

## KATA PENGANTAR

In the Indonesian revolution for Independence few people have been as controversial as Sutan Syahrir, Indonesia's first Prime Minister. In hindsight this was almost inevitable, for despite the fact that he held centerstage only briefly, from 1945-48, he has had a most profound influence on the course of the Indonesian revolution.

He was the main protagonist of a negotiated settlement with the Dutch, but one under international auspices. In this he went against considerable popular feeling that a military solution was both necessary and possible. Assessing the strengths and weaknesses on each side, Syahrir recognized the preponderance of Allied military strength. On the other hand Holland, in his view, could not afford a protracted war, and given Indonesia's relative military weakness, even if we could not win a single battle, as long as the Dutch did not entirely destroy our military strength, we would prevail in the end.

While there were those who thought that the national revolution for independence and the social revolution should not and could not be separated, Syahrir, who recognized the need for both but also recognized the realities of the situation, made a fundamental choice, and gave highest priority to the first goal. His primary reason was that while independence was a goal shared by all, revolutionary social change was not. The divisions among ourselves that would result from giving equal priority to the social revolution might well endanger the preservation of national unity essential for the early attainment of independence. This he considered a major precondition for bringing about the social changes he too considered necessary.

With Vice-President Hatta and the Komite Nasional Pusat he was responsible for the establishment of a system of parliamentary government and a multiparty system, which Sukarno subsequently approved, even though he criticised it later when he embarked on his Konsep Presiden. There were both tactical and strategic reasons for this decision. Tactically, it was a way to remove the stigma of 'Made in Japan' and 'fascism' which the Dutch, but at first also the Allies, attached to the proclamation of independence. This would clear the way for a possible negotiated settlement. Strategically, a democratic multiparty system

was more likely to ensure the support and active participation of the many different golongan and aliran in Indonesia's pluralistic society, than would a single party. Moreover the single national party that had been established, was, not only in the eyes of the Allied Forces, but also in the view of many of the fervently anti-Japanese and revolutionary pemuda, tainted by a history of Japanese collaboration. A multiparty democracy had the additional tactical advantage that such a system would make it almost impossible for the Dutch to manipulate Indonesia's various minorities for their own purposes.

A second strategic consideration was that a democratic system would better enable us later to fight what Syahrir felt was Indonesia's longterm enemy: feudalism in its various forms, as well as the fascist legacy that the Japanese military had left among a large part of the pemuda. Syahrir's pamphlet "Perjuangan Kita" reflects the strength of his convictions on these issues. although it sowed at the same time the seeds of a great deal of hostility that was to plague him all his life. Nevertheless, the weight of his priorities led him in 1946 to restore the Pamong Praja, despite the often violent popular reactions against it in various parts of the country for its role in the hated rice-levies for the Japanese army and the forced supply of romusha's during the war, and despite the risk this entailed of restoring in this way the feudalism he so intensely disliked.

Something should also be said here about his political and intellectual style. He did not shirk confrontation, and was often openly scathing in his condemnation of what he thought to be acts of stupidity or cowardice. Neither did he make a secret of his aversion to the glorification and deification of the state, including the state of Indonesia. To him the state was not an end in itself, but the expression and the instrument of people's sovereignty. He saw it as a most important instrument for the attainment of the other goals of the revolution: of freedom (kebebasan), social justice and human rights.

All this, as well as his obvious personal and political courage, earned him the admiration and passionate devotion of many, especially among the young, but also the enduring enmity of others. Adding to the scope of these deeply held emotions was the fact the PKI saw the continued existence of the PSI as a threat to its political ascendancy, which had at all cost, to be removed. They certainly were successful in doing so.

With the growing number of historical studies and personal memoirs by participants that are now appearing, the historical record will undoubtedly become clearer, and much of the controversy is bound to die down. This

will also bring out more clearly Syahrir's longterm significance as an articulator and defender of the kind of political values that are indispensable for the attainment of Indonesia's goal of a democratic society.

President Soekarno was undoubtedly aware of this as well as of the political nature of the accusations against Syahrir when, upon receiving the news of his death, Soekarno officially declared him a national hero.

The significance of 'Renungan Syahrir' lies in the picture that emerges from this collection of letters which were edited by his then wife Maria Duchateau. Syahrir emerges here as a major budayawan, who was not only interested in politics as the preparation, forging and exercise of power, but as much, if not more, in the political and cultural values that underlie and nurture a political system. These values already show themselves in the way he looks at his own life situations, his reactions to his own imprisonment, at life in exile-communities. His observations about the kinship between fascism and the colonial mentality continues to be relevant, even now. He also makes clear his standpoint on the then burning issue of cooperation or non-cooperation with the Colonial Administration. The book however shows an even broader intellectual range, an intense literary and philosophical interest and an extraordinary maturity, as well as breadth of vision. Syahrir deals with the loss of selfconfidence of those in Europe committed to democracy, and the cultural and political assault of fascism on it. Although, obviously, this is not a political book as such, his comments show his acute awareness of the impending Pacific war and its ideological implications. Throughout the book one is struck by the intellectual detachment and spirit of principled moderation that his thoughts bespeak. This is all the more astounding if one realizes that at the time of his writing he was only a young man in his mid-twenties.

There was however one exception to his generally tolerant attitude. He was exasperated and impatient with the ignorance and backwardness which he saw in the many traditional cultures of the country, and he condemned its causes. His deep immersion in Western culture and his admiration for its dynamism, accentuated all the more the cultural distance he often felt with his own people, despite his political commitment to them. Much has been made of this, by foreign and domestic critics alike. However, in this he was very much like Jawaharlal Nehru, whose letters to his daughter Indira Gandhi, written from prison, showed the same sense of alienation. We now realize that that kind of alienation was a problem for almost the whole first generation of Asians who had

studied in Europe in the 1920's and 30's. It disappeared with the rise of subsequent generations whose selfconfidence and pride was rooted in their sense of national independence. However, more than 40 years later, we have also come to realize that that kind of alienation was merely a special case of the more general, and continuing problem of the political socialization of younger generations in our rapidly changing societies. At the same time it can be argued that history is, more often than not, made by marginal people, who do not share all the prevailing values, fears and prejudices of their contemporaries.

In his brief and meteoric political career Syahrir has shown himself in many respects, to fall outside the then familiar mold of leaders of the nationalist movement. This may well be the reason for the widely varied ways in which people have interpreted his policies as well as his motivations. Nevertheless he has, undeniably, left an indelible mark on the Indonesian revolution and on Indonesia's emerging political culture. This lucid, penetrating, insightful and often moving book shows how relevant the values Syahrir lived by, still are to our contemporary situation.

Soedjatmoko  
Jakarta, 1 Februari 1988

00000000000