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INDONESIA: THE CONTINUING REVOLUTION

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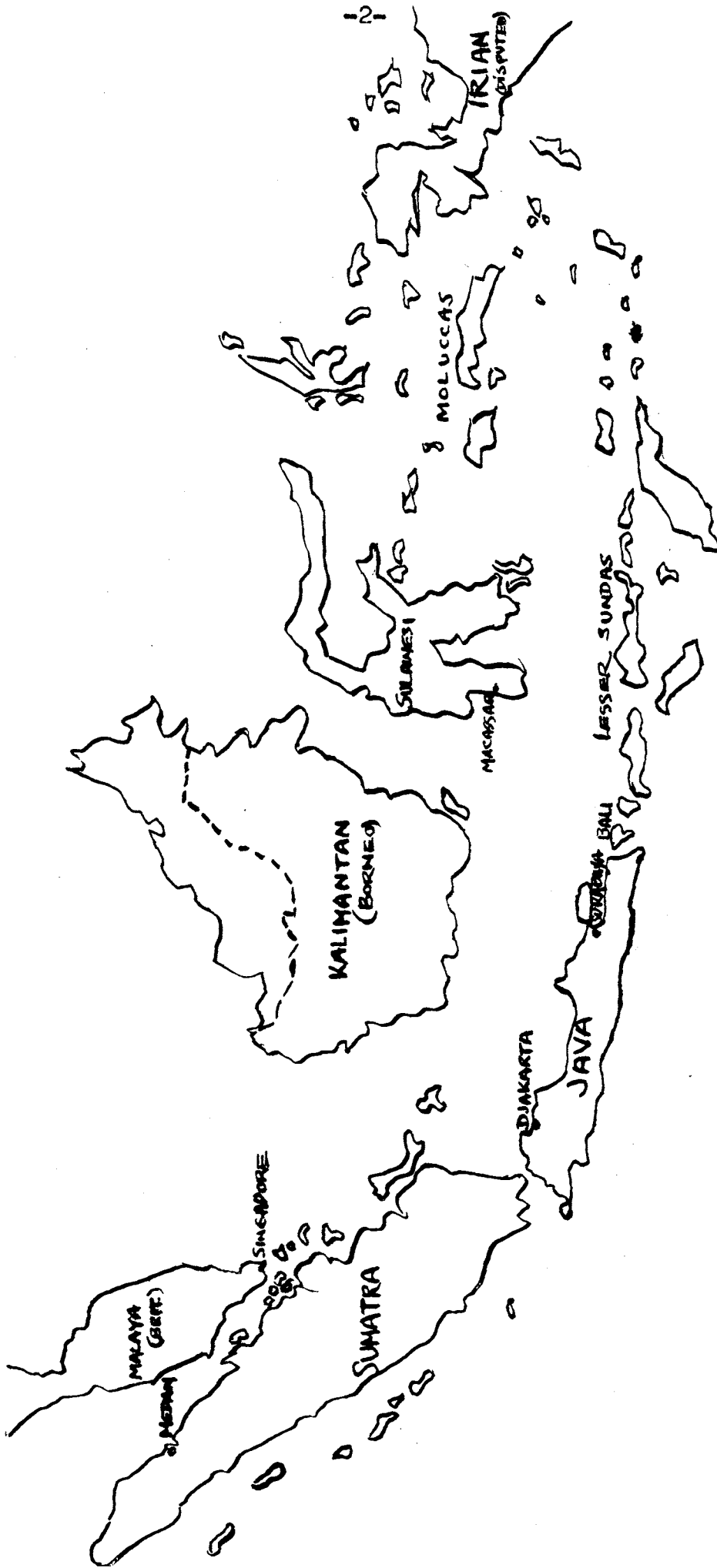
The many islands of Indonesia became a republic by declaration in 1945 and a free nation in fact at the end of 1949. The fate of this new tropical country is of great practical concern to Americans, yet we know too little of its problems and prospects.

We see scattered and inadequate newspaper accounts of Indonesian affairs. They give the impression that the island republic is being swamped by successive waves of problems, some of them inherited from the era of Dutch colonial rule and some of more recent origin. The problems are very real, even threatening, but even the most gloomy pessimist must admit that the young republic has made an impressive start under the most difficult circumstances.

It is remarkable that a unified state could be created at all in an archipelago of so many islands and so many peoples. The key link in the Indonesian island chain is Java, the rich island where more than fifty million of Indonesia's seventy-eight million citizens live. To the west of Java, the larger island of Sumatra supports a population of over ten million, despite the fact that over eighty per cent of its surface is covered by dense jungle. The rest of the Indonesian population is scattered unevenly over the islands to the north and east: Kalimantan (formerly Dutch Borneo), Sulawesi (formerly Celebes), the Moluccas, and the chain of small islands running out to the east from Bali. In the extreme west is the disputed area of Western New Guinea (called Irian by Indonesians), which is claimed by Indonesia but occupied by the Dutch.

This collection of mountainous tropical islands has been a great historical crossroads of cultures and peoples, so that the present richness and diversity of Indonesia is ethnic as well as strictly geographical. Some writers claim that two hundred languages and dialects are spoken in the islands. If we count only the major groups, we find about twenty distinct cultural areas, ranging from the strongly Moslemized patriarchal society of Acheh at the northern tip of Sumatra, through matriarchal Minangkabau on the west coast, through Hindu Bali, to the solidly Christian area of Menado at the tip of Sulawesi. Disintegrative forces are constantly at work in a nation of so many languages and geographically isolated areas.

The geographic and cultural diversity of Indonesia is very real--to the unending delight of tourists and ethnologists--but its importance is easy to exaggerate. Historically, contact between the Indonesian islands has probably been no more difficult than between the southern regions of China. The sea has been as much a highway as a barrier, and the proofs of intensive cultural interchange are seen in the great similarity of political forms, economic institutions and social usages from one end of the archipelago to the other. The traveller in the islands will see diversity, but he will also see the foundations of unity. If he is American, he will be surprised to find that the Indonesian national motto, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, has precisely the same meaning as our own E Pluribus Unum.



# INDONESIA 1953

There have been four great historical unifiers in the Indonesian archipelago: (1) Hindu-Buddhist colonization and rule in the first millenium, ending in the great Madjapahit empire of the fourteenth century, (2) the remarkable conversion of most Indonesians to Islam after the twelfth century, (3) the forcible unification of the islands under Dutch rule after the seventeenth century, and (4) the Indonesian nationalist movement and revolution.

The legacy of Hindu-Buddhist predominance can still be seen in the great temples and monuments on Java and in the social and political forms on both Java and Sumatra. The island of Bali--at the eastern tip of Java--is still a stronghold of Hinduism. In other areas, Islam has achieved either a complete or superficial triumph. In general, we can say that the religion of Mohammad has penetrated most deeply in western Indonesia (Sumatra and West Java) and in the coastal towns of the east. In Central and Eastern Java, undercurrents of the old Hindu-Buddhist culture--with its mystical mind and aristocratic tradition--are persistent and formative.

So even before the completion of the Dutch conquest, a basic cultural stress was becoming visible in Indonesia between the strongly Moslem West and the incompletely Moslem East. Politically, the archipelago was still divided into petty kingdoms and sultanates when the first Dutch ships arrived off the coast of Java.

Dutch colonialism was rightly known as the most intensive in Asia. The material achievements of Dutch rule are all the more remarkable when we realize that its actual duration was less than a century and a half. The Netherlands East India Company had begun its checkered career of conquest, exaction, and controlled trade in the early seventeenth century, but the period of actual Dutch rule began only after the Napoleonic era.

At its height, Dutch colonialism was essentially exploitative rather than merchantilistic. The Dutch were not searching so much for markets as for raw materials and foods to be traded and processed in Europe. To achieve this aim, the Dutch had to penetrate Indonesian society and transform its basic character. Until about 1870, the needed commodities were obtained by forced cultivation and forced labor, with the Javanese village as the unit of production and the Dutch government as the controller and recipient. This was the era of the Culture System. After 1870 and in the first decades of this century, private Dutch capital poured into Indonesia to finance the rich plantation economy of Java and Sumatra. The export economy of the islands expanded and came under increasingly direct Dutch management.

In both the first and second phases of imperialist development, Indonesian society was thoroughly shaken and remoulded. The impact of Dutch rule was certainly far greater than that of the British in Burma and India.

Since Dutch aims were primarily economic, the greatest transformations in Indonesian society were in agricultural production. Blessed with

rich soils, generous rainfall, and warm, constant temperatures, the islands were well suited to become a giant agricultural factory. At the end of Dutch rule, the Indonesian economy had assumed a dual nature, in which the two sections--food and export production--were closely interdependent. The native rice culture was intensified and extended through large-scale irrigation projects in the river valleys of Java and, to a lesser extent, Sumatra. Great food surpluses allowed sensational population increases, which in turn provided an increasing reservoir of cheap labor for the development of the plantation economy.

The Indonesian economy became immensely productive but dangerously vulnerable. Perhaps its greatest weakness was dependence on foreign market prices for its tropical exports. The world depression of the thirties underlined the unpleasant fact that government revenues and private income in the islands were at the mercy of market fluctuations in Europe and America. The engineer must marvel at the Dutch genius in scientific and rational production which made Indonesia rich in rice, rubber, tin, palm oil, ground oil, tobacco, sugar and other commodities; the economist has misgivings when he sees that prosperity in such an economy is always mortgaged to an uncertain future.

One of the spectacular developments of the Dutch period was the population growth on Java. It is likely that no more than six million people lived on Java at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The ninefold increase under Dutch rule can be attributed to the extension of irrigation works and health services, the maintenance of peace and order, or to other factors. The fact remains that the fifty-three million people now living in an area equal to that of the state of Wisconsin constitute a social and political problem of major proportions.

The social structure of Indonesian society under Dutch rule was unique and reflective of the economic situation. Three distinct social groupings existed: the Dutch as an upper class of administrators, managers, and technicians, the Chinese as merchants and small capitalists, and the mass of Indonesians generally outside the realm of economic and political power. J.S. Furnivall has described this as a "plural society," emphasizing the fact that each group was governed by its own laws and occupied a rather fixed position in society as a whole.

Within the Indonesian segment of this "plural society," the educated leadership group was pitifully small. Insofar as Indonesians were able to rise to power or prominence, it was usually as minor officials, local religious leaders, or small traders. To a large extent, the Indonesian officialdom was of an aristocratic background and of a more regional than national character. Separated physically and culturally from the masses of Indonesian farmers during the Dutch period, these leaders must have seemed an unlikely prospect to become the elite of a new and self-sufficient nation.

Perhaps the most momentous action of the Dutch in Indonesia was the political unification of the archipelago into a stabilized whole.

Although the Dutch took great pains to discourage the growth of national consciousness, the living fact of nationhood was inescapable. When the first real symptoms of Indonesian political consciousness appeared before the First World War, it was striking that the focus was national rather than regional. It is scarcely less significant that the ideology of this forward echelon of the nationalist movement was Moslem.

The story of the Indonesian nationalist movement before the Japanese invasion is a story of failure. Although real progress was made in fostering a national language based on Malay and in focusing the attention of the small educated elite on national aspirations, the Dutch succeeded in suppressing the movement and jailing its ablest leaders. When the Japanese came, Sukarno, Hatta, and Sjahrir were in exile and independence was a distant dream.

The story of the Japanese occupation of Indonesia is yet to be written. Some day, we will know in detail how three years of occupation served to crystallize and activate a deep and powerful revolutionary movement. By propagandizing nationalism and giving positions of responsibility to Indonesian leaders, the Japanese created the conditions for the struggle for independence. When the war ended, the returning Dutch found that the principal areas of their colony had become a republic with an astounding claim of sovereignty and--most astounding of all--a functioning government and the kernel of a national army.

Three years of intermittent fighting with the Dutch ended with the signing of the Round Table Agreements of December 27, 1949, which transferred full sovereignty to the government of the United States of Indonesia. The price of independence was a guarantee of Dutch economic interests, the granting of certain financial and trading preferences, and the acceptance of a nominal political union with the Netherlands under the Dutch Crown. On August 17, 1950, the United States of Indonesia transformed itself into the unitary Republic of Indonesia, and all traces of Dutch political rule passed into history.

The Republic of Indonesia has now lived through nearly four problem-plagued years. Indonesians who expected to find immediate peace and prosperity in their independent nation have been quickly disillusioned.

The most newsworthy problems of Indonesia's first years have been political. In its first year, the government was faced with three serious rebellions (South Moluccas, Darul Islam, and the Westerling adventure). Two of these disturbances were quickly quelled, but others flared. In September, 1953, the government still faced three sizable rebellions and several minor disturbances. The problem of disorder has been complicated by the performance of a 300,000-man army which has neither the training nor the discipline to fulfil its duties with great efficiency.

Despite rebellion and banditry, a highly centralized government is

functioning with varying degrees of efficiency in the greater part of Indonesia. This in itself is a notable achievement, considering the low level of education and political experience during the Dutch period. Administration has been smoother at the local and district level than in the capital city of Djakarta, where a huge bureaucracy is coping with complex problems of political and economic administration. The cries of corruption are loud, frequent, and well-founded, which is not altogether surprising in view of the positive government role in the economy and the low scale of official salaries. More serious yet is the problem of administrative inefficiency resulting largely from a lack of trained and competent personnel. To cite just one example, the work formerly done by five Dutch engineers in irrigation in East Java is now being done by an Indonesian technical-high-school graduate. Yet the office of this official runs with surprising efficiency.

The political party struggle has been carried on with some vehemence through the remarkably free national press and on the floor of Parliament. The largest party is the Moslem Masjumi, led by Mohammad Natsir, Sukiman, and Mohammad Rum. The Indonesian Nationalist Party, led by Sidik Djojokusarto, exercises influence beyond its numbers, partly because of the association of its name with that of President Sukarno. The Indonesian Socialist Party of Sutan Sjahrir is an elite, intellectual group of great influence but little numerical strength. The Indonesian Communist Party has made great strides under the leadership of D.N. Aidit, but its membership is also limited. In addition to these major parties, nearly twenty small groups make a claim of national standing.

The present Parliament (People's Representative Council) is an appointed body, but general elections are scheduled for 1954 and 1955. The carefully constructed Election Law does credit to this body, whose record has been otherwise quite mediocre. It is hoped that the general election will greatly reduce the number of parties in Parliament and turn some of the energy of interparty bickering into more useful channels.

While the nation waits for general elections, several ominous political developments have become apparent. One is the growing Federal Movement, backed by a demand for greater regional autonomy. The serious Achehnese Rebellion can be considered an expression of this demand. An even more serious threat is posed by the growing polarization of political attitudes toward the Moslem and Communist camps. The small Communist Party has made a surprising comeback after its unsuccessful rebellion at Madiun in 1948 and is rapidly increasing its strength and influence. A broad and powerful Moslem movement has taken form partly as a reaction to communist successes and partly as an expression of Islam's major role in the new Indonesia. While the nationalist parties grope for programs and principles, tension between Communists and Moslems is becoming threatening, with the clique-ridden army standing by as an enigmatic though perhaps decisive factor.

The deterioration of the political situation is deeply rooted in the current economic crisis. Almost immediately after independence,

Indonesia began to reap great profits from the Korean War boom in raw material prices. With rubber and tin selling at record prices, government revenues were more than sufficient to support the huge army, the expanding bureaucracy, and an ambitious program of national development. When the inevitable recession set in a year and a half later, the entire export economy was shaken, and the government was faced with a financial crisis which has continued to deepen through the fall of 1953. Much of the political unrest at all levels is traceable to the downward spiral of Indonesia's dependent economy.

The effects of the post-Korean recession have been felt in all sectors of the economy. In 1952, Indonesia imported more than 700,000 tons of rice and large quantities of wheat, allotting nearly twenty per cent of her foreign exchange for food imports. This desperate food situation is directly connected with the problem of repairing and extending vital irrigation works in Java to support the fast-growing population, but the present government budget does not allow the necessary expenditures. While food imports remain at a high level, foreign exchange is being diverted from outlays for developmental capital goods and the entire economy suffers. This vicious circle will continue to operate until export prices rise significantly or until army and civil service expenditures are drastically cut.

Indonesia is thus enmeshed in a tangle of economic, political, and social problems. It is a virtual certainty that the situation will worsen before there is an improvement. During these years of continual crisis, it is impossible to know whether Indonesia is merely facing problems of growth or whether the new republic will indeed disintegrate.

It is important to realize that Indonesia is experiencing a profound social revolution as society readjusts itself under the new conditions of freedom. There is much reason for long-range optimism, especially in view of the tremendous expansion of educational facilities at all levels and the impressive work of some of the government's technical ministries. The Indonesian language has taken giant strides in the last several years, and a genuine national culture can be seen taking form in the cities of all regions.

It can be argued that a unique new society and new nation are being created in the Indonesian archipelago. A gloomier view is that the Republic of Indonesia is an artificial creation which will disintegrate under the stress of disuniting forces. Despite their differences, Indonesian leaders generally hold to the optimistic view. Perhaps this widely shared attitude will be the margin of survival during these difficult first years.

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