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Dear Mr. Rogers:

During these first cool days of the rainy season, I do most of my writing on the veranda of my hotel in Bogor. As I sit here, I can see the green jungled slopes of Mount Salak, a dead volcano which rises nearly 7,000 feet from the Bogor foothills. Not long ago, Mount Salak was a favorite lair of the Darul Islam rebels, and a few fanatic Moslems still hide there.

The scene reminds me that Indonesia is the one country in the Far East whose rebellions are not communist, but Moslem. Yet down here in Bogor, as in most of Indonesia, politically-minded Moslems belong to the moderate and perfectly legal Masjumi Party.

Next door to the hotel is a command post of the Siliwangi Division, which has been fighting the Darul Islam rebels for several years with limited success. Only six years ago, the same Siliwangi Division crushed the communist rebellion at Madiun. Since then, the Indonesian Communist Party has stood loyally at the government's side, contemptuous of traitors and rebels.

I've spent a good deal of time wondering about the four factors in this Indonesian political equation: Nationalist government, communists, Moslems, and army. My 1953 letters were written with the feeling that this equation--which can be factored several ways but seemingly never to a solution--contains the most basic statement of power relations in Indonesia.

For six weeks now, I've spent my time on the communist factor. I've read nearly all of the published material on or by the Indonesian Communist Party, and I've talked with many people. My aim, of course, is to explain the communist problem in some meaningful way through a series of letters.

You may ask why I choose to describe Indonesian communists at this time, rather than Indonesian businessmen, dancers, governors, or movie stars. At least, it's a question that I often ask myself.

As one observer, I can hardly hope to present commentary on more than twenty-five or thirty problems in the coming year. Yet my goal is to give an informative and useful picture of Indonesian political history during this time. What problems should I report? I have some conscious standards of selection. Other standards are quite arbitrary and depend on what interests me. If I explain something about these standards, those who read my letters may find it easier to judge my observations and the Indonesian scene I observe.

Take the communist problem as a starter. In describing the communist movement, I make a conscious decision not to write a great deal about the crisis in the Ali Sastroamidjojo cabinet, an event which has been exciting Djakarta politicos for

nearly a month now. One pivot of my decision was the feeling that the reportable facts about the Ali cabinet crisis so closely resemble those about the Wilopo cabinet crisis in 1953 that the reader would have some trouble distinguishing the two series of events. Factual reporting of capital city news could very easily give the impression that Indonesian politics is a merry-go-round, forever revolving through the same circus of events.

But Indonesian politics is not a merry-go-round. Behind the frequently re-enacted drama of personal feud and Djakarta crisis, events are unfolding which will have a decisive effect on the type, form, and function of this young state when it gets a few years older.

No one knows yet which force, or combination of forces, will rule Indonesia in the future. A remarkably free political struggle has been going on since 1945 to determine the winner. Because the composition of the government was decided by decree and appointment several years ago, the progress of the real struggle for power in Indonesia is only dimly reflected in the personnel and policies of the Indonesian cabinets, which have numbered five in five years.

My job is to report this struggle for power and to give some idea of the economic developments, social changes, and attitudes which effect the struggle.

Whether I am in Djakarta, Medan, or a jungle village, I have to make innumerable decisions about what is important and what is not. My choice of problems to report is not entirely intuitive, though I'll admit that "hunch" plays its part. I generally decide to report on a problem when it meets the following conditions:

(1) It must fall somewhere in my field of competence, which is political history. To me, political history is the study of how people attain power or influence because of their position, prestige, wealth, or access to arms. So my interest is not in a narrow field of events, but in an aspect of events, relations, and attitudes that are found in all segments of society. I want to know, (1) Who has power now, who is gaining power, and why? (2) What are the uniquely Indonesian forms and institutions for getting and exercising power?

A Caltex (California-Texas Oil Co.) decision to invest $100,000,000 in Sumatra is decidedly in my field, as is the gathering of 250,000 Moslems to celebrate a religious event. A demonstration in conservative Central Java against western dancing may reveal more about the basic stuff of Indonesian politics than a week of parliamentary sessions. The same may be true of a recent statement by the Minister of Health that he fired a top doctor as being "a-national and anti-revolutionary" because, among other things, he advocated that nurses use western toilet paper instead of the "water of our land."

A little Indonesian boy, not four years old, just passed my typewriter. He saw me and started to cry. His nurse told him, "He'll bite you! He'll bite you!" and then said calmly to me, "The child is afraid of you." That my white skin makes me a bogeyman is also a proper study for the political observer.

As I define it, the field of Indonesian political history is as wide as Indonesian society.

(2) The problem should have significance.

Considering Sukarno's position of influence, I would be slacking if I ignored his unique personality. On the other hand, I will not concentrate a great deal of attention on the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce, for it is definitely not a powerful body.

In the free struggle for power in Indonesia, I think that the following groups are especially important:

Moslems, moderate and radical
Communists
Radical nationalists, especially Sukarno
Regional Army Commanders.

Other groups vie for power, but these are the principal actors, for they all possess an important combination of the prerequisites for power: access to arms or wealth, effective organization, an appealing program, prestige, or the traditional loyalty of large numbers of people.

The same, however, can be said of a power struggle almost anywhere. It is also important to ask what special character Indonesian culture lends to political life.

A political movement or group usually needs wealth of some type to carry out its program; it is typically Indonesian that the source of this wealth is apt to be the government, Chines merchants, or possibly foreign enterprisers. Political leaders generally strive to unite their followers in a common program of action; it seems to be typically Indonesian that unity and direction in a political movement stems more from personal loyalty to a dramatic leader than from common cognizance of common interests. Slogans which appeal to a generalized fear of foreign spies, communists, or fanatic Moslems seem to be particularly effective with certain groups; slogans which stress concrete goals or programs of action seem to be strikingly ineffective.

If I had unlimited time, assistance, and notepaper, I might try to describe in detail all the major Indonesian power groups and the character of the political situation they operate in. Since I cannot do this, I must limit my goals somewhat. In my next several letters, I will discuss what I consider to be the major recent changes in power relations on the national level; my information on the "typically Indonesian" aspects of political life will come from concrete case studies I will undertake when these first letters are finished.

The major changes I refer to are, (1) the growing radicalism of President Sukarno's speeches, (2) the expansion and growth of the Indonesian Communist Party, and (3) the creation of the Anti-Communist Front. In reporting on national events of this sort, I search for facts to verify or dispute the following working hypotheses, which are themselves the result of sixteen months' general political observation in Java and Sumatra:

1. The radical wing of the Masjumi Party and the Indonesian Communist Party are both benefiting from the development toward extremism in Indonesian politics.

2. Radical nationalists (Sukarno, for example) are being drawn more and more into cooperation with the Indonesian Communist Party. The best test of the alliance will be Indonesian Nationalist Party policy toward foreign investments in Indonesian rubber and oil.

3. There is a development toward regional separatism or Warlordism in Sulawesi, and to a lesser extent in East Java and North Sumatra. The clearest test of this trend will be control over provincial revenue and civil service appointments.

4. The Indonesian bureaucracy is extending its control over economic, social, and cultural life. Control over this bureaucracy is generally the aim of all political groups.

Elastic hypotheses of this type are now laws, however useful they may be. There is no certainty that the Masjumi Party will rule Indonesia, that Sulawsei will become a separate nation, or that a native Indonesian business class will not take root and flourish. I look just as diligently for evidence to contradict my notions as I do for support. Perhaps my future work will convince me that these hypotheses are not so important in current Indonesian political history as are some others. But for the time being, I believe that the most significant political problems are related to these four.

(3) My reporting should deal as much as possible with concrete situations and verifiable facts.

Djakarta is not the only politically important location in Indonesia. Provincial capitals and rural districts are significant too. Observers who do all their reporting in a vacuum from Djakarta find themselves out of contact with developments in the hinterland and often get excited about matters of only temporary or limited importance.

To guard against this kind of rootless reporting, I will do a good part of my next year's work in a single administrative district (kabupaten) in East Java. For six months or more, I will give most of my attention to the political life of the 200,000 people who are there. This work should provide me with concrete information on the "grass-roots" strength of national political groups and indicate how much real sense there is in my ideas of what is "typically Indonesian" in the political scene I've been viewing.

I will continue to report from time to time on national events of great significance, even though this involves the risk of writing too much about generalities. My next few letters on the Indonesian Communist Party are derived in great part from documents, speeches, and published programs. I would like to be able to present a less generalized picture, but Indonesian communists do not give interviews freely, nor do they discuss the inner workings of the party with outsiders. But the communist problem has become extremely important, so I will discuss it with what materials I have on hand.

(4) The problem should be accessible to investigation.

Regionalism is a fascinating problem, and it is indeed noteworthy that Colonel Warouw, Regional Commander of the Indonesian Army in Sulawesi, has found his own source of revenue in smuggling copra to the Philippines. I don't have the means to go deeply into the problem of regionalism in Sulawesi, so I must be content to gather information on a similar trend in the more important provinces of East Java and North Sumatra.

Other problems are outside my scope for security reasons. If I were to collect information about the police intelligence service, I would be considered a spy; if

I tried to study the Darul Islam rebellion firsthand, I might be shot. My attention had better go in other directions if I wish to maintain my status as a guest in this country.

The lack of unity and discipline in the army is an extremely important subject. A strong political move by the army, or a section of it, could basically change the relations among the Moslem, communist, and nationalist groups which I consider so important. Unfortunately, it is impossible to carry out a satisfactory analysis of happenings in the army. The most I can do is report on these events as they are discussed in newspapers and coffeeshops.

(6) Finally, the problem must be of great interest to me.

It is purely a matter of taste that I collect political cartoons, see Indonesian movies whenever I can, go out of my way to meet Indonesian painters, and spend a lot of time reading fantastic and romantic tales from Indonesian pulp magazines. I happen to think that these activities are informative and entertaining. Whatever the source of his information, I think that the political historian should have an understanding of what makes people laugh, cry, or dream.

Along this line, I wonder if anyone has done serious thinking about the effect of American movies in places like Indonesia? The subject interests me greatly. Movie houses here are very often sold out in advance, and the favorite pictures are American. While political writers are worrying themselves sleepless over the progress of communist ways of thinking--a real enough worry--an American-originated revolution in values may be going on at a great pace.

I'm not speaking of the aspects of our movies which seem to embarrass so many Americans--the Chicago shootings, the exaggeration of wealth, or the great physical beauty of almost everyone portrayed. I mean the more basic attributes of the American movie: continued, fast, effective action; individualism that "takes nothing from nobody"; optimism that finally brings even hapless Bob Hope to glory and a girl.

American movies are a reportable aspect of the Indonesian scene, and perhaps a very significant one. For one thing, they are part of the social and cultural revolution which seems to be drawing cities like Djakarta and Surabaja farther and farther away from the rural villages that they dominate.

A political observer can't ignore the great gap between city and village in Indonesia. If I choose to do this by talking about differing tastes in entertainment, I hope some other observer broadens the picture by discussing the difference between urban and rural family life, child care, or superstitions.

Reporting politics in Indonesia is something like trying to catch ten bouncing tennis balls at the same time. Political groups are not stable and they do not act consistently. There is not an overwhelming trend toward one group or one belief, as was the case in China a few years back. Even the basic financial condition of the state is subject to tremendous variations with the unpredictable fluctuations in the international rubber market.

It is just this diversity and unpredictability that makes Indonesia such an absorbing study during these first years of the republic. The critical period of the

General Election campaign is approaching. The first decisive contest of power between Moslems, radical nationalists, and communists is about to take place. There is every chance that the distribution of power will be basically different in twelve months from what it is now. I hope to do a comprehensive and sensible enough job of reporting the events of this year, so that the readers of these letters will have a useful understanding of the character, conduct, and support of the political groups which will be influential at that time.

Yours sincerely,

Boyd R Compton

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