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The Spirit of Indonesia

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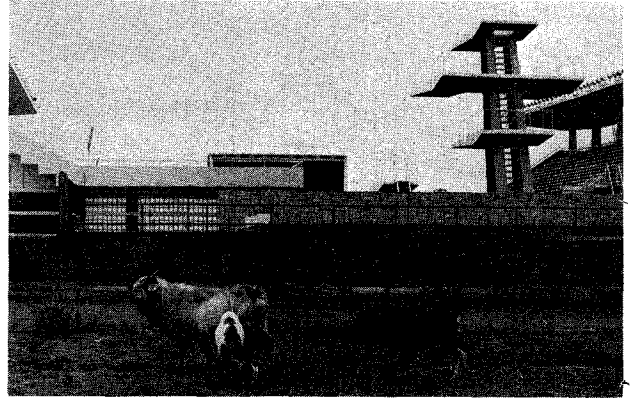
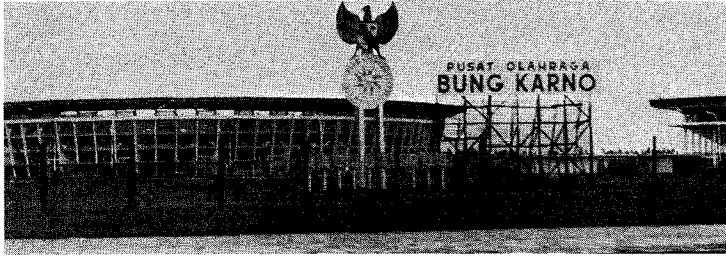
Dear Mr. Nolte,

Indonesia, the largest and potentially the richest country in Southeast Asia, is also the most enigmatic; some would add, the most troublesome. From the outside the country appears grossly mismanaged. Her leaders seem capable only of creating slogans and of blaming others for the country's difficulties. In foreign affairs, Indonesia appears arrogant and inconsistent. Yet internally, the people, or at least the small segment I met, demonstrate a cheerfulness, a spirit, and a support of government that are difficult to understand in the light of the depressed living conditions. I went to Djakarta last October impressed only with the chaos and the double-talk. I came away impressed as much with the spirit of Indonesia. This combination of impressions leaves me with an intense ambivalence toward this great new country.

The acknowledged poverty in a country as rich in resources as Indonesia speaks dramatically of government incompetence. Even Indonesia's official statistics, not the most reliable in the world, show a staggering record of inflation, economic stagnation, and growing foreign indebtedness. Rapid inflation has made a mockery of wages. The salaries of the young university and government people I met (about 3,000 rupiahs per month, or less than US \$ 5 at the unofficial rate), are not even sufficient to buy a month's supply of cigarettes. There have been rice riots in Djakarta and famines reported in parts of central Java, whose rich soils support some of the highest population densities in all of Southeast Asia. Major roads in the capital disintegrate less than a year after construction. Many parts of the city have no piped water or electricity, or have these in quantities almost below usable minima. The build-up of arms for the West Irian crisis took about 80% of the government budget and left the country heavily in debt to Russian arms suppliers. In aggregate, sectoral, or individual accounts, the economy demonstrates only pathological stagnation.

The current exchange rate bears stark witness to the chaos. The official rate is 45 rupiahs to the dollar. On a tourist visa, I was allowed 180 to 1; through a "contact" I bought 750 for one dollar; U.S. Embassy people get 800 to 1; and I heard of rates as high as 1200 to 1.

President Sukarno repeats claims of great national developments, obviously referring to achievements such as the construction for the Asian Games. The magnificent luxury Hotel Indonesia and the mammoth Bung (Brother) Karno sports stadium with swimming pool and other assembly halls are indeed landmarks of modern construction.



For the Asian Games....
from sports grounds to grazing grounds.

It seems to matter little that these achievements do not contribute to productivity, that they are used only by the foreigner (in the case of the hotel) or are abandoned to the goats (in the case of the sports grounds). They are monuments to national (or at least Sukarno's) pride.

Some people have argued that the achievement of this construction demonstrates that the Indonesians are really effective in matters they consider important. This is doubtful. The hotel and sports complex were built by others - Russians, Japanese, and a Danish-American architect. What this does demonstrate is the necessity of obtaining government permission for any achievement. This only reinforces the impression that the stagnation of the economy can be attributed primarily to government mismanagement or overmanagement. It is acknowledged that much of the rubber produced privately outside of Java is smuggled out for sale in Singapore simply because the dictated price at which government buys is far less than the world price.

Covering and rationalizing this great stagnation and mismanagement is a line of double-talk that makes the efforts of George Orwell or even Stalin himself pale in comparison. Indonesia's official national goal is the creation of a socialist society, the struggle for which is led by the Great Leader of the Revolution himself, President Sukarno. "Basically and essentially, Indonesian Socialism is concerned with the relations between human beings in all possible spheres....Close, warm relations rank very highly within the Indonesian scale of cultural values that were already well developed many centuries ago."

Indonesian Socialism is not the same as Western Socialism. It has indigenous roots and will be a harmonious fusion of the unique Indonesian identity with social justice and social prosperity. At the base of Indonesia's unique identity is the concept, Pantia Sila, consisting of an interlocking set of five principles: Belief in God, Humanity, Nationalism, Sovereignty of the people, and Social Justice. There are six other elements identified in the roots of Indonesian Socialism:

1. Kerukunan: the tendency of human beings to seek close relations with one another.

2. Kekeluargaan: the principle of the family system, meaning such a relationship as allows of a harmonious combination of the two ideas of serving the group and, at the same time, of exercising authority as an equal member of that group.

3. Perikemanusiaan: humanness, or the Principle of Humanity.
4. Kerakjatan: the democratic principle, which stresses the idea of the entire people in action in a society, rather than the mechanism of the ballot box that is so frequently associated with democracy in the West.
5. Gotong-rojong: the common voluntary effort of a community in working for a purpose benefitting the community or some member of it.
6. Masjarat jang Adil dan Makmur: The Indonesian Socialist Society in which particular concepts of social justice and prosperity prevail.

I make no pretense at understanding this; I am merely quoting official sources.

Only the fundamentals of Indonesian Socialism have been laid down in the Constitution. A full set of details has not been specified, nor can there be any overnight or piecemeal change instructed from above. "On the contrary, the winning of Socialism must be a process in which each move, every measure, each policy, must first be tested against Pantja Sila and then worked out pragmatically, the success, or otherwise, of the results again measured against the criterion set by Pantja Sila."

One of the more "practical" measures designed to win Indonesian Socialism is the First National Overall Development Plan, covering the period 1961 to 1969. This was produced by the Dewan Ferantjang Nasional, the National Planning Council, commonly referred to as Depernas. "Fortunately the Depernas has, apart from the past experiences in planning development by various ministeries and bodies, three historical documents to use as source materials... namely: 1. the 1945 Constitution with its Pantja Sila ideology. 2. the Political Manifesto of August 17, 1959. 3. The President's message on Development of August 28, 1959." Using these important documents, and testing its actions against Pantja Sila, the Depernas produced a memorable plan. Its form is fantastic. Commemorating Indonesian independence day (August 17, 1945), the plan is in 8 books, 17 volumes and 1945 sections. As someone here said, "It was written by a poet, not an economist." In content the plan is little more than a collection of hastily gathered departmental projects requiring a total public investment of Rps 240,000 million (US\$5,300 million at the official rate of exchange). Indeed there is neither the statistical data nor does there seem to be sufficient interest to construct a plan that is anything more than a list of politicians' pet projects.

Indonesia has had a taste of ballot-box democracy and has found it indigestible. The Political Manifesto of 1959 brought the country back to the revolutionary constitution of 1945. In the process elections became temporarily unnecessary, and "liberalism" became a bad word, connoting all the divisiveness and instability of a representative government. The Great Leader promised to hold elections in 1962, but these were postponed due to the great threat to national security embodied in the West Irian crisis. Now only the Communists are calling for elections, decidedly against the wishes of the Great Leader. More to his liking is his own Guided Democracy with its Guided Economy. The guidance is necessary in the present development to "maintain vigilance against elements which

have obstructed efforts at development since 1950, including liberalism with its political instability, remnants of colonialism, sabotage and subversive activities by anti-national elements, etc.; all these must be retooled."

Retooling is a common process in Djakarta today. Sukarno claims that in this he has created a new word for the English language, apparently overlooking the experience of mass machine production, where the process increases productivity. In Djakarta one hears of people being retooled into and retooled out of government service. Unfortunately the substitution of guided democracy for ballot-box democracy does not seem to have eliminated instability, for the retooling process goes on at a rapid rate and one is hard pressed to keep the ins and outs roster current. Enquiring about a man I particularly wanted to see, I was told that he had been out for some time. When I finally located him, he was the newly installed head of a new Secretariat to the President. A geographer of my acquaintance was retooled out of office and into jail, but allowed to carry on his government work by having materials brought to him and by making frequent trips to his office. When the pace became too much for him, he stopped working to enjoy the peace of proper incarceration; he was promptly retooled out of jail and back into office.

In her foreign relations Indonesia does little to reduce tensions in this part of the world. She blustered about for a year, arming, sending paratroopers and gunboats (one of which did taste combat and was sunk) against the Dutch in West Irian. While Indonesian leaders cried for war, they decried the extreme provocation of the dispatch of Dutch naval units from Holland. The blustering proved sufficient and Indonesia won West Irian from the Dutch. Now she has embarked upon programs of confrontation to Malaya, support of the Brunei rebels, and opposition to Malaysia. Indonesian gunboats have become increasingly menacing in the Straits of Malacca. One recently chased an Indonesian smuggler onto a beach in Malaya and set fire to the cargo of contraband rubber. The Indonesian navy is not noted for the close discipline of its gunboat crews, some of which are suspected of plying the ancient arts of piracy in their spare time, but this crew at any rate took a dim view of Indonesian nationals trying to increase their gains by selling their rubber in Singapore rather than in Djakarta.

Tension was also heightened when Indonesia announced that she considered it necessary to her security to patrol the air along her borders with Malaya and Brunei. Russian-built twin-jet bombers zoomed over the Straits and drew a refreshing comment from Malaya's Prime Minister. "Let them come and look," he said, "we have nothing to hide." When asked if Malaya would try to stop violations of her air space, the Tunjku replied, "Of course not. With our handful of Pioneers (slow scouting and transport planes), their pilots would be home and in bed before our boys got off the ground."

Indonesian leaders often manifest the kind of almost unreal attitude toward the world that I found in a young lady from the foreign service. "We are trying to do things our own way. If we joined one or the other camp, we could get all the aid and assistance we wanted, but since we want to be independent, we have to fend for ourselves."

"But you certainly received considerable aid for the Asian Games and the West Irian Affair," I countered.

Her indignant reply was classic. "Yes, but we had to pay for it,"

That her reply is not completely true is less important than the frame of mind it illustrates. Indonesian leaders often show a great reluctance to acknowledge that what they want involves some cost. This is true not only of external aid, but of her own internal development.

If all of this sounds rather fantastic, it is only because it is. Or at least it is fantastic outside of Indonesia. In Djakarta the picture is different; not entirely different, but not at all as one-sided as it appears from outside.

From the outside the West Irian affair seemed ludicrous in the extreme. One could hardly accept the Indonesian claim that the Dutch hold on this tract of virgin jungle with its stone-age people obstructed Indonesian national or economic development. In Djakarta, however, the serious young intellectuals I talked with felt their country's struggle for the territory was a just and righteous one. And one does not have to go back very far before the record of Dutch intransigence makes one sympathetic with the Indonesians. Some of these intellectuals argue that the only reason Indonesia had to fight for its independence lay in the Dutch failure to see the nationalist handwriting on the wall, and to accept legitimate Indonesian aspirations.

Even in the unreality there is evidence of a spirit that is admirable and that is fortunately found also in more realistic forms. One senses in Indonesia a serious search for self identity. The desire of the Indonesians to do things "our own way" is largely an attempt through actions to discover who and what they are. However much the attempt may fail, and failure is painfully evident, it is the attempt that is important. It is far healthier than a slavish acceptance of another culture or another set of values.

A major part of the spirit of Indonesia is a deep pride in and love for the country. Indonesia itself is a land that is easily loved. Visitors quickly become deeply involved, almost infatuated, with the country and the people. At the moment this calls forth all the extremes of passion. Indonesia's admirers either see nothing wrong and defend every move, or they see the wrongs too clearly and become bitter and disillusioned. In the Indonesians the love of country seems to be more relaxed, more tolerant and more hopeful than in its external admirers.

Even the people who were "out" showed (to me) no deep resentment or bitter frustration. They were waiting for their turn. The young university economists (in but not fully trusted because they were all students of Dr. Sumitro, a leader and Finance Minister of the Sumatra rebel government) saw clearly the great failure of government but exhibited little frustration over their forced inactivity. They, too, were waiting, certain that their time to lead would come.

A large part of this pride and love for country derives from the Indonesian war for independence. (Indonesia would undoubtedly have attained independence without a fight, perhaps more easily, about the same time Malaya did, but that does not alter the fact that she did fight.) The war left a deep residue of anti-colonial sentiment, reenforced by the recent West Irian crisis. It is this sentiment that makes Malaya suspect in Djakarta. Malaya achieved its independence without the purifying rite of the bloodbath. In Djakarta Malaya now appears as the running dog of neo-colonialism. It is this anti-colonial sentiment that moves Indonesian leaders to support Azahari's Brunei rebels, because they were fighting against the British. Even more, their fight was against Malaysia, which the Indonesians see simply as an attempt by the British to transfer sovereignty to their puppets in Kuala Lumpur, against the real wishes of the people of the Borneo territories. Djakarta now argues that Malaysia is simply an imperialist trick to save rubber and tin for their industries. It seems to matter little to the Indonesian sense of logic that one of those "imperialist" customers for Malayan rubber is the U.S.S.R., or that Malaya uses her tin and rubber revenues for economic development rather than for arming.

There may be an element of envy in Indonesia's recent policy of confrontation against Malaya, but behind that there is also a more healthy sense of protest. It is essentially a protest against the old order, call it what you will, in which the Indonesians were on the bottom. In addition, there is a sincere desire to build a new and better society, a desire that makes the sense of protest even more healthy.

Indonesia's paranoia is denigrated in Kuala Lumpur. What country could possibly feel threatened by Malaya? Against Indonesia's 300,000 troops, armed and trained in the most modern manner, Malaya could pit only a few thousand regulars. Against Indonesian jet bombers and battle cruisers, Malaya offers only a handful of lumbering Pioneer aircraft and a few coastal patrol launches. Of course, Indonesia is not concerned with Malaya's insignificant forces; she is really concerned about the great air, sea, and land power of the British (and to a lesser extent the Americans) who stand behind Malaya. It is this power, supporting what Indonesian leaders feel to be a hostile ideology, that gives them the impression of being besieged. In reality, this power in itself is not a great threat to Indonesia. The threat only becomes real when that power confronts leaders whose country is already highly divided and who maintain only a precarious unity among a scattered and ill-distributed population. In this sense, of course, it is not the external power so much as the lack of internal unity that threatens the very existence of Indonesia.

Two thirds of Indonesia's 97 million people are crowded into the two islands of Java and Madura, with 7% of the country's total land area, and a population density of 478 persons per square kilometer. The remaining 35% of the population is scattered over a 3,000 mile archipelago with an average population density of only 34 persons per square kilometer. Added to this is the heterogeneity of cultures that have never experienced political unity except under colonial rule, and that only recently. This geographic and cultural divisiveness appears to be Indonesia's greatest problem. This helps to

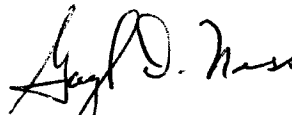
account for the great concern with national unity, which seems to consume most of the efforts of the Indonesian leaders.

In the same region, however, the Philippines has a population more scattered than that of Indonesia. No island in the Philippines has the preponderance of population that Java has. Yet the Philippines seem to have no problem maintaining national unity. This suggests that though the geographic dimension of divisiveness is important, it is less important than the political system, which determines how political instability or economic stagnation will arise from the geographic divisions.

By any measure the Philippines is the freest country in South-east Asia. I would argue that there is an important connection between freedom and the creation of national unity, at least in this part of the world. Dictatorial governments deny initiative to regions, whose leaders then find it necessary to subvert government directions or to break away in order to advance their own interests. This is something Indonesia's leaders have not yet learned, despite their experience with the Sumatra revolt, which was a clear manifestation of this conflict between central and regional interests. It is a lesson that Indonesia's leaders can ignore only at the peril of that national unity with which they seem so concerned.

And so the ambivalence; back and forth I go. Indonesia's objective problems are staggering and call forth the sympathy of any observer. But these problems seem rendered unsolvable by the incompetence of the leadership, which seems unwilling or unable to accommodate the diverse but legitimate demands of the Indonesian people. One can only admire Indonesia's spirit, a spirit of protest and an attempt to build a better society. At the same time one can only be appalled with the actual manifestations of that spirit. At the moment there is no evidence of effective attempts to achieve, or even to move in the direction of the new society.

Sincerely,



Gayl D. Ness

Received in New York March 7, 1963.