
JOEBAR AYOEB

On October 11, Joebar Ayoeb died in Jakarta. He was the secretary-general of Lekra from 1958 until 1965. His death, Ben Abel informs me, was not reported in any of the Jakarta dailies despite his considerable importance on the Indonesian cultural scene.

I grieve all the more for him when I think that his name might be forgotten were it not for Western scholars such as Keith Foulcher and Henk Maier. On the other hand, he never himself, like many other former political prisoners, made an effort to see that his work and the work of his comrades was remembered. He was concerned, rather, that his rights as an Indonesian citizen be respected again. Even as I admired him and was fond of him, his attitude nonetheless exasperated me. I wanted to see the historical record made secure; he wanted, it seemed to me, to find himself again a full citizen of his country and, without in the least bit denying or excusing his past, found an attempt to make it part of history contrary to that goal. He lived in poverty, but with dignity, while waiting, fruitlessly, as the absence of obituaries attests, for this to happen.

I wonder now whether if, from a political point of view, he was not right. The refusal to claim their record left the New Order government with only a specter to confront. In place of a debate about the role of Lekra and, more generally, the Communist Party and those associated with it, the government has only ghosts with which to do battle. When it claims to fear "organizations without form" in any manifestation of discontent, it shows that the spirit of Ayoeb c.s. continues to agitate. His death has not gone unnoticed even if it has gone unpublished. The government's suppression of his last achievement in making news is an example of their fear of a resurgence and, no doubt, it informs those who agitate again in a more spirited fashion, perhaps, than knowledge of the historical record would.

I, however, continue to regret the possibility that his name and the deeds attached to it might be lost. The editors of *Indonesia* hope to publish an obituary in due time in which his achievements will be noted. In the meantime, I wish to record an anecdote he told me. When the hunt for "Communists" began, Ayoeb, knowing he was in danger, went into hiding. He did not, however, flee Jakarta for safer places. Instead he

went to a section inhabited by many military figures. His thinking was that no one would look for him there. He worked as a street vendor and escaped capture. When, however, his wife was taken by the military, he gave himself up on the condition that she be released. It was the beginning of years of captivity without trial.

He told me this story modestly and informally, without thought that I might record it. Against his strategy and perhaps his wisdom, I relate it here because I persist in thinking that stories of courage are valuable themselves and serve noble purposes for others.

James T. Siegel