakarta, van der Most continued, mainly with tailors, batik printers, and smiths as members. The Persarekatan Sopher Mataram (PSM, Mataram chauffeurs' union) also participated in the SKBI. The central figure in Yogyakarta was Moeljono, alias Tarmoedji, former PKI and SR leader and propagandist in Kediri, who was not interned to Digoel because he was in prison in November 1926 and released in August 1928. He had participated in the establishment of the PSM, became its vice-chairman, joined the SKBI, and was appointed SKBI commissioner for Central Java. In Surakarta, Surabayan SKBI leaders had made contact with "communist" Siti Aminah, alias Woro Trisoelo, wife of Trisoelo from Surabaya, who was now in Digoel, and she in turn had introduced them to Sadino Martopoespito and Soemokasdiro, alias Rasimin, both PNI candidate members. They formed a provisional committee in Solo. This was about all. In no other places such as Banyumas, Cepu, Kudus, Blora, Semarang, and Pekalongan, had the SKBI met with much success. Verheijen again advised the governor general that there was no need to clamp down on the SKBI; it was enough to watch it closely.<sup>36</sup>

On the same day, July 18, 1929, however, the resident of Surabaya sent to the advocate general a secret police report from Surabayan PID assistant *wedana* Soentoro, dated July 16. In this report, Soentoro wrote that "Spy S3 showed me a letter dated May 30, 1929, which originated from the Secretariat of the Anti-Imperialist League and was addressed to the central executive committee of the SKBI." In this letter the Secretariat of the Anti-Imperialist League informed the SKBI that it was admitted to

<sup>36</sup> Deputy ARD Chief (van der Most) to Attorney General, July 17, 1929, and Attorney General to Governor General, July 18, 1929, both in Mr. 695x/1929. Also see Deputy ARD Chief (van der Most), Voorloopig Rapport over de tegen de Sarekat Kaoem Boeroeh Indonesia (S.K.B.I.) getroffen maatregelen, July 30, 1929, Mr. 731x/1929; Attorney General to Governor General, Nov. 15, 1929, Mr. 1192x/1929; Adjunct Chief Commissioner of Police, Surakarta, to Resident of Surakarta, Aug. 10, 1929, and Attorney General to Governor General, Nov. 15, 1929, both in Mr. 1193x/1929.

the League "as the first Indonesian member." Soentoro submitted with his report a photographic reproduction of the envelope and the letter.<sup>37</sup>

Upon receiving this report, the *hoofdparket* decided to act. On July 24, the advocate general sent a telegram to the resident of Surabaya as well as the other regional chiefs in Java and Madura and the governor of the East Coast of Sumatra to carry out "police searches of SKBI offices and houses of its leaders and propagandists" on July 26 and to report to the *hoofdparket* by telegram on "any SKBI contact with other associations and who formed the linkage between the League and the SKBI in Holland."<sup>38</sup> In the police sweep, SKBI activists marked by the PID were arrested in Batavia, Bandung, Padalarang, Semarang, Blora, Banyumas, Yogyakarta, Surakarta, Kediri, Blitar, Pasuruan, Malang, Probolinggo, Jember, Surabaya, Bangil, Banyuwangi, and Makassar, including twenty-five in Surabaya, twenty in Surakarta, and twenty in Yogyakarta. Most of them were released soon after, but the government eventually decided in December 1929 to intern six "SKBI leaders and propagandists" to Digoel: Marsoedi (chairman); Goenardjo, alias Hardjosepoetro (commissioner of the executive committee and chairman of the branch for printers and chauffeurs); Ahija Soepardi, alias Ahjadiredjo (former VSTP member and chairman of the branch for railway workers) in Surabaya; Sadino Martopoespito (SKBI propagandist and batik trader); Soemokasdiro, alias Kasimin (SKBI propagandist and former station clerk at the Solo-Balapan station) in Surakarta; and Moeljono, alias Tarmoedji, in Yogyakarta. Interestingly, SKBI secretary Askandar was not interned, though he was responsible for SKBI correspondence with the League. No doubt he was assistant *wedana* Soentoro's "Spy S3."<sup>39</sup>

On August 6, 1929, the government representative for general affairs made an announcement in the *Volkraad* on the Anti-Imperialist League, saying that "the government would not tolerate any direct organizational contact between associations and persons in the Indies and the League or any other association under strong communist influence. As soon as enough evidence is available to prove such contact, the government will intervene. This has always been the standpoint of the government, and it will always remains so." He also offered "an explanation for the government standpoint regarding the trade unions" on the same occasion. He stated that he "did not want to deny the desirability of a healthy trade union," but made it clear that "all dogmas derived from the West" should be shunned and that "the

<sup>37</sup> Assistant *wedana* of the PID branch (Soentoro), *Geheim Rapport*, Surabaya, July 16, 1929, Mr. 731x/1929.

<sup>38</sup> The *hoofdparket* soon learned from the Dutch Intelligence Service that Roestam Effendi and Ticoalu Pandean, who ran a press bureau for colonial politics in The Hague, formed the link between the SKBI and the Anti-Imperialist League. *Procureur Generaal aan Gouverneur Generaal*, Aug. 27, 1929, Mr. 812x/1929.

<sup>39</sup> Deputy ARD Chief (van der Most), *Voorloopig Rapport*, July 30, 1929, Mr. 731x/1929; Deputy ARD Chief (van der Most), *Rapport over de resultaten van het tegen de Sarekat Kaoem Boeroeh Indonesia (SKBI) ingesteld onderzoek, ten verfolge op mijn voorloopig rapport van Juli 30, 1929*, Oct. 17, 1929 and *Attorney General to Governor General*, Oct. 21, 1929, both in Mr. 1017x/1929; *Attorney General to Governor General*, Nov. 13, 1929 and *Resident of Surabaya to Governor of East Java*, Sept. 20, 1929, in Mr. 1191x/1929; *Attorney General to Governor General*, Nov. 15, 1929, Mr. 1192x/1929; *Attorney General to Governor General*, Nov. 15, 1929, and *Adjunct Chief Commissioner of Police, Surakarta Branch, to Resident of Surakarta*, Aug. 10, 1929, both in Mr. 1193x/1929; *Uittreksel uit het Register der Besluiten van den Gouverneur Generaal van Nederlandsch Indië*, April 5, 1930, Mr. 393x/1930.

government does not regard the so-called strike article in the criminal code (art. 161 bis) as damaging for *bona fide* trade union activity in any respect, but as indispensable against the *mala fide* unions." As Petrus Blumberger interpreted rightly, his message was clear: Indonesians were expected to stay away from "party political, socialist, and nationalist dogmas about 'capitalism' and 'imperialism,'" and "work with the government to look after the economic interests of the employees in harmonious agreement with the general interest of the land and people."<sup>40</sup>

The SKBI was neither illegal nor clandestine. Since it was led by former PKI/SR/trade union activists and had been penetrated by spies and informers, however, nationalists perceived it as "shady" from the beginning, and its shadiness was confirmed by the government clamp-down. Its significance as an organization lay not in its constitution or activities, but in the opportunity it offered the government to make its standpoint clear: the government would tolerate no direct organizational contact with the Anti-Imperialist League or any other organization under communist influence; no politically inspired "dogmatic" trade union movement would be allowed; and finally, the PNI had better keep its own trade movement activities within proper bounds. This last warning was clearly communicated, though the *hoofdparket* had not found any direct link between the SKBI and the PNI in the July police searches.

## Iwa's Internment: Setting an Outer Limit (2)

### a. Framing Iwa Koesoema Soemantri

Mr. Iwa Koesoema Soemantri was also arrested on July 26, 1929, in the police sweep against the SKBI, but his case was dealt with separately from the beginning, even though the *hoofdparket* initially believed that he was a central figure in the SKBI Medan branch in December 1929.<sup>41</sup>

Van der Plas described Iwa as "Former chairman of the SPPL and the Perhimpoean Indonesia and former representative of Semaoen in the Netherlands, who stayed in Moscow for some time, now more or less aligned with the PNI," making it clear that Iwa had long been under surveillance, at least since 1924, when he became secretary of the newly established SPLI (Sarekat Pegawai Laoet Indonesia, Indonesian Seamen's Union) under Semaoen in Amsterdam.<sup>42</sup> When Iwa returned to the Indies with a law degree from Leiden (hence his title, Meester in de Rechten, Mr.) on November 11, 1927, the prosecutor general duly reported the event on the same day to the governor general. He reported that the traveler had returned to Ciamis, his home town in West Java where his parents lived (his father was a retired school inspector), while noting again that Iwa had belonged to the left wing of the PI (Perhimpoean Indonesia) in the Netherlands, stayed briefly in Moscow, and been appointed as PI representative to the Comintern.<sup>43</sup> Since then, he often appeared in the ARD monthly surveys. The survey for November 1927, for instance, noted that Iwa was planning to

<sup>40</sup> Petrus Blumberger, *De Nationalistische Beweging*, pp. 369 and 374.

<sup>41</sup> Advocate General (Verheijen) to Governor General (De Graeff), October 21, 1929, Mr. 1017x/1929.

<sup>42</sup> Van der Plas said Iwa was secretary of the SPPL, mixing up the SPPL the PKI established in Java in 1925 and the SPLI which Semaoen established in Amsterdam in 1924.

<sup>43</sup> Attorney General (Duyfjes) to Governor General (De Graeff), Nov. 11, 1927, Mr. 1341x/1929.

move to Medan. That for February 1928 reported that he remitted money to Soebardjo, then working at the Anti-Imperialist League Secretariat in Berlin. The survey for March 1928 noted his attendance at PNI closed meetings held in Bandung under Soekarno's leadership.<sup>44</sup> And when he moved to Medan on April 3, 1928, the chief commissioner of the Batavian police informed his counterpart in Medan of his departure by telegram.<sup>45</sup>

Iwa most likely did not move to Medan because of his nationalist politics, though no doubt he was a nationalist, like many of his friends who studied in Holland. When he returned to Java, he had worked briefly at Mr. Iskaq Tjokrohadisoerjo's law firm in Bandung and then at Mr. Sartono's in Batavia. Both were friends of Iwa's since their Holland days and were active in the PNI. He also came to know Ir. Soekarno, PNI chairman, in late 1927, when he was in Bandung. But he went to Medan, as he says in his autobiography, which he never intended to publish, because his uncle, Abdul Manap, told him that there was no Indonesian lawyer in Medan and invited him to come.<sup>46</sup> Seen from the *hoofdparket's* perspective, however, Iwa belonged to a small cadre of "intellectuals," even one of the most dangerous among them because of his Moscow past, with whom the Comintern encouraged the Indonesian communists to seek cooperation or the formation of "an anti-imperialist bloc." He would not have come to Medan, the *hoofdparket* was convinced, for any reason other than political.

A burgeoning "frontier" town and a European-dominated commercial enclave in the late nineteenth century, Medan had by the late 1920s become the "Paris" of the Indies, with a population of 76,600 in 1930, of which natives made up 41,300, Chinese 27,300, and Europeans 4,300. It was the capital of the residency of the East Coast of Sumatra, and, more importantly, the commercial center of "Deli," shorthand for the plantation belt centered in Deli, Serdang, and Langkat, what Tan Malaka called "a land of gold, a haven for the capitalist class, but also a land of sweat, tears, and death, a hell for the proletariat."<sup>47</sup> The population of East Sumatra in 1930 was 1.69 million, of which Javanese, with 600,000 (35.0 percent), formed the majority, while other major racial and ethnic groups included Malays (335,000; 19.9 percent), Chinese (193,000; 11.4 percent), Karo Bataks (145,000; 8.6 percent), Simalungun Bataks (95,000; 5.6 percent), Toba Bataks (74,000; 4.4 percent), Mandailing and Angkola Bataks (60,000; 3.5 percent), Minangkabaus (51,000; 3.0 percent), Sundanese (44,000; 2.6 percent), Banjarese (31,000; 1.9 percent), and Europeans (11,000; 0.7 percent).<sup>48</sup>

The central institution in East Sumatra was not the state, a conglomeration of the Indies regional administration, local sultanates, principalities, statelets, and other

<sup>44</sup> Poeze, *PPO: 1927-1928*, pp. 169, 267, 274.

<sup>45</sup> Rapport No. 2, in Chef der Recherche, *Algemeene Politie Batavia (Maseland)*, Extra-Rapport, Sept. 10, 1928, Mr. 315x/1930.

<sup>46</sup> Iwa Koesoemasoemantra, *Indonesia Minzoku Shugi no Genryu: Iwa Koesoemasoemantri Jiden* (Tokyo: Waseda University Press, 1975), pp. 65–66. His Indonesian original is not published.

<sup>47</sup> Tan Malaka, *From Jail to Jail*, Volume One, translated and introduced by Helen Jarvis (Athens: Ohio University Monographs in International Studies Southeast Asia Series, No. 83), p. 43.

<sup>48</sup> Michael van Langenberg, "National Revolution in North Sumatra, Sumatra Timur and Tapanuli, 1942-1950," PhD dissertation, University of Sydney, 1976, pp. 959–960; Anthony Reid, *The Blood of the People: Revolution and the End of Traditional Rule in Northern Sumatra* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 43 and 58.

“autonomous” units, but the Western (i.e., European and American) tobacco, rubber, palm oil, and other kinds of plantations, which were developed since the 1870s in this sparsely populated but fertile region with imported white planters and imported Chinese and Javanese coolies, and which developed in turn a network of roads, the railway line linking Langkat, Deli, and Serdang, a telegraph line, harbors, waterworks, and schools. A glimpse at the situation in Deli tells us a great deal about the state of the region. As Rob Nieuwenhuys aptly said, “Deli was an island.” “In Deli everything had to be imported, the employees as well as coolies. The staff came directly from Europe, the coolies from Java. Deli was a conglomeration of white settlements with Chinese and Javanese colonies encircling it. But they were all foreigners, no one had roots.”<sup>49</sup> Tan Malaka, who lived in Deli in 1919–1921, would only add:

The conflict between the white, stupid, arrogant, cruel colonizers and the colored nation of driven, cheated, oppressed, and exploited slaves . . . fouled the atmosphere in Deli and gave rise to constant attacks by the coolies on the plantation Dutch. Frequently just one insult or criticism was enough to cause a coolie to draw his machete from his belt and attack the *Tuan Besar* [plantation administrator] or *Tuan Kecil* [white assistant] then and there, for his heart was filled with such a hatred for it all.<sup>50</sup>

Indeed, collective labor protest and physical assaults on management, though never with such organizational sophistication, frequency, and political inspiration as the planters claimed, were common, and increasing in the late 1920s. From 1925 to 1930, Stoler says, reported assaults on overseers (whites and non-whites) rose from thirty-one to 220, and the number perpetrated specifically against European staff more than doubled for the same period. In 1924 it was calculated that an assistant in fifteen years of service had a 3 percent chance of being killed by a worker and at least a 50 percent probability of being physically assaulted.<sup>51</sup>

The regional administration and plantation industry were highly sensitive to any sign of unrest in plantations, and they blamed communist agitators, extremist elements, and nationalist troublemakers for the increase in physical assaults and labor protest. The Deli Planters Association (DPV, Deli Planters Vereeniging) and the General Association of Rubber Planters in the East Coast of Sumatra (AVROS, Algemeene Vereeniging van Rubberplanters ter Oostkust van Sumatra) jointly established a private intelligence service, the DPV-AVROS Intelligence, in October 1927, which was headquartered in Medan and headed by a former East Sumatran PID chief; it worked closely with the regional intelligence to gather information on “the religious and political trends among the plantation workers” and tracked down runaway contract coolies.<sup>52</sup>

This does not mean that the *pergerakan* was strong in Medan and made significant inroads in “politicizing” plantation workers. Whether in the name of the BO (Boedi

<sup>49</sup> R. Nieuwenhuys, *Oost-Indische Spiegel* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1978), quoted in Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation*, p. 14.

<sup>50</sup> Tan Malaka, *From Jail to Jail*, Volume One, p. 47.

<sup>51</sup> Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation*, pp. 42, 53, and 62.

<sup>52</sup> Onderzoek inzake het opvatten van gedroste contractanten door den te Medan gevestigden inlichtingsdienst der DPV en AVROS, Mr. 145x/1929.

Oetomo), the SI, the Insulinde, the PKI, or the Sumatera Thawalib, the *pergerakan*, largely confined to Medan and other East Sumatran small towns and expressed most livelily in native journalism, hardly touched on plantation workers. Its constituency was confined largely to a small group of native civil servants, railway workers of the Deli Sumatran Railway, Mandailing and Minangkabau Islamic reformists, and urban "middle class" native professionals. Besides, its radical wing represented by largely Mandailing and Minangkabau PKI activists and *kaum muda* militants of the Sumatera Thawalib, was destroyed in the wake of the revolts with the internment of about thirty people from East Sumatra, including Abdul Xarim M.S. (of future Digoel Concert), Chalid Salim, and Urbanus Pardede, leader of the PKI Pematang Siantar section.<sup>53</sup>

When Iwa arrived in Medan in April 1928, the *pergerakan* in East Sumatra was thus not very lively, with at most a few hundred people active in political, religious, social, youth, and other associations, closely watched by the PID and the DPV-AVROS intelligence, and hemmed in by opposition from the regional administration, the plantation industry, the hereditary rulers and chiefs, and conservative religious leaders. Yet all the same Iwa found himself right in the middle of this small *pergerakan* world as soon as he settled down. With his Leiden law degree, his past as PI chairman, and his friendship with such PNI luminaries as Soekarno, Sartono, and Iskaq Tjokrohadisoerjo, he was looked up to as a leader by *pergerakan* activists and was identified by the PID as a "PNI propagandist" dedicated "to win over the majority of the population to his own political line to achieve 'freedom from the Netherlands' in an illegal way."<sup>54</sup>

To measure the extent of Iwa's involvement in Indonesian associational life in East Sumatra, above all in Medan, and how closely he was watched by the PID, we only need to look at "hard facts" contained in the summary of regional intelligence reports the East Sumatran PID chief compiled after Iwa's arrest.

1928

April 3: Arrived at Belawan on board "Plancius" from Batavia; stayed with municipality veterinarian Abdul Manap.

April: "Mr. Iwa Koesoema Soemantri has opened a law firm at 12 Hüttenbach street, here [in Medan]. The chairman of the Jong Islamieten Bond, named [Mohammad] Dasoeki, a family member of Mr. Iwa Koesoema Soemantri's, works there as a clerk."

May 19: a members' meeting held by the BO in its club house at the Tjong Yong Hian street, Medan, for the twentieth anniversary; attended by about eighty people, including representatives of Minangkabau Saijo [Minangkabau friendship association] and the Journalists' Union; "Mr. Iwa Koesoema Soemantri, the well-known nationalist from Weltevreden, was also present."

July 20: The first issue of Malay language daily *Matahari Indonesia* [The Sun of Indonesia] appeared under Iwa's chief editorship.

<sup>53</sup> Van Langenberg, "National Revolution," pp. 120–131; Reid, *The Blood of the People*, pp. 59–61.

<sup>54</sup> Chief of the Regional Intelligence, Medan, East Coast of Sumatra, to Governor of the East Coast of Sumatra, July 22, 1929, Mr. 315x/1930.

Oct. 21: The BO held a meeting in its club house to establish a branch of the youth organization Pemoeda Indonesia [Indonesian Youth]; Iwa was appointed as adviser.

Nov. 6: Harijo Soedjono, director of the Nationale Bank established by the Surabaya Study Club, arrived in Medan and stayed at the Grand Hotel; he contacted Iwa and Abdul Manap.

1929

Jan. 8: The Medan branch of the Jong Islamieten Bond held a *slametan* [ritual feast] in its club house at the Oranje Nassau street; attended by seventy people, including Iwa and Abdul Manap.

Jan. 12: A meeting was held in the club house of Minangkabau Saijo to establish a branch of youth organization Pemoeda Indonesia formally; about 250 people attended, including Iwa, Abdul Manap, Mangaradja Ihoetan [editor-in-chief of *Pewartu Deli*], and Mohammad Dasoeki.

Jan. 31: *Matahari Indonesia* ceased publication.

Feb. 3: The Kaoetamaan Istri, a women's branch of the BO, celebrated its one year anniversary in the BO club house; attended by two hundred people; Iwa and Abdul Manap, BO Medan branch chairman, both gave a speech.

Feb. 24: Chauffeurs' Union Persatoean Motorist Indonesia (PMI) was established in the BO club house with Iwa as "provisional adviser."

March 16 and 17: The Opium Regie Bond Loear Djawa dan Madoera [Government Opium Monopoly Workers' Union outside Java and Madura] held a congress, attended by forty-five branch representatives; Iwa elected its chairman.

March 24: The Persatoean Motorist Indonesia held a member meeting in the BO club house; Iwa attended the meeting as adviser. On the same day, Executive members of the BO, the Persatoean Motorist Indonesia, the Pemoeda Indonesia, and the Nationaal Indonesische Padvinderij [National Indonesian Scout Movement] met at Iwa's office to discuss the establishment of a club house.

April 14: The Tebing Tinggi Sepakat held a public meeting in Tebing Tinggi; Iwa gave a speech.

May 4: The Pemoeda Indonesia held a party in the BO club house; Iwa gave a speech.

May 26: Two branches of the Opium Regie Bond held a joint meeting at the club house of Taman Persatoean Indonesia [Garden of Indonesian Unity], under Iwa's leadership.

June 1: Mr. Soenarjo, a "well-known PNI leader," arrived in Medan.

June 16: A meeting was held under the leadership of Mr. Iwa Koesoema Soemantri and Mr. Soenarjo in the club house of Taman Persatoean Indonesia to discuss the establishment of a "Volksuniversiteit" in Medan.<sup>55</sup>

It should be kept in mind that any information derived from spies and informers, what Iwa "reportedly" said, and/or any speculation on the part of PID officers about his activities are not included in the above summary. In other words, the above includes only those "events" which we can be reasonably sure happened (i.e., events PID officers could see with their own eyes and had no reason to fake) and which Iwa

<sup>55</sup> This is based on the summary of East Sumatran PID reports compiled by the Leader of the Regional Intelligence in Mr. 315x/1930.

admitted did happen or at least never explicitly denied in his interrogation and/or disclaimed in his autobiography. Relying on such data, we can say this much with confidence. Iwa was active in the BO and Pemoeda Indonesia circles, which is not surprising given his Dutch education, his activist past as a leading member of Tri Koro Darma (a youth organization close to the BO, the future Yong Java) and the PI, and the fact that he was personally close to his uncle and Medan BO chairman Abdul Manap. (He met with his future wife, Kuraisin, Abdul Manap's niece and Iwa's cousin, at his uncle's house and married her in Medan at his encouragement.<sup>56</sup>) He was also active in the PMI and the Opium Regie Bond, again, not surprisingly, because Iwa like many other PNI leaders saw trade unionism as a way for the PNI to reach out to "peasants and workers." Finally he was active in journalism, publishing, and, for a while before J. Manoppo joined him, editing *Matahari Indonesia*. And he would have participated in the establishment of a Volksuniversiteit, people's university, with Soenarjo, if he had not been arrested in July 1929.

As the Medan PID chief suspected, Iwa might have been preparing the ground for a PNI branch in Medan, establishing networks among BO and Pemoeda Indonesia members, trade union activists, and journalists. He did not make any real progress if that was the case. On December 29, 1929, the governor of the East Coast of Sumatra ordered the regional intelligence to carry out extensive house searches as part of the Indies-wide clamp down on the PNI, to learn "how far the PNI political propaganda the above mentioned agitator [Iwa] carried out secretly had taken roots in the bosom of above mentioned associations [BO, Jong Islamieten Bond, etc.], in this case [in the bosom] of their leaders." Eighty-eight places were searched, including the houses of Mr. Soenarjo, Abdul Manap, Mohammad Dasoeki, Mohamad Samin (former Medan SI chairman) and Taman Siswa schoolteachers. "No positive results" were obtained, but the house searches were successful nonetheless, governor van Sandick reported to the prosecutor general, in "raising the self-confidence administrative and police officials so needed."<sup>57</sup>

But this was what the government learned later, after it had made up its mind to intern Iwa to Banda Neira. When he was free in 1928 and 1929, both the *hoofdparquet* and the regional intelligence suspected not only that he was leading PNI propaganda but also, and more seriously, that he was involved in clandestine, underground activity. And spies and informers supplied more than enough information to support their suspicion. Though there must have been not a few in Iwa's circles who worked for the PID, we know for sure only one who was a spy. Mohamad Joenoes is mentioned in the list of names of those people who were interrogated and whose houses were searched in the police sweep on December 29, 1929 with this note:

Is in constant contact with all political leaders in Medan; is collaborator [*medewerker*] of the Regional Intelligence; house search conducted in order to avoid suspicion. Editor of *Benih Merdeka* (1920). President of the chauffeurs' union in Medan (1920). Leader and agitator in the DSM [Deli Sumatran Railway] strike (1920). Editor of *Benih Timor* (1925). Commissioner of the journalists' union in

<sup>56</sup> Iwa Koesoema Soemantri, *Indonesia Minzoku Shugi*, pp. 72–73.

<sup>57</sup> Governor of the East Coast of Sumatra to Procureur General, Medan, March 7, 1930, and the list of people whose houses were searched, both in Mr. 381x/1930.

Medan (1925). Former editor of *Matahari Indonesia*. Editor of *Bintang Sumatra* (1929).<sup>58</sup>

Being an editor of *Matahari Indonesia*, Mohamad Joenoes was in Iwa's inner circle, along with Mohammad Dasoeki, Abdoel Hamid Loebis (editor of *Matahari Indonesia*; Iwa served as his defense attorney when he was prosecuted for press offenses in *Pertja Timoer* in 1928), and Hasboellah Parindoeri (Matu Mona, correspondent of *Matahari Indonesia*), among others.<sup>59</sup> It is most likely Joenoes who reported to the PID on the meeting at Iwa's office on December 20, 1928 "to establish a SKBI branch," a meeting allegedly attended by Mangaradja Ihoetan (editor-in-chief of *Pewartu Deli*), Hasan Noel Arifin (editor of *Pewartu Deli*), Tan Tek Bie (editor-in-chief of *Tjin Po*), Mohammad Said (editor of *Oetoesan Sumatra*), and Mohamad Dasoeki.<sup>60</sup> The PID also obtained information from spies and informers that Iwa appointed his *zaakwaarnemers*, solicitors, in Pematang Siantar, Tebing Tinggi, and Tanjung Balai as PNI propagandists in late 1928; that Iwa was trying to establish "a central trade union" with the assistance of two propagandists from Java, Soetarmono and Hardjosoekarto, who "disguised" themselves as peddlers of "Indonesia" brand cigarettes and carried out propaganda among contract coolies; and that Iwa tried to establish "cells" among DSM workers.

As the governor reported to the prosecutor general in March 1930, the PID eventually learned that there was nothing clandestine about Iwa's activity and that most, if not all, of these and other pieces of information brought to them by spies were unfounded. But in 1928 and 1929, the PID trusted these and other spy reports and found them alarming, because PID officers believed, like other administrative officials and planters, that collective labor protest and physical assaults on the plantations were "politically" induced from the outside.

And there was also enough evidence to alarm the government about the situation on the plantations. The Dutch language newspaper, *Java Bode*, reported on May 7, 1929 that sixteen contract coolies were arrested on the Kotari tobacco plantation in Serdang for establishing "a Javanese nationalist association" and planning an insurrection on May 1, 1930. The next day, the advocate general sent a telegram to the governor of East Sumatra, inquiring about the *Java Bode* report. The governor sent back a telegram to Verheijen on May 10, reporting the arrest of seven "executive members" and eight "propagandists" and stating that they carried out "illegal activities" in Kotari and that Iwa was "behind the secret nationalist action." The next day, Verheijen again sent a

<sup>58</sup> See the list in Mr. 381x/1930. Mohammad Said says that Mohamad Joenoes started his activist career as vice chairman of the Asahan SI in Tanjung Balai and editor of *Benih Merdeka* (Medan SI organ under Mohamad Samin's chief editorship) in 1916. Mohammad Said, *Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan Pers di Sumatera Utara* (Medan: Waspada, 1976), p. 16.

<sup>59</sup> Mohammad Said, *Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan Pers*, p. 34; Iwa Koesoema Soemantri, *Indonesia Minzoku Shugi no Genryu*, p. 71.

<sup>60</sup> See the summary of East Sumatran PID reports compiled by the Leader of the Regional Intelligence in Mr. 315x/1930. Judging from the participants, the meeting was more likely one of the journalists' union. Tan Tek Bie was its chariman in the mid-1920s. See also Mohammad Said, *Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan Pers*, p. 46.

telegram to van Sandick, instructing van Sandick to consult him before initiating any measures against Iwa.<sup>61</sup>

Then, van der Plas, always ready to prove his worth as adviser for native affairs to the governor general, alerted him regarding Iwa. In his letter dated June 22, 1929, he mentioned "the underground action" among workers in Serdang and other places in East Sumatra and speculated that Iwa might be behind the movement. He then wrote:

Besides, if Mr. Iwa Koesoema Soemantri's contact with the underground action in Serdang can be established and the grave character of this [contact] confirmed, I would suggest Your Excellency intern this former chairman of the SPPL in the Netherlands, former representative of Semaoen, former resident of Moscow, to Digoel. Not only because the East Coast of Sumatra forms a very vulnerable point, but also because this [action would be] in line with the liberal policy of construction the government has followed [and also in line] with stern measures against underground destructive action, and because the arrest of one of the intellectual leaders, based on adequate reasons, will have its favorable influence on Java in general, on the PNI in particular, and call to mind in a convincing way the limits [*grenzen*] which the government wishes to set.<sup>62</sup>

Like the question concerning the SKBI which were then being debated between van der Plas and advocate general Verheijen, the question concerning Iwa's arrest and internment was also introduced by van der Plas because he thought it advisable to set an outer limit to the sorts of activities the government would tolerate and to send a signal to the PNI about it. But Verheijen did not respond to van der Plas' report on Iwa. He was interested in determining not just the limits, but also the right moment to act.

That moment perhaps came earlier than he had expected. In early July 1929, an assistant's wife was killed by a contract coolie on the Parnabolan plantation in Simalungun, East Sumatra. News of the murder spread throughout the Indies and instantly became a *cause célèbre* for those whites who had long criticized what they regarded as the government leniency toward the native population. The funeral was widely attended. Telegrams of outrage were sent by Europeans to the governor general and the Queen. Dutch newspapers in Java speculated on a "Moscow-Deli connection." Army troops were sent from Java to Deli to "restore order." The European protest climaxed with a privately convened meeting in Medan on July 16, 1929, attended by 2,300 "Fatherlanders" demanding sterner measures to protect their interests. In less than a month after that, a local branch of the right-wing *Vaderlandsche Club* was established in Medan. In the meantime, the laborer Salim's trial started within a week of the incident, five days later he was sentenced, and on October 23 he was scheduled to hang.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> PG (Attorney General) to G Medan (Governor of East Sumatra, Medan), May 8, 1929; G (Governor of East Sumatra) to PG, May 10, 1929; PG to G Medan, May 11, 1929; Attorney General (Verheijen) to Governor General, May 13, 1929, all in Mr. 449x/1929.

<sup>62</sup> "Tijd. wd. adviser voor inlandse zaken (Ch.O. van der Plas) aan gouverneur-generaal (De Graeff), 22 juni 1929," in Kwantes, *De Ontwikkeling: 1928-Aug. 1933*, p. 239.

<sup>63</sup> Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation*, pp. 75, 82-83; Reid, *The Blood of the People*, p. 39.

In the middle of this mounting European hysteria, Verheijen sent a telegraph to the governor of East Sumatra on July 13 and instructed him to send a report on the secret nationalist propaganda he had mentioned in his May 10 telegram and to tighten police surveillance of Iwa. Two days later, on July 15, he wrote a letter to the governor suggesting that he should consider taking stern measures against Iwa if necessary. He then said:

His records [*antecedenten*], however, are such that enough terms are there to warrant our consideration of taking administrative measures in his case, as soon as it can be deduced from specific evidence with a probability bordering on certainty that he has had a hand, directly as well as indirectly (through intermediary henchmen, for instance) in a secret action, from which irregularities can be expected to result.<sup>64</sup>

What he meant by “administrative measures” was internment. Governor van Sandick sent his report to Verheijen on July 24, stating what he should have known in any case from the frequent, periodic East Sumatran PID reports: that Iwa and “two propagandists from Java,” Soetarmono and Hardjosoekarto, were involved in “secret illegal associations and meetings in the sub-district of Serdang,” that Soetarmono and Hardjosoekarto, “disguised as cigar and cigarette peddlers,” visited almost all plantations and spread propaganda among the coolies, that Sailan, former police agent from Surabaya, established a Ketoprak troupe on the Kotari plantation and collected money, reportedly for the purchase of weapons, and that the police had arrested twenty and prosecuted four suspects, including Sailan.<sup>65</sup> He also sent a telegraph to Verheijen on the same day, reporting that the police arrested eight persons on July 15 on the Sibogot plantation for the establishment of a SR.<sup>66</sup>

These pieces of information were nowhere close to what Verheijen called “specific evidence with a probability bordering on certainty,” but by the time van Sandick sent out his report to Verheijen, he had already decided to take action against the SKBI and Iwa simultaneously. He instructed the governor by telegraph on July 24 to arrest Iwa and carry out police searches on July 26.

Iwa was thus arrested because “his records” and his central position in Indonesian associational life in Medan made him a suspect and because the government found in him an easy target to placate the European community in Deli as well as elsewhere in the Indies. On July 29, the advocate general asked the governor general’s authorization to keep Iwa in preventive custody “in connection with the communist propaganda he had carried out since 1924 in Amsterdam, his continued political activity in East Sumatra, and his relations with the League.”<sup>67</sup> Justified and framed in this manner, the administrative process to intern Iwa was then started.

<sup>64</sup> Advocate General (Verheijen) to Governor of East Sumatra (L. van Sandick), July 15, 1929, Mr. 672x/1929.

<sup>65</sup> Governor of East Sumatra (van Sandick) to Advocate General (Verheijen), July 24, 1929, Mr. 757x/1929.

<sup>66</sup> G Medan to PG, July 24, 1929, Mr. 712x/1929.

<sup>67</sup> ARD Chief (van der Most), Voorloopig Rapport, July 30, 1929, Mr. 731x/1929.

*b. The meaning of Moscow*

From the beginning, the advocate general only wanted to make a strong enough case to justify Iwa's internment on the basis of "his records." He was little interested in his activity in East Sumatra, so little, in fact, that the council of the Netherlands Indies wondered why Iwa was not questioned about his activity in East Sumatra when it met to deliberate on his internment on March 7, 1930.<sup>68</sup> But as Verheijen wrote, his records looked incriminating enough.

According to those records, Iwa Koesoema Soemantri, born in Ciamis in 1899, went to Holland in 1922 after graduating from the law school (*rechtschool*) in 1921. Active in the PI, he joined Semaoen in the establishment of the SPLI in Amsterdam in 1924 and became its secretary and then vice chairman. In 1925 he served as PI chairman. After graduating from Leiden University in 1925, he was appointed PI representative to the Comintern and went to Moscow with Semaoen.

His files contained a letter Iwa sent from Moscow to "Saudara Baron van Bour de Platte (Soeleiman)" in Leiden—a photographic reproduction of the document had fallen into the hands of the ARD—in which he told Soeleiman that he, Iwa, and Semaoen disagreed so much that they no longer saw each other, that the Eastern University in Moscow (KUTV) was like an elementary school, and that he was teaching other Indonesian students. There was a picture of Iwa, taken in Moscow, which had also come into the possession of the ARD; two Moscow returnees, Daniel Kamoe and Mohamad Saleh, had identified the man in the photograph as "Dingli." During his interrogation, Iwa initially denied ever living in Moscow, but confronted with this letter and this picture, he admitted that he had been there.

He also admitted that he wrote a pamphlet, "Statement of the Anti-Ribut," at Semaoen's request. He had also written a booklet in 1926 entitled *The Peasants' Movement in Indonesia*, under the name "S. Dingley" and at the request of Th. Dombal and N. L. Mercheriakov of the Farmers and Peasants International. What's more there was another letter, this one a communication that "Dingli" sent from Moscow, via Soeleiman in Leiden, to "Soedara A dan M," that asked for their assistance in securing an exit permit from the Soviet authorities. This letter was in an envelope addressed "Saudara Toean Hadji Muchtar" at "Tuan Faddulah, c/o Dewanpengtahwan, Singapore" and dated December 17, 1926. It is likely that Visbeen, the Batavian PID chief sent by van der Lely to destroy the PKI center in Singapore, got hold of this document because "Soedara A dan M," Alimin and Moesso that is, had been arrested on December 18, "Saudara Toean Hadji Muchtar," Soebakat, had fled to Bangkok, and the CID-SS was able to intercept his mail because it knew "Tuan Faddulah" had been used as a secret mail post for PKI correspondence. Iwa had ultimately obtained his exit permit from the Soviet authorities with Dombal's help. He returned to Berlin with the money he had earned by writing the booklet, *The Peasants' Movement in Indonesia*.

The file continued. Iwa had joined up with Gatot Mangkoepradja in Berlin, and after a brief stay in Paris, they returned to the Indies in November 1927. He moved to Medan in April 1928, but he continued to correspond with his friends in Western Europe. There were two letters the PID confiscated in his house and office, one from V.

<sup>68</sup> Council of the Netherlands Indies (Vice President Ch. Welter), *Advies van den Raad van Nederlandsch-Indië*, March 7, 1930, Mr. 315x/1930.

Chattopadhyaya, international secretary of the Anti-Imperialist League, to the editor-in-chief of *Matahari Indonesia*, and the other from Nazir Pamoentjak to Iwa, introducing Prof. Dr. Freundlich as “a League man.” Iwa admitted that he had talked with the professor when he visited Medan at the invitation of the Indies government and that he had introduced him to Soenarjo and Sartono. There was another letter the PID found in his house, a letter from Berlin, dated February 25, 1929, which Iwa received from “Abdul Rahman,” that is Soebardjo, who was then working at the Secretariat of the Anti-Imperialist League in Berlin. A notebook was also confiscated from his house in which two addresses were written in cipher; military intelligence decoded them as the addresses of Frau Rose, Berlin Ost, zv Rigaerstrasse 60 Manfred and Hellm Muller, Berlin Nord Ost, Langenbeckstrasse 4 Georg.<sup>69</sup>

All these pieces of evidence were convincing enough to persuade the governor general and the council of the Netherlands Indies that “Iwa played a socially dangerous political extremist role since 1923,” as “communist propagandist for the Far East,” “paid by Russia for his participation in the action of the Red Peasants’ International,” in contact with the Anti-Imperialist League and with trusted men (*vertrouwensmannen*) “secretly,” and active in East Sumatra behind the scenes.<sup>70</sup> It should be stressed, however, that central to the “records” was Iwa’s stay in Moscow. There were other Indonesian students who worked with Semaoen and other communists and socialists in the Netherlands, and with the League. But only Iwa went to Moscow. How could he not be a communist, a Comintern agent, if he stayed in Moscow for one and a half years, attended the Eastern University, and worked for the Farmers’ and Peasants’ International? This was the fundamental line of reasoning. But if we read the transcript of Iwa’s interrogation carefully, while keeping in mind what he has to say about his Moscow days in his autobiography, a different picture of him emerges.

Iwa was interrogated by controleur W. J. Leyds on September 25–28, 1929. Initially, as noted earlier, he denied his stay in Moscow, but confronted with his letter from Moscow to Soeleiman and the photograph of him taken in Moscow, he eventually admitted, most likely on September 28, that he had indeed lived in Moscow. Perhaps because memories of his Moscow days came surging back to him once he had admitted he had been there, he kept talking about his life in Moscow even after Leyds finished asking all the questions prepared beforehand; to accommodate the full length of the confession, Leyds added supplementary minutes dated September 28. In this section, Iwa recounted his history while Leyds apparently just took notes without asking any questions.

I must indeed admit that I was in Russia . . . Semaoen had departed there earlier, I think at Russian expense, he wrote me from Russia that if I was willing to pay the cost of travel myself, I could study at the Eastern University and there I could get free meal and lodging. Semaoen said that I could not get the travel free because I was bourgeois, at least not a member of the communist party. I wanted to go there for a few months to have a look, and the plan to study there free was tempting. I

<sup>69</sup> Magistraat te Medan en Hoofd van Plaatselijk Bestuur (W.J. Leyds), *Proces Verbaal* (Mr. Iwa Koesoema Soemantri), Sept. 25-28, 1929; Dec. 20, 1929; *Het Hoofd der VIIde Afdeling A*, namens den Legercommandant, aan Procureur Generaal, Oct. 31, 1929, all in Mr. 315x/1930.

<sup>70</sup> Attorney General (Verheijen) to Governor General (De Graeff), Dec. 3, 1929, Mr. 315x/1930.

left for Russia after I succeeded [in obtaining the law degree at Leiden], at the end of 1925, I believe in December. It was terribly cold. I had a Dutch passport, with a Russian visa, [which I obtained] at the Russian Consulate in Berlin. I got a visa because Semaoen probably had written [to the consulate] for that. Semaoen also introduced me to the University in Moscow as a nationalist who was sympathetic with the Soviet. I went to Moscow with the authorization of Perhimpoean Indonesia, but did not discuss its matter. Semaoen wanted to do that alone.

. . . At the Eastern University the Administration gave me a pseudonym, S. Dingley. Semaoen was called Serphon, this name was not official, Semaoen had little to do with the University, he was more [like] "Counselor [Raadsman] for Indonesian students."

. . . I took a course in Russian, [taught by] the Berlitz method, and a couple of courses on Communism, historical materialism, and French, [taught] by an Austrian. . . After a few weeks I had had enough and did not go there regularly any more. I kept myself busy with teaching other Indonesian students in the dormitory geography, general history, and newspaper reports. When people noticed that, I was appointed a teacher, but I remained a student. There were then four other Indonesians: Moelia, Minahasa, Celebes, and Oesman; Minahasa was probably Waworuntu [Johannes Wawoerontoe]; and also there was Pakih.

I gave no lectures in communism, people did not trust me to do that, I was a student there myself and did not mind much about that. I wanted to know more about communism then, but I have never been a convinced communist, and the more I knew about the theory and practice, the more I found it repugnant. I did not like the party men, either: authoritarian, fanatic and one-sided. I was generally greeted with mistrust. I could not move around in Moscow freely; all offices and so on were guarded by soldiers. No one could go in without his membership card with picture, and I was not a member. I wanted to leave altogether, but I had come to know Anna Elinischna Iwanna [Ivanova], who was going to give a birth to my child, she was a student in medicine and worked then as nurse in an orphanage, was not a member of the party and had a very difficult life; she was an intern in the orphanage. I was accommodated badly, slept with eight men in one room, Chinese, Persian, and Caucasian, a changing company, often ill-mannered, uncultured men. The meals were also bad. After a few months . . . I did not attend the lectures regularly, and my lectures in history were bourgeois-minded, so they heard from my students who learned a little Russian. I was kicked out of the University, and Semaoen was angry because I did not want to get registered as party candidate . . . I had no place to stay, in the summer of 1926 I stayed in a village with Anna, thirty [miles?] from Moscow, and lived there among peasants, my wife paid for that, and I gave [her] whatever salary I [earned] as a teacher. I became acquainted with the chairman of the cooperative of peasants' associations, Dombal, and he introduced me to Michiarof [Mercheriakov], a colleague of his in [its] executive [committee]. Through their mediation I became [a] correspondent. Semaoen was no longer willing to help me then.

I became correspondent of a monthly journal for peasants . . . I also got Dutch and Malay newspapers from Dombal which he got from Semaoen and Dombal paid me. I did that for a couple of months. When my wife's delivery approached, I wrote home, via Soeleiman, [asking] for money to travel home, and in case it was

not enough I wrote that brochure [*The Peasants' Movement in Indonesia*] which was published in Russian under Dombal's editorship . . . I earned pretty good [money]. Then, after the baby was born, I departed. The only connection I still have with Russia is the child. I have not sent money very often, twice fifty guilders each, once one hundred guilders . . .

I admit to have written this letter "to Soedara A and M." It is Alimin and Moesso. I knew them when they came to Moscow in the summer of 1926; I was then already in the countryside, but visited Moscow once in a while. They were sent as representatives of the communist party in the Indies. They were not that open to me, because I was not [a member] of the party.

They came in August and left in October, and left me their address: c/o Tuan Faddulah Singapore, [who] this Tuan [is] I do not know.

The meaning of the letter is: I sent this letter in the envelope [addressed] to Hadji Muchtar, whether it is a pseudonym of Soebakat, I don't know.

A and M are Alimin and Moesso.

I reported there [in the letter] that I only received one letter from them [from Shanghai]. . . [then I wrote] that I am no longer a friend of my "kawan [friend]," that is Semaoen, who did not want to work in Moscow but was always intriguing.

He did nothing for the Indies [Indonesia?]. He wanted to keep the position as representative of the party in the Indies for himself while he was out of the Indies all too long. Besides, he had promised me to write to Kijaji (that is the commissar for eastern affairs, that was Petrowski for some time, then [M. N.] Roy, a British Indian), because I wanted to arrange my departure, but since I fell out with Semaoen he did not want to cooperate [with me to get] a visa, and I could not obtain a visa myself, because I was not trusted; Petrowsky did not want to let me go. I wanted them [Alimin and Moesso] to write to Petrowsky to let this Soemantri go. I had to write them any way, because I had to know whether the address was still good, after the revolt, for "kedjadian [event]" [in this letter] means revolt. They had already told me in Russia about the plan to begin a revolt after their return, if those in Moscow at least agree with that.

But they told me that Moscow did not agree. . . Moscow was afraid of a failure. When they arrived in Shanghai, the revolt had already taken place. Probably Soebakat had speeded it up, and the people who were in the Indies.

I did not get any answer to this letter. But I got a visa later, that is, by Dombal's mediation, I was sent to the border as a sort of prisoner.

I was in Russia from the end of 1925 to the middle of 1927.<sup>71</sup>

Iwa's recollection of his Moscow days as recorded in his autobiography does not differ in many respects from what he says above. It is warmer and more detailed, and more resigned to the fact that people easily believed him to be a communist or at least a socialist, because he was in Moscow. In the autobiography, his bitterness against Semaoen is more low-keyed, Alimin and Moesso are not mentioned, and his memory of Anna Ivanova and their child, Sumira Dingli or Mira, is sweeter. In one respect, however, the autobiography is more enlightening, for it gives specific dates for his arrival, marriage, and the birth of his child: he arrived in Moscow in October 1925,

<sup>71</sup> Chief of Local Administration in Medan (W.J. Leyds), Vervolg Proces Verbaal (Mr. Iwa Koesoema Soemantri), Sept. 28, 1929, Mr. 315x/1930.

married Anna in early January 1926, and their daughter, Mira, was born in October 1926.<sup>72</sup> If his statement to Leyds is located in this time frame, it becomes clear how quickly Iwa was disillusioned with Moscow; in less than two months, he was kicked out of the university. He fell out with Semaoen and became Dombal's protégé by the summer of 1926, at the latest. And after Mira was born in October, he was doing everything he could to obtain a visa and to get out of Russia. It is hard to believe that Iwa became "a communist propagandist for the Far East" as a result of this experience, or as a result of working with Semaoen, Alimin, and Moesso, who did nothing to get him an exit permit. But his Moscow stay was enough to convince Verheijen, van der Plas, and other high-ranking Indies government officials that he was a communist. On March 22, 1930, the governor general decided on his internment. Iwa went to his place of exile, Banda Neira, not Digoel, in June, because he was an "intellectual."

### The PARI underground: Dealing with *Onverzoenlijken*

#### a. Its history

If the SKBI affair and Iwa's internment tell us how the government went about impressing an association between things "communist" and Digoel on the popular consciousness and posted "no trespass" signs to define boundaries circumscribing native resistance and native associations, then the government's responses to the Pari, the only real, albeit ghostlike, revolutionary underground party in Indonesia at the time, tells us something more about the disjunction between the Dutch Indies political police perceptions of the communist threat and its comparatively diminutive reality. The Pari, Partai Republik Indonesia, was established in Bangkok in June 1927 by three communist fugitives, Tan Malaka, Soebakat, and Djamaloedin Tamin. It grew out of "the communist propaganda center" in Singapore which opposed the Prambanan decision in 1926. It was small, clandestine, and tightly knit. Its purpose was "to achieve the most complete freedom of Indonesia as soon as possible" and "to establish a Federal Republic of Indonesia" by means of "*massa actie*."<sup>73</sup>

The original Pari manifesto, which Tan Malaka wrote in Dutch and Soebakat translated into Malay in June 1927, seems no longer available. What we have is a Dutch language summary of the manifesto dated May 1929 and addressed to "supporters of the Comintern in Indonesia." In this manifesto, as far as we can tell from the summary, Tan Malaka and Soebakat located the meaning of Pari in the lessons they drew from the destruction of the PKI. They announced, first of all, that the most important goal for the Indonesian people was to achieve "Indonesian national and social liberation" and that the Pari was established to achieve this purpose. As "veterans of the [now] destroyed PKI," they also announced that they had decided not to establish the PKI anew in order to avoid raising any misplaced hopes the people might have regarding the Comintern. "There exists a bureaucratic leadership even in Russia," they said, and they argued that "after the example of China, Stalin will send his Borodins, van Galens,

<sup>72</sup> Iwa Koesoema Soemantri, *Indonesia Minzoku Shugi no Genryu*, pp. 43-55. Iwa visited Moscow for the second time in early 1958, but Anna had died just before his visit, in late 1957.

<sup>73</sup> Unless otherwise noted, I rely on Djamaluddin Tamim, *Sedjarah PKI* (n.p.: n.d., Mimeo) and Harry A. Poeze, *Tan Malaka: Levensloop van 1897 tot 1945* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), pp. 354-446, in this section on the Pari.

Cheka, military and other numerous advisers to revolutionary Indonesia." That would not be in the interest of Indonesia, however, for "there are things the Indonesian people have to do other than waiting for the outcome of the struggle between Trotsky and Stalin." The Pari is a revolutionary workers' instrument designed to solve these problems.

Second, they announced that the collapse of the PKI was due to more than one weakness, as explained in Tan Malaka's *Semangat Moeda* and *Massa Actie*. The PKI was not a "strong machine." Its more fundamental weakness, however, lay in the popular belief in "Ratoe Adil [just king] or Mahdi." "The rebellions in 1926 were in essence a copy of what had happened in Aceh and Jambi." Members of the party central executive thought they could start a communist revolution that way. "Lia [Boedisoejtiro]" wrote to "Hasni [Tan Malaka]" in "Tokyo [Manila]" in January 1926 that the eleven leaders had decided to observe "a big feast [revolution]." Men in the underground and talisman [*djimat*] dealers took the situation into their own hands, and, as a result, the official party executive in Bandung became isolated. The Pari should never repeat this mistake and become "a proletarian revolutionary party, which cannot agree with the action of Moscow and the Third International."<sup>74</sup>

The Pari statutes stipulated that its sections were to be established in "places which are regarded as important economic, political, and transportation centers" and "where there are at least five members." But it was never meant to be a mass party. When interrogated in 1930, Mardjono, a leading Pari propagandist, said Tan Malaka told him the goal of Pari was "to form cells in various political parties and trade unions to bring these associations under the influence of the Pari."<sup>75</sup> It was meant to be a small, disciplined, clandestine, cadre party. And in fact it kept its activity so secret that the *hoofdpartij* did not know its existence for more than two years after its establishment, not until late 1929 when Soebakat was arrested in Bangkok and the government obtained Pari correspondence and literature in his possession from the Siamese authorities. It published no party literature; its organ, *Obor*, was hand-written and circulated from one person to another. Its correspondence was maintained through couriers and secret mail posts, its letters written in cipher, all Pari members identified by code names, and its manifestos and brochures sent by mail, hidden in newspapers.<sup>76</sup>

Its central leadership consisted of Tan Malaka (chairman), Soebakat (secretary), and Djamaeloedin Tamin (commissioner), and was called Kongsi Tiga, committee of three. The committee members never met together after they established the party in Bangkok. Tan Malaka went from Bangkok to Manila, and after he was deported from Manila in August 1927, he stayed in Amoy and its vicinity until 1931, when he moved to Shanghai. Soebakat remained in Bangkok for most of the time until he was arrested in October 1929. Tamin went back from Bangkok to Singapore and stayed there, though he often fled shore by signing on as a sailor whenever he sensed danger.

<sup>74</sup> Korte Inhoud van het Manifest der Partij Republiek Indonesia (PARI), Vb. 6-8-30 B18.

<sup>75</sup> Proces Verbaal (Mardjono), Mr. 509x/1931.

<sup>76</sup> Hoofd van den Dienst der Algemeene Recherche (van der Most), De Partai Republiek Indonesia (Pari), Geheim Rapport, March 4, 1930, Mr. 509x/1931.

We know little about what Soebakat did in the Pari, except that he was in regular communication with Tan Malaka and Tamin. Tan Malaka was more like a teacher and party theoretician than party chairman, frequently busy training party cadres Tamin sent to him and writing “theses” and *Obor* articles. Central to the Pari activity was Djamaloeddin Tamin, who ran its network in the Indies almost single-handedly from Singapore until his arrest by the British CID-SS (Criminal Investigation Department—Straits Settlements) in September 1932.

No doubt Tamin was a consummate underground operative, possibly even the best Indonesia produced during the Dutch era. He had many names. Aside from Djamaloedin Tamin and Bakri, names by which he was known in Singapore, he also used names such as Gow, Abdullah/Dollah, Si Badu, Lookman/Lohman, Si Besar, Jozeph/Josefo, Sulaiman/Salomon, A. Jacob, Joesoef, Boediman, Iskandar, and Alex in Pari correspondence. He was cautious: whenever he sensed impending danger, he never hesitated to leave Singapore, often as seaman on the Singapore-Mindanao-Zamboanga and the Singapore-Bangkok line. He was fortunate: he was protected by a retired CID-SS agent, Pak Said, who revealed the identities of other CID agents and informers. Having been trained at the Sumatra Thawalib Islamic school in Padang Panjang, West Sumatra, and having assisted many PKI fugitives in finding jobs and settling down in Malaya, he had extensive non-Pari networks to rely on among largely Minangkabau religious teachers, especially Sjech Taher Djamaloeddin Al Azhari and his disciples in Perak, Negri Sembilan, Johor, and Penang. And he was supported by a small group of Pari cadres and supporters, the core of which seems to have evolved from among PKI fugitives who fled to Singapore in 1926 and 1927.<sup>77</sup>

In his autobiographical *Sedjarah PKI* (History of the PKI), Tamin says that he assisted more than one hundred PKI fugitives find jobs and settle down in Malaya in late 1926 and early 1927, but counted on receiving help for the revolutionary cause from only ten people: Djamaloedin Ibrahim (also called Rahman Djamal), Daja bin Joesoef (Tenek, Aliyasin), and Mohamad Arief Siregar (Mohamad Ajoob Siregar), from West Sumatra; Maswar Madjid from South Sumatra; Tjek Mamad (Mansur) from Banten; Kasim (Emang) from Ciamis; Agam Poetih (Mahmoed) from Aceh; Mardjono (Djohan), Sarosan (Saroso, Agoes), and Soewarno (Achmad) from Java.<sup>78</sup> Since he wrote *Sedjarah PKI* in the 1960s, decades after the fact, one might suspect that he simply mentioned those who played major roles in the Pari. This is not the case. Tjek Mamad, Kasim, and Soewarno seem not to have played any role in the Pari at all. Agam Poetih, the bodyguard Moesso brought with him to Singapore in early 1926, was close to Soebakat and Tamin, but remained on the margins of the Pari network. The rest of the individuals named in the list above, as well as several others (such as Umar Giri/Abdoel Rahman, Kandur, and Dawood), however, constituted a group described as “young men of Tamin’s university” in Pari correspondence. All of them were eventually arrested, and except for Djamaloedin Ibrahim, who was kept in Onrust, a prison island off Batavia, because of his tuberculosis, all were interned to Digoel. Maswar Madjid was arrested by the CID-SS in September 1928 and interned to Digoel. Sarosan and Mardjono were arrested in July 1930; Umar Giri in April 1931; Mohamad Arief Siregar and Daja bin Joesoef in September 1931 shortly after Tamin’s arrest in

<sup>77</sup> See Tamim, *Sedjarah PKI*.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47 and 57.

Singapore; Kandur in June 1933. And finally, Djamaloedin Ibrahim, along with Dawood, who was briefly arrested together with Tan Malaka by the British police in Hong Kong in October 1932, had formed the bridge to a new generation of Pari activists by the time they were arrested in Batavia and Surabaya in 1936. The history of Pari was therefore a history of failure, outlining a series of arrests and internments that befell Pari activists one after another. Yet this history does tell us how the *hoofdparket* captured the activists, what the Pari was all about, and what it meant to be part of the underground in Indonesia during the late 1920s.

*b. Its detection*

The first Pari activist interned to Digoel was Maswar Madjid. He was arrested in Singapore by the CID-SS in September 1928, after it learned that he gave Indonesian students stopping over in Singapore Tan Malaka's writings—*Naar de Republiek Indonesia*, *Semangat Moeda*, *Goetji Wasiat Kaoem Militer*, and *Massa Actie*—which he obtained by mail, hidden in copies of the *North China Daily News*, from Amoy. He was handed over to the Indies government in February 1929 and interned to Digoel in October without revealing anything about the Pari.

As a result of his arrest, however, ARD chief van der Lely learned that there was a secret mail post in Amoy whose address was "Esquire Lawson, c/o Pit Sang Dispensary, Chan Chuang, Amoy"; van der Lely concluded that correspondents who used this address belonged to a core of men Tan Malaka and/or Alimin and Moesso had organized.<sup>79</sup> The Dutch Consul in Amoy learned at the Amoy post office in February 1929 that letters came from Bangkok to "Esquire Lawson" sent by Viggo-Lund. The Dutch consul in Bangkok then located an Indonesian, Mohamad Zain, working at Viggo-Lund, and sent his picture to the governor general. The *hoofdparket* identified Zain as Soebakat. The prosecutor general asked the governor general in April 1929 to instruct the Dutch consul to start negotiating with the Siamese government for the arrest of Soebakat and recommended his internment to Digoel upon his extradition.<sup>80</sup> PID staff was sent to Bangkok in October 1929 and confirmed that Mohamad Zain was Soebakat. The Siamese authorities arrested Soebakat and confiscated Pari literature and correspondence in his possession.<sup>81</sup>

The ARD succeeded in breaking the Pari code by December 1929 and learned for the first time that there was a party, Partij Republiek Indonesia, founded as an Indonesian revolutionary workers' party somewhere near the Indies. Here, the timing was important. The police clamp-down on the SKBI and Iwa had taken place in July 1929. In early December, the advocate general had proposed Iwa's internment to the government general. In writing to De Graeff on December 17, Verheijen therefore reminded him that in proposing Iwa's internment he had written that "Iwa intentionally and consciously took the side of those who plotted a deliberate attack on the Netherlands Authority and now seem to be plotting anew." Whether they had participated in the revolts or not, he argued, people remained who continued to advocate for revolution, "still working together and trying from abroad to sow the

<sup>79</sup> Harry A. Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, pp. 390, 396.

<sup>80</sup> Prosecutor General to Governor General, April 25, 1929, Mr. 404x/1929; Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, pp. 396–397.

<sup>81</sup> Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, p. 397.

seed for a revolutionary movement in the regions in illegal ways." He had now found evidence of this group and its activities, he declared, referring to the Pari, led by Tan Malaka, Soebakat, and Alimin. Their purpose was to achieve Indonesian independence "by means of mass action" and, Verheijen added, obviously echoing passages van der Lely had quoted from Tan Malaka's *Naar de Republiek Indonesia*, to establish its sections in places "which are regarded as important economic, political, and transportation centers." Many of its members, however, remained unidentified because they were addressed in code names such as Kan, Joseph, Mandar, Marwal, Ogiri & Co.<sup>82</sup>

Verheijen reported to De Graeff that the confiscated documents and letters also revealed that the Pari had sent Tan Malaka's letters to such nationalists as Ir. Soekarno, Mr. Singgih, and Dr. Soetomo, seeking cooperation, and that the Pari had planned to hold a conference in September 1929, to be attended by twelve participants, six from Java, three from Sumatra, and three from abroad. Based on "Boediman's" letter to Soebakat dated August 10, Verheijen speculated that one of the participants from Sumatra, "Ramantuan," was probably Iwa, and that "Jono" and "Nar" who Boediman said were involved in that "eskabei ziekte [SKBI zaak, i.e., SKBI affair]" were Sediono and Soenarjo. He concluded that there was a contact between Alimin on the one hand and the SKBI in Java and Iwa in Sumatra.<sup>83</sup> In his fantastic political policing world, Tan Malaka's Pari was thus joined with the SKBI, Iwa, and Alimin (and presumably Moesso), forming the one, unified, revolutionary underground informed by Tan Malaka's revolutionary vision and revolutionary strategy.

Soebakat was interrogated by Visbeen in January 1930. He was most interested in Pari codes. But Soebakat told him little more than he had already known from the documents and letters. He told Visbeen that "Boediman" was Bakri and that Alimin was not involved in the Pari. Visbeen, however, did not believe him.<sup>84</sup> Soebakat killed himself on February 2, 1930.

After further investigation, the ARD chief completed his first major report on the Pari in early March. He concluded in this report that the Pari was independent of the Comintern, that there was no connection between the Pari and the PNI, and that it had no connections with any foreign revolutionary parties. The ARD also identified "Jono" and "Nar" as Mardjono and Soenarjo, because they had left for Singapore in August 1929, shortly after the police clamp-down on the SKBI, and concluded for the first time that Maswar Madjid was a Pari member. But it still believed that Boediman/Bakri was Alimin.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Prosecutor General to Governor General, Dec. 17, 1929, Vb. 6-8-30 B18.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. Verheijen's speculation that "Ramantuan" was Iwa is perhaps correct, but it does not mean that Iwa was involved in the Pari. Tamin knew that Iwa had been in Moscow, and must have believed as the *hoofdparket* did that he was a communist. Given his position in the *pergerakan* world in Medan, it is not surprising that Tamin tried to contact with him as he did though in vain because of his arrest. But Iwa mentions neither Tan Malaka nor Tamin nor Pari in the pre-war section of his autobiography.

<sup>84</sup> Visbeen, *Proces Verbaal* (Soebakat), Jan. 13, 1930, Vb. 6-8-30 B18.

<sup>85</sup> ARD Chief (van der Most), *Geheim Rapport: Onderwerp Pari*, March 4, 1930, Mr. 509x/1930.

c. *Its network*

The detection, and subsequent destruction of the Pari network in Central and East Java in the summer of 1930, however, was not due to this fine detective work. Central to this network were Mardjono and Sarosan. Mardjono (b. 1909 in Kediri), who studied at private HIS (Hollandsche Inlandsche School) in Surabaya for six years and then graduated from the Semarang Rajat school in Semarang in 1925, was a student of Tan Malaka's. He was active in the PKI-affiliated Indonesian Scout Organization in Semarang and knew Soebakat personally.<sup>86</sup> In May 1926 he moved from Semarang to Banjarmasin with his friends, Moenandar and Sarosan, worked at the *Borneo Post* as a typesetter, and then went to Singapore in 1927 with an Arab entrepreneur, Said Djen Alsagaff, to work at his printing firm for six months. It was there that he met with Tamin, who let him read Tan Malaka's writings, *Massa Actie*, *Goetji Wasiat Kaoem Militer*, and *Semangat Moeda*. He joined the Pari, went back to Banjarmasin, and after a short while taught at a private school in Marabahan until Soenarjo came from Surabaya in March 1929 and replaced him.<sup>87</sup>

Soenarjo, one of the founders of the SKBI, had a longer career in the *pergerakan*. Active in the SR, the chauffeurs' union, and the SBBE in Surabaya during the "communist period," he changed from one job to another—working as a customs clerk in Surabaya, a clerk at the auction firm in Malang, a used book seller in Malang, and a teacher at the school run by the Perserikatan Goeroe Bantoe, the assistant teachers' union, in Surabaya—before he became secretary of the "Bersatoe" Commercial Press and editor of *Sinar Indonesia* and participated in the establishment of SKBI in July 1928. In early 1929, however, he fell out with Marsoedi, moved to Banjarmasin in March 1929, became a teacher at Marabahan as Mardjono's replacement, and was recruited to the Pari by Sarosan.<sup>88</sup>

Sarosan (b. 1906 in Purworejo) came to Semarang in the early 1920s, shortly after his graduation from the HIS in Purworejo, worked for *Sinar Hindia* as a typesetter, and then became a student nurse at the Semarang central hospital. He joined the SR and the Indonesian hospital workers' union in 1925, participated in the nurses' strike, lost his job, and worked for *Api*, the Semarang PKI and SR organ, under Soebakat's leadership. He came to know Mardjono in Semarang, because both of them were active in the Indonesian Scout Organization, the communist scout movement. He moved with Mardjono to Banjarmasin in May 1926, worked for the *Borneo Post* as a typesetter, joined Mardjono in Singapore in February 1927, worked at Al Ikwan Press owned by Alsagaff, met Tamin, and joined the Pari.<sup>89</sup>

After working as a seaman on the Singapore-Australian line for some time, he returned to Banjarmasin by early 1928, met with Soenarjo, and then went to Java in April 1928 for Pari propaganda. His activity, it seems, went on smoothly. He first got

<sup>86</sup> Soebakat wanted to send him to the youth conference to be held in Shanghai in September 1926 because of his activity in the IPO in Semarang, but for reasons not entirely clear (most likely because Soebakat could not get in touch with Mardjono in time). Tadjoeeddin M.S., future Alphonso at the 1928 Comintern congress, was sent. See Tamim, *Sedjarah PKI*, p. 41; Poeze, *Tan Malaka*, pp. 406–407.

<sup>87</sup> Visbeen and Mohamad Halid, *Proces Verbaal (Mardjono)*, July 30, 1930, Mr. 509x/1931.

<sup>88</sup> Visbeen and Mohamad Halid, *Proces Verbaal (Soenarjo)*, July 29, 1930, Mr. 509x/1931.

<sup>89</sup> Visbeen and Mohamad Halid, *Proces Verbaal (Sarosan)*, July 25, 1930, Mr. 509x/1931.

in touch with Soedarmo, Mardjono's brother and a NIS (Netherlands Indies Railway) station clerk at Babat, Bojonegoro, who was not interested in the Pari but knew which railway workers would be active in trade unionism. At his introduction, Sarosan met in Cepu with NIS conductor Danoewirjo and let him read the Pari manifesto and other Pari literature. Danoewirjo in turn introduced him to Soetedjo and Tjokrosoebono, both from Cepu, and Ngadimin from Semarang. All were NIS railway workers and all joined the Pari.<sup>90</sup>

Here it is important to note the timing. As we may recall, the SKBI was established in July 1928, when Sarosan was in Java and started Pari propaganda among railway workers. With the memory of the VSTP still fresh, there must have been not a few railway workers who wanted to revive it, and railworkers certainly knew which individuals among them were most likely to be active in this endeavor. Danoewirjo (born in c. 1900), an NIS conductor since 1921 and a former VSTP member, appeared to be a likely activist, for Marsoedi also asked him to join the SKBI in its early days. In his interrogation after his arrest, he admitted that he agreed to become a Pari propagandist and asked Ngadimin to carry out propaganda among "old friends," that is former VSTP members among SS (State Railway), NIS (Netherlands Indies Railway), SJS (Semarang Juana Railway), and SCS (Semarang Cirebon Railway) workers. If there is any truth in the police reports that SKBI propaganda was being carried out in late 1928 and early 1929 among railworkers in Pekalongan, Cepu, Magelang, Purworejo, Kutoarjo, Malang, Probolinggo and other places in Central and East Java, some of it might in fact have been Pari propaganda, as Tamin says in *Sedjarah PKI*, though neither Danoewirjo nor Ngadimin nor Soetedjo naturally admitted that they had done any activity for the Pari.<sup>91</sup>

But this soon brought about a misfortune, for the Pari network in East and Central Java was badly shaken when the police clamped down on the SKBI and frightened railway workers. Since Soenarjo had been marked by the PID as a SKBI activist, both Soenarjo and Mardjono (with whom Soenarjo stayed) were arrested briefly in Marabahan in the police sweep against the SKBI. Shortly after their release, both fled to Singapore in August 1929 and were soon joined by Sarosan. Mardjono was sent by Tamin to Amoy in September, stayed with Tan Malaka for a month, and came back to Banjarmasin in November. Perhaps because he was now marked by the PID as an activist, he was approached by a police *wedana* and started to work as "his spy to watch people coming from Java," while working as a clerk at the local Dutch controleur's office.<sup>92</sup> In the meantime, Soenarjo stayed in Singapore with Tamin, studied Tan Malaka's writings, and returned to Banjarmasin at the end of 1929 with Sarosan. But the resident now banned him from teaching at the private school in Marabahan because of his SKBI past, and he was forced to return to Surabaya and became a "propagandist," that is commission agent, of *Soeara Oemoem*, the leading newspaper published there by Dr. Soetomo's Study Club.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Visbeen and Mohamad Halid, *Proces Verbaal* (Danoewirjo), Aug. 3, 1930, Mr. 509x/1931.

<sup>91</sup> See Tamin, *Sedjarah PKI*, p. 67; Visbeen and Mohamad Halid, *Proces Verbaal* (Soetedjo), Aug. 8, 1930; Visbeen and Mohamad Halid, *Proces Verbaal* (Ngadimin), Aug. 9, 1930; and Visbeen and Mohamad Halid, *Proces Verbaal* (Danoewirjo), Aug. 3, 1930, all in Mr. 509x/1931.

<sup>92</sup> Visbeen and Mohamad Halid, *Proces Verbaal* (Mardjono), July 30, 1930, Mr. 509x/1931.

<sup>93</sup> Visbeen and Mohamad Halid, *Proces Verbaal* (Soenarjo), July 29, 1930, Mr. 509x/1931.

After joining Mardjono and Soenarjo in Singapore, Sarosan also went to Amoy in September 1929 and returned to Banjarmasin with Soenarjo in December. Shortly thereafter he traveled to Java, stayed with Danoewirjo, now in Surakarta, for a month, and then with Tjokrosoebono in Secang for three months. By this time, however, the situation had changed. The SKBI affair had scared railway workers. Neither Danoewirjo nor Tjokrosoebono was willing to carry out propaganda for the Pari any more. Presumably Sarosan remained there in Central Java with nothing to do. Eventually he ran away with Tjokrosoebono's wife in early July 1930, was caught by Tjokrosoebono, given money by Danoewirjo to go away, and then surrendered himself in Surakarta to police *wedana* Ramelan on July 10. He told Ramelan everything the interrogator wanted to hear, revealing not only the identities of people involved in the Pari network in East and Central Java, but also its connection with the Comintern.<sup>94</sup>

By early August, all men involved in the Pari network were thus under arrest: Sarosan and Danoewirjo in Solo; Mardjono and Moenandar in Banjarmasin; Soenarjo in Surabaya; Soetedjo in Cepu; Ngadimin in Wonogiri; R. Moerdomo in Kediri; Soedarmo in Bojonegoro; Mas Soewarjo in Semarang. A year later, the governor general decided to intern eight Pari members, Mardjono, Sarosan, Moenandar, Soenarjo, Danoewirjo, Ngadimin, Soetedjo, and Ngadimin, to Digoel. The rest were released, but placed under strict police surveillance.<sup>95</sup>

From their interrogations, the ARD learned finally that Bakri/Boediman was Djamaloeddin Tamin, not Alimin, and concluded that Pari networks were run by "chief agents [*hoofdagenten*]" and "agents [*agenten*]."<sup>96</sup> It believed that Tamin was the chief agent for Sumatra and Iwa his supporter, while Mardjono was the chief agent for Java and Sarosan his agent. As far as we can tell from Tamin's *Sedjarah PKI* and several other sources, the Pari never used the words "chief agents" and "agents." The ARD projected its own organizational image of political policing onto the Pari, and believed that it had a structure that was isomorphic with itself, albeit far smaller. As the ARD saw it, Tan Malaka was van der Most's counterpart, while Tamin was Visbeen's and Sarosan, Ramelan's. But the Pari did not just operate in thin air. Its "agents" and supporters were out on the murky ground, operating among activists, informers, and spies, for instance like Mardjono, who worked as a spy for a police *wedana* to protect himself as a Pari propagandist.

Yet in a curious way the words, "chief agents" and "agents," did capture an important feature of the Pari. As we can see by examining the Pari in Central and East Java, it was a very small network indeed. But the question remains: what was the organization supposed to do if Sarosan, for instance, had succeeded in establishing a branch or two in Central and East Java? Ngadimin stated in his interrogation:

Sarosani said then that he had come from abroad with his friends, whose names he did not say, in order to establish a new organization. He talked about the organizations abroad and said that the movement here did not have any success

<sup>94</sup> Visbeen and Mohamad Halid, *Proces Verbaal (Sarosan)*, July 25, 1930; Visbeen and Mohamad Halid, *Proces Verbaal (Danoewirjo)*, Aug. 3, 1930, both in Mr. 509x/1931.

<sup>95</sup> Procureur Generaal (Verheijen) aan Gouverneur Generaal (De Graeff), March 21, 1931, Mr. 509x/1931.

<sup>96</sup> Hoofd van den Dienst der Algemeene Recherche (van der Most), *Geheim Rapport*, March 4, 1931, Mr. 509x/1931.

because the organization was not good and the leaders made mistakes. Therefore a new party must be established, which has the purpose of organizing workers anew . . . The executive of the new party was established in Banjarmasin, [he said,] and branches should be established in Java. Each branch should consist of six persons divided into two sub-branches, namely A and B. The A branch should consist of one member who should lead the branch and come in direct contact with the executive in Banjarmasin. The B branch, comprising five persons, should receive instructions from member A and they have the task to expand the new party secretly by joining various organizations, with the purpose that when mass action should take place, the new party can take over the leadership of this action. The members of the B branch may not know each other and should get in contact with only member A. They may not get in contact with the executive, either. All its work and also the names should be kept secret and especially the names of the executive members. The members of the executive in Banjarmasin should be in contact with the executive abroad, while the executive abroad should take care of the communication between the trade unions in the Indies with those in Europe. This way Sarosan hoped to be able to obtain improvements for the workers, and when the workers have formed a unity, the freedom should come of itself. Sarosan then asked me whether I was willing to become a member of the new party, to which I agreed.<sup>97</sup>

What Ngadimin talked about is the organizational structure of Pari, its shell, as he understood it from Sarosan's explanation. Ngadimin, or for that matter any other Pari member, never said anything about what the members were supposed to do once they had formed cells in other organizations, but the moment for mass action had not arrived yet. Nor did Visbeen and Mohamad Halim, police *wedana* from the Batavia PID, ask this question, because to them the answer was self-evident: they had already concluded that Pari members were "secret agents" taking part in a broad revolutionary conspiracy. But it is not hard to understand what they were supposed to do. Recall what the Pari executive did when it sought cooperation with nationalists. It sent Tan Malaka's letters. Recall what Mardjono and Soenarjo did when Tamin persuaded them to join the Pari. They read Tan Malaka's writings such as *Naar de Republiek Indonesia* and *Massa Actie*. Recall what Sarosan did when he met with Danoewirjo. He gave him the Pari manifesto and other Pari literature. In short, the Pari was a group of Tan Malaka's disciples, and its network functioned to distribute his writings, *samizdat*. Seen from this angle, the words "chief agents" and "agents" prove to be apt descriptions for explaining the Pari, not in the sense the ARD understood, but in manner that calls up images of commissioned traveling salesmen as represented by Singer Sewing Machine Company agents—salesmen and supervisors—then active in Java.

#### *d. Its meaning*

The destruction of the Pari network in Central and East Java was followed, two years later, by the arrest of Djamaloedin Tamin, Mohammad Arief Siregar, and Daja bin Joesoef in the summer of 1932. This was mainly due to the improvement in political policing in British Malaya and improved police cooperation between the ARD and the British CID-SS.

<sup>97</sup> Visbeen and Mohamad Halid, *Proces Verbaal* (Ngadimin), Aug. 9, 1930, Mr. 509x/1931.

As Tamin recalls in *Sedjarah PKI*, Batavian PID chief Visbeen was back in Singapore about a month after the arrest of Pari activists in Java in July 1930. Tamin, always a cautious man, fled from Singapore in August. Since then he was almost always on the run, except for several brief stays in Singapore, often shadowed by the CID-SS: as seaman on board "Darvel" of the Singapore-Mindanao-Zamboanga line from August 1930 to January 1931; on board "Kistna" of the Singapore-Bangkok line with Daja bin Joesoef from January to July 1931; and hid out in Selangor, protected by Islamic teachers trained at Padang Panjang, from July to December 1931.<sup>98</sup>

By the time he was back in Singapore in December 1931, Arief Siregar and Daja bin Joesoef had obtained jobs at the Nederlandsch Koloniale Petroleum Maatschappij (NKPM, Netherlands Colonial Petroleum Corporation) in Sungai Gerong, Palembang, and the distribution of Pari literature in South Sumatra and Batavia had started to go well once again. Dawood (Davidson) had also joined the Pari following Tjek Mamad's introduction.<sup>99</sup> In early 1932, after Soekarno was released from prison and joined the Partindo, Tamin recalls, the demand for Pari books, pamphlets, and propagandists picked up. In February 1932, he sent Dawood to Tan Malaka for training, who had by then moved from Amoy to Shanghai. In March, Adam Galo from Padang Panjang got in contact with Tamin in Singapore. In May, he started to be tailed again by the CID-SS; he suspected a former PKI fugitive he had helped settle down in Kota Tinggi informed the CID-SS of his presence in Singapore. In July, Kandur gelar Soetan Rangkajo Basa, who had been out of communication with Tamin for almost three years, came to Singapore, told him that he had been in contact with West Sumatran PSII (Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia) leaders such as Hadji Djalaloeddin Thaib, and returned to West Sumatra with Pari literature. In August, Adam Galo sent two men, Loetan Soetan Basa and Loetan Madjid, from West Sumatra to Singapore for Pari cadre training. For the first time since 1929, there seemed to be a chance to establish a branch in Padang Panjang, West Sumatra and perhaps in due course in Batavia and Palembang, too. Tamin bought a ticket to go to Batavia on September 15, 1932. Two days before his departure, however, he was arrested by the CID-SS, along with twelve other men, when they were producing Pari pamphlets at their hideout.<sup>100</sup>

In two days the CID-SS learned from the Pari correspondence it confiscated that Mohamad Arief Siregar was in Sungai Gerong, Palembang, working as a clerk at the NKPM, and that Daja bin Joesoef was in Pasar Senen, Batavia. Alerted by the CID-SS by telegraph, the PID picked up both men on the same day. At the time of their arrest, the police confiscated *Obor* from Arief Siregar's house and *Pari Manifesto* (one copy), the Pari statutes (two copies), the *Pari Manifesto* dated May 1929 (two copies), letters from Nadir (Tan Malaka) and Goenadhi (Soebakat) to Ir. Soekarno, Mr. Singgih, and Dr. Soetomo (two copies), and a picture of Tan Malaka at Daja bin Joesoef's place.<sup>101</sup> The ARD also learned that another man had been with Daja before his arrest, a man identified later as Kandur (also called Mohamad Noer, Djamil, Tagong, Charles, and Tumbel) who was arrested in June 1933.

<sup>98</sup> Tamim, *Sedjarah PKI*, pp. 69-78.

<sup>99</sup> Tan Malaka, *From Jail To Jail*, Vol. 3, p. 318.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78-86.

In the subsequent interrogations, Daja bin Joesoef and Tamin (who was handed over to the ARD in September 1932) said hardly anything about the Pari, but Mohamad Arief Siregar told an interesting story about his life, how he had joined the Pari, and what life was like in the Pari underground.

Mohamad Arief Siregar—to be more precise, Mohamad Arief Siregar, alias Mohamad Ajoob Siregar, alias Suntoo, alias Suntok, alias Noekman, alias Hongko, alias Mohamad Sidik, alias Hamzah, alias Menteri, alias Adik Menteri, alias John Little—was born in Beringin, sub-district of Sipirok, district of Padang Sidempuan, residency of Tapanuli in c. 1908. A graduate from the second native school in Sipirok, he became a teacher-trainee (*kweekelingonderwijzer*) for two years at the Moehammadiyah school in Beringin, and then worked as an assistant teacher there until 1924. Then he moved with his uncle to Pematang Siantar, to Singapore, to Indragiri, and back to Singapore, from 1924 to 1926. On his way from Rengat to Singapore in 1926, he met with Raoeb from Padang, who introduced him to Bakri (Tamin) in Singapore.<sup>102</sup> The interrogation of Mohamad Arief Siregar then continued this way:

6. What is the real name of Bakri?

I didn't know his real name until now. In fact I didn't know that his name is Djamaloeddin Tamin. The picture you show me (a picture of Djamaloeddin Tamin held out to him) is that of Bakri I meant. Bakri often came by and borrowed money from me so that I had almost nothing left any more. On his advice I paid the remaining rent to Sjech Ibrahim with my money left and then went to stay with Hadji Akip, a man from Palembang, who lived at 7 Minto Road, Singapore. A man whose name was Masjwar [Maswar Madjid] was also staying there, a man from Padang, who is now in Boven Digoel.

7. Who else stayed in that house?

Only Masjwar and I. At that time Bakri (hereafter named Djamaloedin Tamin in these minutes because this is his real name) also came once in a while, and I gave him some money. I stayed in the house of Hadji Akip for two months and then moved to 1 Rowell Road, where Chinese rickshaw coolies lived, and I got a room with Adam, Moening, Timin, Zainoeng, and several others whose names I don't know, all peddlers from Padang. There also was a man whose name was Soelan, who had some small capital and let the other men from Padang hawk goods. It was the man, Soelan, to whom I was brought by Djamaloedin Tamin and for whom I hawked goods.

8. Where did Soelan come from and what is his real name?

He is from Padang and Soelan is his real name. I worked for Soelan for five months, and then told Djamaloedin Tamin that I was going to work [as a seaman]

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<sup>101</sup> See Hoofdparket, Opgave van te interneeren personen die daadwerkelijk deelgenomen hebben aan de actie van de geheime revolutionaire "Partei Republiek Indonesia" (PARI), Mr. 963x/1933.

<sup>102</sup> Visbeen and Mohamad Halid, *Proces Verbaal* (Mohamad Arief Siregar), Oct. 6, 1932, Mr. 963x/1933. Raoeb from Padang is most likely Madjid Rauf, who was working as a tapper at the rubber plantation in Kota Tinggi, together with Soebakat and Abdoel Rahman alias Umar Giri alias Idris in December 1926 when Alimin and Moesso were arrested there. See Tamim, *Sedjarah PKI*, p. 46.

on board, because I couldn't [earn enough to] eat, could not buy anything any more. I stayed in Singapore for three more months, got a job as postman at the central post office in Singapore, worked there for three months, and after that worked for nice months as postman at a sub-post office. Then I worked as a seaman on board the steamship "Marella" of the [Singapore-]Australian line, made two trips which lasted for about three months. After that I was unemployed for three months, and I stayed with Soelan.

Then he took passage on board the "Darval" of the North Borneo line as a seaman, stayed with Tamin for three months in Singapore, worked for Soelan, and then for Adam after Soelan's departure, and finally in July 1929 he was sent by Tamin to Medan as a courier to deliver his letter to Iwa Koesoema Soemantri. By the time he arrived in Medan, however, Iwa had been arrested. Arief destroyed Tamin's letter as instructed, stayed in Medan for two weeks, worked for four months in Pematang Siantar at a lodging his uncle owned, and then returned to Singapore. When he met with Tamin (most likely in December 1929 or January 1930), he told Arief that they better keep quiet for some time (most likely because of Soebakat's arrest). Arief went to Pulo Sambu, worked at a BPM (Borneo Petroleum Maatschappij) for three months, and met with Abdoelrahim Siregar and Harahap. Three of them went to Palembang in March or April 1930 and got a job at NKPM in Sungai Gerong. After working for seven months, Arief wrote to Tamin, asking him to send an assistant. Daja bin Joesoef came from Singapore, whom Arief had known since his Singapore days.

17. How far did you go with your propaganda for the Pari then and how many members or candidate members did you get?

I did not do any propaganda myself because I had no time for that. I had to work hard from morning to evening, and then I was too exhausted to do anything for the Pari. So there were no members or candidate members for the Pari. Daja came about a month later [after he wrote to Tamin]. I had sent money for his travel . . .

. . . After I was acquainted with Djamaloedin Tamin in 1926, he talked about political affairs regularly and gave me various books to read, such as "Semangat Moeda," "Philippine Revolution" and "Chinese Revolution." The first one was written by Tan Malaka. After Djamaloedin Tamin trained me in politics for about six months, which was when we were staying at 7 Minto Road, with Hadji Akip, he asked me what I thought about the various books, especially that of Tan Malaka. I answered that in my opinion it would be difficult to achieve the goal described in the book and that I thought I was not yet sufficiently informed of politics to understand everything. Djamaloedin Tamin laughed and did not say any more . . .

Tamin later told him about the Pari. He let Arief read its statutes and regulations. He also told him that "Tan Malaka used to receive f.400 a month from Moscow, but no more" and that "he broke his relationship with Moscow." The party was led by Tan Malaka, Soebakat, and Tamin, Arief said, and Sarosan, Soenarjo, Mardjono, Abdoelrachman (Umar Giri, alias Idris, arrested in Riouw in April 1931) and several others, all arrested by then, were its members. After he settled down in Sungai Gerong, Arief Siregar met with Pasariboe, a former PNI member and land registration official

(*kadaster*) in Palembang, who introduced him to the former chairman of the PNI Palembang branch, Samidin.

25. Did you tell Samidin about your plan and did he agree with your ideas?

No. Well, I talked with him about holding rallies . . . but he said that the local had to follow the instruction of the PNI central executive to hold no rallies. Samidin was planning at that time to establish [a branch of] the Pendidikan Nationala Indonesia [Indonesian National Education], but Noengtjik, a former PNI [local] executive member, was against it. I tried to reconcile each to the other, but without success. Because I did not believe it right to have a PI [Partij Indonesia, Indonesia Party] and a PNI [Pendidikan] side by side, I conceived a plan with Tjeq Man and Soediardjo to establish the Taman Peladjaran [garden of learning], an association [reading club] which should not have anything to do with politics officially not to scare away government officials. But the plan was really political, was aimed at standing close to the PNI [Pendidikan]. As such, Samidin was to be asked to be its leader and the new PNI [PNI-Baru, i.e., Pendidikan] was to be born out of the Taman Peladjaran.

26. But the purpose of the Pari is not the same as the purpose of the new PNI?

It doesn't matter. My purpose was only to form a political party in Palembang, and I first thought about the PNI which is closest to the Pari. Once the party is established in Palembang, it would be easier for me to advance my ideas. Djamoedin Tamin also told me to try to establish trade unions and for that I asked Daja [bin] Joesoef's help. I don't know what he did in Palembang, but he once told me that he found someone in the inland who was willing to work for the Pari. Because of party discipline, however, I was not allowed to ask who he was or to follow the ones he associated with.

. . . In Palembang I found no one who would agree with my idea and join the Pari. The members of Taman Peladjaran were all supporters of the PI and the PNI. In Sungai Gerong I also had no success initially in establishing a cooperative because of the egoism of various people. When the pay was cut, however, a list went around to strike. I don't know who made the list. I said it was crazy to strike, because they themselves would become victims. Eventually I succeeded in establishing a cooperative. In Sungai Gerong, Palembang, and Plaju, I never talked about the Pari . . .

This was the story Arief Siregar told to Visbeen and Mohamad Halil. There is no reason to doubt his story. No doubt he reported only those facts he believed Visbeen and Halil already knew. He did not reveal anything about any Pari activists whom he knew were at large. Yet he admitted that he had been a Pari member and offered them sufficient information about his life, how he met with Tamin, and what his life was like after he joined the Pari.

There is one striking element in his story. It appears Arief Siregar had had no stable jobs and no stable addresses since he left Tapanuli. He was free-floating, moving from one place to another, working in one job or another, and meeting and establishing connections with many different people. In this respect he was perhaps not very different from many other itinerant men he met, such as the peddlers from Padang who worked for Soelan in Singapore or the two friends with whom Arief moved from

Pulo Sambu to Sungai Gerong. He was wandering, like many other Sumatran *perantau*s (wanderers). But he experienced a fatal encounter in his wandering. He met with Tamin, and something happened. He did not say, and we do not know, what happened when he met Tamin, but it is clear he accepted his authority. He gave him money. He did what Tamin told him to do. He read Tan Malaka's *Semangat Moeda* because Tamin let him read it. He discussed politics with him. He warmly remembered Tamin's laughter when he said he did not fully understand politics. He remembered he shared Pari secrets with him. He joined the Pari. But we do not know, and perhaps he himself was not sure, when it was he joined the Pari. Perhaps it was when he met Bakri/Tamin, or perhaps it happened when Tamin revealed Pari secrets to him.

His life did not change markedly after he became a Pari man. He kept wandering, moving from one job to another, from one place to another. Occasionally he worked as a courier, when Tamin told him to do so, as when he traveled to Medan to deliver his letter to Iwa. Once he settled down in Sungai Gerong, he continued to follow Tamin's instructions. He established a reading club with the hope that someday it would be a party. As he tells us, however, his political work did not go very far. He was exhausted after his work and people he came to know well were largely PI and PNI supporters. But it did not matter. What mattered was that he kept communicating with Tamin, in coded letters and coded names, which Tamin told him to use. To put it briefly, Arief accepted Tamin's authority in defiance of the Indies state authority and despite his fear of arrest and eventual internment. He embodied what the Pari underground meant for Arief.

It should be no surprise, then, that Visbeen and Mohamad Halil regarded coded letters and coded names as the most important signs of the Pari underground. Recall what Arief said about Soelan. He said he was a man from Padang, and that Soelan was his real name. As soon as he said that, Visbeen and Mohamad Halid understood what he meant: Soelan was not a Pari man. He did not use aliases, which meant he did not accept names given by Tamin. Coded names and letters were significant, not only because they formed the key to unlock Pari secrets, but also because they signified that there was a hierarchy built ultimately on the acceptance of Tan Malaka's authority, the very presence of which negated the established colonial order. It is symptomatic in this sense that Arief had in his possession a copy of *Obor* written mostly by Tan Malaka and that Daja had a picture of Tan Malaka.

Pari men knew they risked internment to Digoel once they were arrested. They knew they were moving in a terrain that the government had designated with sign posts as forbidden, a place where they were not supposed to "trespass." They were there because Tamin wanted them to be there and they felt that their guide, Tamin, and through him, Tan Malaka, were watching them. This explains why Ngadimin said in his interrogation that "when the workers have formed a unity, the freedom should come of itself." They were talking about the emergence of a new hierarchy, independent of the Indies state and society, emanating from Tan Malaka and transmitted by Tamin, which somehow made their wanderings meaningful in a new way; they were not speaking of their political liberation.

It should be clear by now why the internment of Pari men was never questioned by the government. The government knew that the Pari was small, politically insignificant, and unsuccessful as a revolutionary party. It also knew that Pari had

nothing to do with the Comintern and that it maintained few relations with any other political parties in the Indies. But these facts were irrelevant. The measures the government took in destroying the communist movement in the wake of the revolts—mass arrest, imprisonment, and internment—were meant to be both political and educational. Politically, the measures were aimed at destroying the core of the party. Educationally, they were meant to impress a government standpoint on the popular consciousness. If there were recalcitrants who did not understand the government's position on this issue, they too had to be arrested, imprisoned, and interned, with the punishment to be determined by the seriousness of their delinquency. In this scheme of things, associating with Tan Malaka, an activity prohibited by a very tall "no trespass" sign, was very serious. As the resident of South and East Borneo wrote to the governor general in proposing Mardjono's internment, "every effort of this leader [Tan Malaka] to get in contact again with the population of the Netherlands Indies . . . must be prevented at any cost, namely by rendering [his] contact persons harmless . . . by the application of so-called extraordinary powers."

Thus, all Pari "agents" and "chief agents" had to go to Digoel. And because they were associated with Tan Malaka and had entered a "no trespass" zone knowingly, no chance was held out for their release from Digoel, as Hillen and Welter both wrote. Djamaloedin Tamin, Mohamad Arief Siregar, and Daja bin Joesoef were interned to Digoel in August 1933 to Digoel. More were to follow them in the coming years. For the purpose of our discussion, however, the important phase of the Pari was closed with the arrest of Tamin, because with his arrest there was no longer any contact left between Tan Malaka and remaining Pari activists, and with this loss of contact, Tan Malaka's legends replaced his person and his writings as the source of authority.

We have now finally reached the point where we may consider the questions raised in the beginning of this essay: how the government policed the *pergerakan* and how its policing shaped Indonesian popular politics. To consider these questions, it is useful to step back somewhat from the immediate cases of the SKBI, Iwa's internment, and the Pari, and to think about the strategy the government adopted in the wake of the revolts. As we have seen, the government made large-scale arrests, imprisonments, and internments in connection with the revolts: 13,000 were arrested, 4,500 imprisoned, and 1,140 interned—massive in scale compared with the arrests, imprisonments, and internments in the pre-revolts years (but minuscule compared with the mass killings, arrests, imprisonments and internments in late 1965 and 1966). The immediate goal of this policy of repression was political, that is, it meant to destroy the core of the Indonesian communist party. But this was only the immediate goal. More important from the government point-of-view was to teach Indonesians that there were limits to government tolerance, that they could go only so far, and if they ventured beyond that point, they would risk internment. In this sense, the project was essentially educational: once "no trespass" signs were posted warning people away from such "things" as PKI, SR, VSTP, Comintern (the Third International), Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat, Anti-Imperialist League, Moscow, and Tan Malaka, and their association with Digoel impressed on the popular consciousness, Indonesians would remain within limits set by the government. In light of this project, it makes sense that

the government dealt with the SKBI, Iwa, and the Pari in the way it did. The government decided to destroy the SKBI as soon as it learned that it was associated with the Anti-Imperialist League. Iwa had been a suspect even before his return to the Indies because he was in Moscow. And the Pari was a group of recalcitrants, *onverzoenlijken*, because they were associated with Tan Malaka and disregarded the “no trespass” signs.

Policing nationalist politics by erecting “no trespass” sign posts, however, presented its own problems. First of all, precisely because such signs were posted, the entire political policing apparatus—not only the *hoofdparket* with the ARD as its core, but also regional and local PID agents and their spies and informers—watched them intensely and placed under surveillance anyone who might approach even remotely near those signs. This was the reason that the murky twilight zone the PID was supposed to police in order to eliminate any “revolutionary” threat to *rust en orde* (quiet and order) kept expanding to penetrate ever more deeply into the more respectable, more “normal,” political terrain. To see this point, one need only recall what happened to Abdoel Manap, Iwa’s uncle, Medan municipal veterinarian, and BO Medan chairman: a moderate nationalist politically and a respectable man socially, he was nonetheless placed under police surveillance and his house searched at least once because of his association with Iwa. In raising the possibility of Iwa’s internment, van der Plas referred to “the liberal policy of construction the government has followed along with stern measures against destructive underground action.” This was the essence of the policy governor general De Graeff pursued toward the PNI in 1927–1931. But it is useful to remember that its foundation was being undermined because the logic of political policing expanded the zone of suspicion.

The other problem created by posting “no trespass” signs was related to the nature of the underground. As we have seen, the actual political underground that emerged in the years following the revolts was very small. The Pari never succeeded in establishing any significant presence in Indonesian nationalist politics and certainly never offered a threat to the Indies colonial order. Yet it figures as an important political entity for study not only because it offered an opportunity for the colonial government to erect one more warning sign, but also because it illuminated—and continues to illuminate—the inadvertent results of policing strategies shaped to respond to an exaggerated threat. The Pari was a sect, constituted from a group of Tan Malaka’s disciples who believed that once their membership became large enough, freedom would come of itself. It was avowedly revolutionary, and the government perceived it that way. But it was in fact more educational than political, as Tamin’s men were so aptly called “young men of Tamin’s university” in Pari correspondence and Tan Malaka dutifully trained men Tamin sent to Amoy and Shanghai. In other words, the basic, but certainly utopian, assumption on which the entire Pari was built promised that if only millions of Tan Malakas and Tamins could be trained, freedom would come of itself. But Tan Malaka and Tamin only succeeded in training at most thirty disciples. The government therefore had no problem in interning Pari activists to Digoel. But once the government carried out this action and “Tan Malaka” was divorced from his person and his writings and transformed into a sign—a transformation that was effectively managed by the government itself—that sign could appear in unexpected places, as the shadows of martyrs so often do. To put it in a different way, the government could post “no trespass” signs to warn Indonesians

away from associating themselves with Tan Malaka and the Pari. But association could happen not only on a political-sociological terrain, but also in a political cultural sphere. Throughout the 1930s, after the government had succeeded in establishing "normalcy," Tan Malaka's phantom took up residence there, in fantastic newspaper articles on the Pari and Tan Malaka and in spy and detective stories. This terrain could not be policed, let alone destroyed, because it was created by the police in a time of normalcy built on Digoel.