
FROM FOE TO PARTNER TO FOE AGAIN: THE STRANGE ALLIANCE OF THE DUTCH AUTHORITIES AND DIGOEL EXILES IN AUSTRALIA, 1943–1945

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The Netherlands East Indies, the vast Dutch colony, was invaded by the Japanese and occupied with relative ease. The Indies government surrendered on March 8, 1942. In the days leading up to the surrender, on orders of the Dutch Governor General, a number of government officials left for Australia. The Dutch government in exile in London—Germany occupied the Netherlands from May 1940—authorized the formation of an Indies government in exile in Australia, named the Netherlands Indies Commission. The commission was inaugurated on April 8, 1942, and was headed by H. J. van Mook. Starting in April 1944, the Raad van Departementshoofden (Commission of Departmental Heads) acted as Van Mook's cabinet. It consisted of six members, with Loekman Djajadiningrat as the sole Indonesian among them. Matters regarding the Dutch and Indonesians in Australia were supervised by Ch. O. van der Plas, who held the rank of Chief Commissioner for Australia and New Zealand and who was undoubtedly the most influential member of the Raad.

The Indonesians stranded in Australia beginning in March 1942—mostly seamen and soldiers—cost Van der Plas a lot of time and caused him much worry. Moreover,

he was also responsible for the almost forgotten community of political prisoners, interned in Boven Digoel, in the Southeast New Guinea jungle. That part of the Netherlands Indies was all that was left of the Dutch realm. But the area was threatened, and for that reason Van der Plas organized an evacuation of Digoel internees to Australia in March 1943. The influx of some five hundred Indonesians was to cause a lot of work for Dutch and Australian officials. But the unconventional Van der Plas also seized the opportunity to employ former exiles for anti-Japanese propaganda activities within the Netherlands Indies Government Information Service (NIGIS). He went even further by endorsing, or perhaps even stimulating, the establishment of Serikat Indonesia Baroe (SIBAR, Association for a New Indonesia), an organization intended to become in the post-war Indies a national party, with official Dutch backing. He consciously sought the support of the exiles, many of whom were communists, to promote SIBAR. For these communists, cooperation fitted in with the Allied struggle against fascism, even if this involved siding with a colonial power. Examples of such cooperation are also to be found in Vietnam, Malaya, and the Philippines, but none went as far as the Dutch partnership offer, and nowhere else was a colonial government more deeply involved with communist leaders as was the Indies Commission in Australia. This qualitative difference distinguishes SIBAR from other colonial-communist wartime cooperation endeavors, and justifies the designation "strange alliance."

Boven Digoel

In 1927, the Dutch colonial government founded its internment camp, Boven Digoel, which comprised settlements named Tanah Merah and Tanah Tinggi, deep in the inhospitable jungle of New Guinea, three days by ship up the Digoel River. The Governor General of the Netherlands Indies could use his discretionary powers, granted to him under article 37 of the Indische Staatsregeling (Indies Constitution), to send a person considered a threat to law and order to a designated place in the Netherlands Indies, from which place the person was not allowed to leave. The term of detention was for an indefinite period, and only the Governor General could lift the detention. He was not required to justify his decision in each case.

The direct reason to develop Boven Digoel was the communist insurrection of 1926–27, which surprised and shocked the colonial government and colonial society. Mass arrests followed, and no fewer than thirteen thousand people were placed in custody initially. To start judicial procedures against such an enormous number of people was, of course, beyond the capacity of the courts. Moreover, the majority of those jailed could hardly be prosecuted under the existing criminal law, despite the presence of a number of broadly worded clauses. Nonetheless, about forty-five hundred individuals were processed, convicted, and sent to jail. Of the eighty-five hundred others, the vast majority were released. About a thousand were considered an enduring threat, and for them the Governor General's "Exorbitante Rechten" (Exorbitant Rights) and Boven Digoel provided an effective way to remove these "enemies" from society. Most of the exiles were left in Boven Digoel to languish for years. Over the years more than half of the first consignment was released, but the ranks swelled again with new exiles when the nationalist parties took over from the communists after 1927, and in due time also became victims of repression. Among

them were the leaders of the Pendidikan Nasional Indonesia (PNI Baroe, Indonesian National Education). In this way Mohammad Hatta and Soetan Sjahrir made their involuntary trip to Digoel. After a year they were transferred to the Banda Islands. Digoel's hardships were considered too much for these intellectuals, but this concern did not apply to their seventeen co-leaders, who were to stay there until 1943. New additions came from the West Sumatran Islam-Nationalist groups Persatoean Muslim Indonesia (Permi, Indonesian Muslim Union) and Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia (PSII, Indonesian Islamic Union Party). A secret attempt to reestablish Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI, Indonesian Communist Party) in 1935 resulted in an inflow of new exiles. During the 1930s, almost thirty supporters of the Partai Republik Indonesia (Pari), secretly founded in 1927 to establish an underground network in Indonesia, were apprehended and sent to Digoel. Pari was the brainchild of Tan Malaka, who worked for the Communist International until 1927. He opposed the insurrection of 1926–27 as doomed to failure. A bitter intra-PKI conflict followed, but the proponents of insurrection won the day. For the subsequent defeat Tan Malaka was blamed, and Moscow followed suit in denouncing him, motivated in not a minor way by the Stalin-Trotsky feud then reaching its climax. A disillusioned Tan Malaka then founded Pari, which set an independent communist course, free of the Soviet center. In Digoel, PKI and Pari supporters had all the time to discuss the controversies, and they did—but they never achieved agreement.

The Dutch authorities emphasized that Digoel was neither a prison nor a concentration camp. It was a location that the inmates were not allowed to leave. They were free to bring their families to Digoel, and to organize their lives to their own liking. The Dutch supplied public amenities such as schools, a hospital, a mosque, and two churches. Outsiders could settle in Digoel as well and start a shop, as some Chinese did. A hundred soldiers of the colonial army KNIL (Koninklijk Nederlandsch Indisch Leger, Royal Netherlands Indies Army) kept guard, and KNIL officers were in command of the camp.

The exiles were divided into a number of categories. Those who refused to cooperate and agitated against the Dutch were labeled intransigents, and for them Tanah Tinggi was founded, forty more kilometers upriver. These exiles were also called "naturalists," as they received only monthly rations in kind, *in natura*, hence their name. They were left to fend for themselves; their poor rations had to be supplemented by tending gardens and fishing. These intransigents were left to themselves, not even clothing was supplied, and only the barest of news from the outside world reached them. There was ample time for discussion, and, in the intense boredom and solitude of their hopeless prospects, political disagreements were blown up to become bitter feuds. Mental problems became common, and tropical illnesses, especially malaria, were rampant. At the beginning of 1937, sixty-five exiles lived in Tanah Tinggi together with sixteen wives and children. At the end of that year, only around twenty exiles were accounted for, with no information on any wives or children. In 1943, twenty-one exiles were registered in Tanah Tinggi.

The other exiles lived in Tanah Merah. There were also naturalists among them, exiles who refused to work but were not considered as intransigent as were the Tanah Tinggi dwellers. In Tanah Merah, exiles willing to be employed by the Dutch were

Indonesians in Australia before August 1945

Name	Background	Affiliation
Abdoelrachman Atmosoediredjo	Dutch Navy	SIBAR
Almassawa, Sayid Abdurrahman	unknown – Arab descent	SIBAR
Boerhanoedin	Digoel – PNI Baroe	SIBAR
Bondan, Mohamad	Digoel – PNI Baroe	aloof
Ditawilastra	Digoel – PKI	SIBAR
Djajadiredja	Digoel – PKI	SIBAR
Djokosoedjono	Digoel – PKI	SIBAR
Djoni, Moh.	Digoel – nationalist	SIBAR
Doelrachman	Digoel – Pari	SIBAR
Harjono	Digoel – PNI Baroe	SIBAR
Haroen Al-Rasjid	Digoel – PKI	SIBAR
Kalalo, Pieter	unknown	SIBAR
Limahelu	Civil Service	SIBAR
Loekman Djajadiningrat (died 1943)	Cabinet in exile	SIBAR
Ma'moen Al Rasjid Koesoemadilaga	Cabinet in exile	SIBAR
Maskoen Soemadiredja	Digoel – PNI Baroe	SIBAR
Moechlis, Hadji (or Hadji Moechlas)	Digoel – PKI	unknown
Moenandar	Digoel – Pari	SIBAR?
Moerad, T.A.	Digoel – PNI Baroe	SIBAR
Moerwoto	Digoel – PNI Baroe	SIBAR
Nasoetion, Jahja	Digoel – Pari	Parki
Nelwan, M.	Dutch Navy	SIBAR
Ngadiman	Digoel – PKI	SIBAR
Noerhadi	Digoel – unknown	SIBAR
Pande Iroot, Willi	seaman	SIBAR
Patty, A.J.	Digoel – nationalist	Parki
Poedjoseobroto	New Caledonia	SIBAR
Roekmanda	Digoel – PKI	SIBAR
Runtulalo, E.	seaman	SIBAR
Sabariman	Digoel – PKI	SIBAR
Salim, Abdoel Chalid	Digoel – PKI	aloof
Sardjono	Digoel – PKI	SIBAR
Senan, Mohammad	Digoel – PKI	SIBAR
Singer, R. Moh.	Civil Service	SIBAR
Siregar, Arief	Digoel – Pari	Parki
Soeka Soemitro	Digoel – PNI Baroe	SIBAR
Soekirno	Digoel – PKI	SIBAR
Soemadhi, Achmad	Digoel – PKI	SIBAR
Soeparmin	Digoel – Pari	SIBAR
Soeprapto, Max	seaman	SIBAR
Thaib, Djalaloeddin	Digoel – Permi	SIBAR
Toekiman	Digoel – PKI	SIBAR
Toekliwon	Digoel – PKI	SIBAR
Toha, Mohammad	Digoel – PKI	SIBAR
Winanta, Alibasah	Digoel – PKI	SIBAR
Wiro Samiardjo (also Wiro S. Miardjo)	Digoel – Pari?	Parki?

grouped into two categories: those willing to hold a permanent job on a monthly allowance, or irregularly as a daily laborer, a job that might be supplemented by work as an artisan, gardener, or fisherman. The number of Tanah Merah exiles reached a

high of about 1,150 around 1930. It steadily decreased to 419 in the beginning of 1937, to 355 at the end of 1939, and to 295 (along with 212 family members) in 1943.¹

Digoel was essentially forgotten after 1939, in the great upheaval of the World War. After the Germans occupied the Netherlands in May 1940, critical attention from the colonial mother country ceased altogether. Government leaders in Batavia had other worries, namely, to prepare for a confrontation with Japan.

Evacuation

In the beginning of 1943, the Allies feared a further thrust of the Japanese toward North Australia, which might be preceded by military actions to gain hold of South New Guinea, with Merauke on the south coast as Japan's most likely target. In this way, Digoel might become a war zone. Until then it remained untouched, except for the one-time appearance of a few Japanese war planes, which dropped a few bombs, an event that was hailed by many exiles.

On February 4, 1943, a Dutch military report suggested that the exiles be evacuated; this was seconded by none less than the Allied commander in the Pacific, US General Douglas MacArthur, who feared that their "presence there might be the cause of unrest and fifth column activity." Van der Plas acted with great speed and submitted, on February 8, a formal proposal to evacuate Digoel as a matter of "urgent military necessity." He described the Tanah Tinggi inhabitants as "extremely dangerous psychopaths" and their counterparts in Tanah Merah as "less dangerous psychopaths," and he also labeled them all as "professional criminals," "antisocial people," and "probably a small number of communists [...] though their knowledge of communism is muddled." The Australians were reluctant to act for logistical reasons. An Australian military report argued that "The internees in question are of a most difficult and undesirable type, [...] are mostly [...] in country very difficult to access. In the somewhat remote contingency that they should fall into Japanese hands, it is hard to

¹ On Digoel's history, including the slightly different number of internees, see: L. J. A. Schoonheydt, *Boven-Digoel: Het land van Communisten en Kannibalen* second ed. (Amsterdam/Batavia: Kolff, 1940 [1936]); I. F. M. Salim, *Vijftien Jaar Boven-Digoel Concentratiekamp in Nieuw-Guinea Bakermat van de Indonesische Onafhankelijkheid* (Amsterdam: Contact, 1973); Anthony van Kampen, *Een Kwestie van Macht: Het Bewogen Leven van de Arts Dr. L. J. A. Schoonheydt in het Voormalige Nederlandsch-Indië, Nieuw-Guinea, Suriname en Nederland* (Bussum: Unieboek, 1975); Citra dan Perjuangan Perintis Kemerdekaan Seri Perjuangan Ex Digul (Jakarta: Direktorat Jenderal Bantuan Sosial, Departemen Sosial, 1977); L. de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog: Deel 11A Nederlands-Indië I* (Leiden: Nijhoff, 1984); L. de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog: Deel 11C Nederlands-Indië III* (Leiden: Nijhoff, 1986); L. A. Peepkorn-van Donselaar, "Interneringskamp Boven-Digoel, 1926-1943," *Leidschrift* 2,6 (1986): 33-69; Takashi Shiraishi, "The Phantom World of Digoel," *Indonesia* 61 (April 1996): 13-48; Takashi Shiraishi, *Hantu Digul: Politik Pengamanan Politik Zaman Kolonial* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2001); Pramodya Ananta Toer, ed., *Cerita dari Digul* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2001); Margaret J. Kartomi, *The Gamelan Digul and the Prison Camp Musician Who Built It: An Australian Link with the Indonesian Revolution* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2002); Margaret J. Kartomi, *Gamelan Digul di Balik Sosok Seorang Pejuang: Hubungan antara Australia dan Revolusi Indonesia* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2005); Marco Kartodikromo, *Pergaulan Orang Buangan di Boven Digoel* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2002); Purnama Suwardi, *Koloni Pengucilan Boven Digoel* (Jakarta: Agung HikmahNya, 2003); Paul Tickell, "A Thoroughly Modern Prison-Camp: Boven-Digoel and Modernity in the Late Colonial Indies" (unpublished paper presented at a conference, nd); Rudolf Mrázek, "Boven Digoel and Terezin: Camps at the Time of Triumphant Technology," *East Asian Science, Technology, and Society* 3,2/3 (2010): 287-314; and Koesalah Soebagyo Toer, *Tanah Merah yang Merah: Sebuah Catatan Sejarah* (Bandung: Ultimus, 2010).

see that any harm would be done in any way commensurate with the extent of resources necessary for their removal and internment in Australia." The Australians' misgivings were to no avail, and the Dutch decision to evacuate was made on March 1, 1943. Van der Plas left the next day for Merauke and Digoel to organize the operation.²

He wrote to Van Mook on April 18, 1943, about his visit to Digoel, stating that, in general, the settlement itself had made a favorable impression on him, but that

... the atmosphere among the internees was horrible. The Muslims and a single fanatical communist have adjusted themselves best. Further you may see men aged twenty-seven years, who are grey and broken after ten years of internment. Very old looking men, using walking-sticks, in reality have not even reached the age of fifty. There is a lot of mutual hatred and envy; the people of Tanah Tinggi are lunatics, all living in barricaded houses, armed with wooden spears, who are out for each other's lives. [...] I spent a lot of time with the internees, was available day and night for discussion and went through the complete evacuation.³

Van der Plas had chosen the carrot of democratic reform to secure an evacuation without internees' opposition. Thus, he addressed the internees in a respectful way, even as if they were already "Rijksgenoten" (partners in the Dutch-Indonesian union to come). In a gathering with all of the inmates, Van der Plas asked for cooperation in the war against fascism. Those internees not yet apathetic or demented agreed to this, albeit they knew very little of developments beyond their community. They supported anti-fascism and stood behind the Allies in defense of democracy, even if doing so entailed working with the Dutch. Among the PNI Baroe internees, cooperation was the obvious choice.⁴ The PKI members were still in doubt. Sardjono was the de facto leader of the group because of his having been chairman of the party in 1926. A comrade whom Sardjono spoke to in Australia later reported that

² Quotations from Pat Noonan, "Merdeka in Mackay: The Indonesian Evacuees and Internees in Mackay, June 1943–February 1946," *Kabar Seberang* 24/25 (1995): 240–42, 246, who bases his analysis on Australian archival sources. In hearings before the Inquiry Committee about Dutch government policies during the war (*Enquêtecommissie Regeringsbeleid 1940–1945: Deel 3C, Financieel en Economisch Beleid: Verhoren* [’s-Gravenhage: Staatsdrukkerij- en Uitgeverijbedrijf, 1949], p. 773, and *Enquêtecommissie Regeringsbeleid 1940–1945: Deel 8C-1, 2, Militair Beleid 1940–1945: Verhoren* [’s-Gravenhage: Staatsdrukkerij- en Uitgeverijbedrijf, 1956], p. 406), on May 31 and July 14, 1949, Van Mook mentioned these considerations again. On February 20, 1953, Van der Plas, during his hearing (*Enquêtecommissie Regeringsbeleid 1940–1945, vol. 8C-2*, p. 1363), added to this that MacArthur intended to abandon Merauke and had already withdrawn his troops. The Australian Army was planning to do so, too. Van der Plas's plea to the Australians not to withdraw from this last free Netherlands Indies territory met with success. The Australians changed their minds, but insisted on the evacuation of Digoel. One might wonder whether Van der Plas was right here. Japanese occupation of Merauke would make Australia itself more vulnerable to Japanese attacks, or was this already not considered a plausible option anymore? See also De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*, vol. 11A, p. 139.

³ This letter of April 18, 1943, in Nationaal Archief (NA), Den Haag, collection 176 H. J. van Mook, entry no. 2.21.123, inventory no. 8, also quoted by De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*, vol. 11A, pp. 139–40. Van der Plas here also refers to an earlier evacuation in mid-1942, when the Dutch forced the exiles, on very short notice, to go to Merauke and a village along the Bian River. The plan was badly coordinated and, after the Australian Navy declined to provide further transport, the exiles were returned to Digoel (see De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*, vol. 11C, p. 139).

⁴ Molly Bondan, *Spanning a Revolution: The Story of Mohamad Bondan and the Indonesian Nationalist Movement* (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1992), p. 182.

[Sardjono] and other prisoners did not know what the second world war was all about. They had only the vaguest idea of Japanese operations and intentions in the Netherlands Indies. Sardjono was the only revolutionary leader in the world who did not know that Trotsky had left the Soviet Union and was dead, Hitler had seized power in Germany, Italians had colonized Abyssinia, Spain had suffered a civil war, Japan had conquered much of China, and Germany had invaded the USSR.⁵

This seems to be somewhat of an exaggeration, but there is more than a kernel of truth in it.

Van der Plas spoke also to Salim (incarcerated in Digoel since 1928 on flimsy accusations, and, as a non-partisan, widely respected among the exiles), and to Salim's astonishment respectfully addressed him as "Meneer" (Sir) and "U" (you, polite form of address). In a personal meeting with Van der Plas, Salim was easily convinced to cooperate in the evacuation. In Salim's opinion, there was no alternative.⁶ The sources that relate the general willingness to cooperate do not seem to be altogether reliable, however. Later on, Van der Plas himself noted that he had encountered "enmity, rudeness, and overwroughtness"⁷ when meeting the exiles.

Van der Plas was a rather unusual Dutch official who had become "a semi-legendary figure [...] with nearly as much fantasy as fact attached to his name."⁸ Knowledgeable Indonesians considered him the brains behind any clever Dutch strategy. He spoke the most important Indonesian languages fluently, probably the only one in the highest Indies ranks to do so, and certainly in Australia he was the one who set out the policies regarding the Indonesians there, and was the one official to address them, as his Digoel expedition shows. He personally knew most of the Indonesian elites, and treated them on an equal footing with the Dutch. He also prepared and evaluated propaganda and intelligence directed towards occupied Indonesia. These activities contributed to his reputation among some as being shady and untrustworthy—many presupposed him to be involved in conspiracies and hidden agendas. He also was a flamboyant personality to whom none of the clichés of Dutch officialdom applied.⁹

⁵ Rupert Lockwood, *Black Armada* (Sydney South: Australian Book Society, 1975), p. 28.

⁶ Salim, *Vijftien Jaar Boven-Digoel*, p. 344.

⁷ Memorandum of Van der Plas, January 12, 1945, in NA, collection 251, Ch.O. van der Plas, entry no. 2.21.266, inventory no. 30.

⁸ George McTurnan Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1952), p. 379.

⁹ William H. Frederick, "The Man Who Knew Too Much: Ch.O. Van der Plas and the Future of Indonesia, 1927–1950," in *Imperial Policy and Southeast Asian Nationalism 1930–1957*, ed. Hans Antlov and Stein Tonnesson (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1995), pp. 34–62, is the most serious attempt to describe Van der Plas's career and measure the motives and importance of "the man who knew too much," as he titled his article. (The Kahin quote, above, was referenced by Frederick.) De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*, vol. 11C, pp. 30–37, also supplies a useful contribution to the Van der Plas biography.

The Transfer to Australia

Without too much opposition, 524 Digoel inhabitants—316 men (22 from Tanah Tinggi), 69 women, and 139 children—were brought by plane, ship, and train to the Cowra Prisoners of War and Internees Camp, about two hundred kilometers east of Sydney, in New South Wales. They arrived in June 1943. The twenty-two Tanah Tinggi veterans were kept apart from the others and put in jail in Liverpool, near Sydney. The Cowra camp housed Japanese and Italian prisoners of war, and to their compounds was now added a barbed-wire section where, under the same rules as applied to POWs, the new Indonesian contingent was held. Ostensibly, the Dutch had succeeded in convincing the relevant Australian officials that here enemies of the Allies were held, not political prisoners of a colonial regime.

In a matter of days, six exiles were released, as Van der Plas recruited them to work for the government in exile, which urgently needed Indonesian expertise, especially in translation services. Five of the six were of PNI Baroe background: Boerhannoedin, Moerwoto, Soeka Soemitro, Maskoen Soemadiredja, and T. A. Moerad. Moenandar, a Pari exile, was the exception. Van der Plas was full of praise for these six and commented that among the Digoelists were a great number of excellent people who could be used in official service.

During their journey away from Digoel, the exiles handed out or dropped notes and letters about their plight and background to Australian guards and onlookers. Some of those communications were delivered to the intended addressees. Among them was the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), which was, of course, interested in coming to the rescue of its Indonesian comrades. It was not a very strong party at that time, and was recovering from a period spent underground, after the party was banned in June 1940, due to its agitation against the Allied powers. When Germany invaded the Soviet Union in July 1941, the CPA came out in the open again and joined the war effort against the Axis. Traditionally, trade unions were strong in Australia, and radical, too. They also had had experiences with Indonesians and the Dutch in the first years of the war, as noted below. And there were organizations, like the Civil Rights Defense League, that approached the Labor government, and confronted it with a number of awkward questions concerning democratic rights and the extent to which Dutch extraterritorial jurisdiction stretched. The press added fuel to the CPA's indignation. The combined pressure soon took effect. Australian officials visited Cowra and wrote their recommendations. The minister of external affairs, H. V. Evatt, wrote on November 16, 1943, to W. B. Simpson, director general of security:

In my opinion the whole thing will have to be thoroughly investigated for the sake of the reputation of this country [...] but [...] it is vital that their detention should be terminated at the earliest possible moment. You should not be limited or restricted by the conditions suggested by the Dutch.¹⁰

The Dutch and Australians met on November 22, 1943, and agreed on the release of all internees no later than December 13, 1943. On December 7, 1943, 150 men were transferred to the semi-military Australian Employment Company in Wallangarra, and to nearby Toowoomba and Helidon, where they supported the war effort by working

¹⁰ Noonan, "Merdeka in Mackay," pp. 244–45.

on farms and in an enormous ammunition depot. Wallangarra was situated in Queensland, not too far from Dutch Headquarters in Camp Casino, near Brisbane. But 332 men, women, and children still remained in Cowra, as the Tanah Tinggi men were still in Liverpool. It seemed nigh impossible to find a place for these exiles that the Australians and Dutch could both approve, the Dutch still demanding strict conditions on the internees' movements and employment. It took until April 1944 before the group was moved to Mackay, in Queensland, a coastal town with a pleasant climate.¹¹

In Wallangarra, around New Year's Day 1944, two PKI exiles, Sardjono and Alibasah Winanta, left to enter Dutch service, certainly after having discussed their political position with the Dutch.¹²

The Digoel evacuation was, in retrospect, not a successful enterprise. Van der Plas, or, for that matter, the Dutch, had tricked the internees into voluntarily moving to Australia, only to lock them up once again. What goodwill the Dutch, still or again, had gained among the detainees could be expected to have disappeared with the internees' prolonged custody in Cowra. And the Australians themselves were insulted by the gross violation of basic democratic rights being imposed by the Dutch on its territory. Was there no one in Dutch circles able to foresee such a development? Did they consider themselves unassailable and free to deal with the Indonesians in Australia as they pleased?

Indonesians in Australia

The Digoel internees were not the first Indonesian refugees in Australia. Shortly after the Dutch surrendered, in March 1942, Dutch merchant ships made their way to Australia. The overwhelming majority of crew members were Indonesians. Not all of these sailors were willing to risk their lives to support Allied shipping. Moreover, they were paid far less than Dutch crew members doing the same work, so there was that disincentive, too. Australian trade unions supported the seamen's demands for equal treatment and helped in coordinating a strike in April 1942. It resulted in about seven hundred Indonesian seamen being arrested and ultimately put behind fences in Cowra. About fifteen hundred seamen remained at work, and regularly called at ports in Australia, where they had to find lodging. Moreover, a number of Indonesians who were on active duty in the Dutch army and navy had escaped from the Indies, and their ranks swelled with units arriving from New Guinea. Scattered groups of Indonesians were also "discovered," among them a group that had worked for decades in New Caledonia. They all fell under the care of the Dutch government in exile, which initially lacked the means to manage these heterogeneous groups in a vast country at war. Communication thus was difficult, also because many of the Indonesian exiles stranded in Australia were barely literate. From an Australian's point of view, Australian society was not used to the presence of colored people on its territory, other

¹¹ On the release of the six exiles, see H. M., "Tabir Rahasia SIBAR," *Murba*, July 18, 1948. The numbers of inhabitants and people transported show slight variations among different sources. Koesalah Soebagyo Toer, *Tanah Merah yang Merah*, p. 70, reports that nine men stayed behind in Digoel. Van der Plas's praise comes from a letter to Loekman Djajadiningrat, July 1943, quoted in De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*, vol. 11C, pp. 142–43.

¹² H. M., "Tabir Rahasia SIBAR," *Murba*, July 20, 1948.

than Aboriginals, and a strict immigration policy existed to ensure an all-white Australia. Thus, the influx of Indonesians was unsettling to some.

The Dutch government set up a structure by which the Indonesians could find lodging, work, allowances, and other help, and through which it could also control their movements. In the main ports, Rumah Indonesia (Indonesia House) were established as meeting places. A general complaint, however, remained that the Dutch were not able to abandon their colonial racism and feelings of superiority. Thus, all the lofty words about building a new relationship after the war in which the partners in the new kingdom would cooperate on an equal footing became empty phrases.¹³

Finally, there was the Netherlands Indies Government Information Service, noted earlier, which had been founded in Melbourne in April 1942 as a cooperative effort of the commission, army, and navy. Its tasks included being a press agency, monitoring radio broadcasts from occupied Indonesia, broadcasting to Indonesia, and photographing and filming news and events. The NIGIS staff initially numbered about thirty, with only a minority being Indonesian. This changed as staff increased to probably more than a hundred in the last year of the war. Not a minor task of NIGIS involved the publication of two journals. The one for Dutch readers was named *Oranje* and was published, first, every two weeks, and, from September 1944 on, twice weekly.

Penjoeloeh

Oranje's Indonesian-language equivalent, but with very different content, was *Penjoeloeh* (The Torch).¹⁴ This journal's first issue appeared on August 21, 1942, with the subtitle "Soerat chabar oentoek pergaoelan Belanda dan Indonesia di Pacific-Selatan" (Journal for the Dutch and Indonesian Community in the South Pacific). Its banner also mentioned Editie Melajoe (Malay edition), to indicate the relationship with *Oranje*. The editor was given as NIGIS, but no individual names were mentioned. Its size, in general, was sixteen pages. It was distributed free of charge. After half a year, a cover with a full page illustration was added to the journal. The contents followed a pattern: an editorial and world news, followed by news from the Netherlands, Indonesia, East Asia, and Australia. Speeches by Dutch authorities were published, among them Queen Wilhelmina's December 7, 1942, speech, which opened—cautiously—new opportunities for the postwar Dutch-Indonesian relationship. Also included were letters to the editor, rarely signed. A few times an anonymous Indonesian contributed an essay on religion. There was room for poetry with propagandistic contents, with acrostics in high favor. In the Australia section, activities relating to the Indonesians were reported, but only minimally. Thus, some activities in the Rumah Indonesia were preserved in print. The first issue opened with an article, complete with the clichés to be expected, by Loekman Djajadiningrat. Each issue carried some ten photographs, many of which pictured Dutch royalty and authorities. As for Indonesians, only Loekman and Minister Soejono were honored with a portrait. For the rest, Indonesians in Australia remained anonymous. There was a slight change in the second year of the

¹³ De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*, vol. 11C, pp. 124–30.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 152–53. About the first year of NIGIS, see "N.I.G.I.S. Beroesia Satoe Tahoen," *Penjoeloeh*, April 30, 1943.

journal. In January 1944, to cover war events in a more up-to-date way, the four pages of the new *Oetoesan Penjoeloeh* were issued twice a week.¹⁵ This supplement gave *Penjoeloeh* the opportunity to be more reflective. More Indonesians submitted articles on a regular basis to it, but under pseudonyms like Sontolojo, Mas Sikoet, and Sapanama, the last one the pen name of Boerhanoedin, one of the PNI Baroe Digoelists recruited by Van der Plas.

These Indonesians must all have been members of the *Penjoeloeh* editorial team, but their names were not given in the journal's colophon. It was only indirectly that their names became public. First, in March 1944, fifteen Indonesian men and one woman posed for a group photograph, which was published in one of the issues. The caption indicated that those pictured constituted the complete editorial staff of *Penjoeloeh*. Names were not given.¹⁶ In the second anniversary issue, in August 1944, the captions of eight scattered photographs disclosed the names of the Indonesian employees.

Boerhanoedin and Sardjono, the PKI leader, were head and deputy head of the Malay Department. Hadji Moechlis, Sayid Abdurrahman Almassawa, and Pieter Kalalo were in the Malay Broadcasting Department, with the first two also broadcasting Islamic religious messages, with Quran readings as well. Editorial staff of *Oetoesan Penjoeloeh* included Maskoen, Moerad, and Soeka. Boerhanoedin's wife worked as a typist.¹⁷

Already in early 1944, the lineup thus featured five former Digoel internees as the mouthpieces of the Dutch government. Boerhanoedin, Maskoen, Moerad, and Soeka had all been sent to Digoel because of their activities in the PNI Baroe of Sjahrir and Hatta, and were motivated by the principled anti-fascist stance of their party. Sardjono was another case, but his communist party and the Dutch government had approved this marriage of convenience. Nowhere was it indicated that these five men were former Digoel inmates.

In 1944, the entire twenty-eight-member-strong NIGIS staff signed a card with Christmas greetings and full of lofty praise to Van der Plas. Among the staff were more than ten PKI exiles, six from PNI Baroe, two from Pari, and one from Permi.¹⁸

Over the years, in all the pages of *Penjoeloeh*, the Digoel camp was never mentioned once, nor was the evacuation of the internees to Cowra. Cowra was mentioned in some of the many poems that *Penjoeloeh* printed when place and date were given. And quite a number, drenched in nostalgia, were written by the prolific Arief Siregar, an exile who signed these with his full name.

¹⁵ "Oetoesan Penjoeloeh," *Penjoeloeh*, February 4, 1944. Two Dutch libraries have a run of *Oetoesan Penjoeloeh* that, in both cases, end with no. 61 of August 15, 1944, when the journal was discontinued. *Penjoeloeh* thereafter appeared two, then three times a week (see Redaksi, "'Penjoeloeh' dengan Perdjoangan Kebebasan," *Penjoeloeh*, July 7 and July 21, 1944).

¹⁶ *Penjoeloeh*, March 7, 1944.

¹⁷ See *Penjoeloeh*, August 4, 1944; and Muslimia, "Penghidoopan Peladjar2 Bangsa Indonesia di Hedjaz!!!" *Penjoeloeh*, May 26, 1944.

¹⁸ In NA, collection Van der Plas, no. 30. The twenty-eight signatories could not all be traced to determine their background. A few bear East Indonesian names, one a Chinese, and one a Dutch. Here and elsewhere information on the background of the exiles is taken from Koesalah Soebagyo Toer, *Tanah Merah yang Merah*.

A short report on October 1, 1943, related the celebration in Cowra of the Islamic New Year 1363, referring to Cowra as where "about five hundred Indonesians from New Guinea were quarantined."¹⁹ Information about who they were and how they got there was not given. One author, whose identity was never revealed, who used the pseudonym Abimanju, when writing in January 1944 in Cowra about the dangers of fascism, hinted at his background:

The cruelty and maliciousness [of the Japanese] with respect to the Indonesian people is worse than that of the former Dutch government. I frankly acknowledge this as an Indonesian who for more than sixteen years suffered the bitterness and exasperation of living in a dense jungle, because I was exiled by the Dutch government. But [...] the Japanese cruelty and its worldwide conspiracies made me [...] willing to sacrifice anything that is requested by the Dutch government and its allies [...]. All the agony I have suffered is already forgotten, and there are no feelings of revenge at all in relation to the former Dutch government, as suffering and misery have to be borne by all people's leaders [...]²⁰

Another letter to the editor came still closer. Abioso (unsolved pseudonym) wrote from Cowra that all Indonesians, whether nationalist or communist, Muslim or Christian, had the duty to free Indonesia from Japanese fascism. This was in particular the obligation of communists, and Abioso continued that, after the war broke out in the Indies, "the communists in exile in a part of Dutch New Guinea" volunteered to fight with the Dutch, and even were ready to return to their exile after Japan was defeated.²¹

Penjoeloeh went into its third year, in August 1944, with the intention to appear more frequently—at first two, and, later, three times a week. Its goal basically remained the same: to foster the fighting spirit to free Indonesia from fascism. But the editorial staff foresaw practical problems as staff members were moved to other tasks and no replacements were employed.²² A loss certainly was the appointment in June 1944 of Boerhanoedin as one of the first five Public Relations Officers of the colonial army KNIL. Together with his four Dutch colleagues, he was sent to newly liberated areas of the Indies to aid the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration (NICA) in the re-establishment of civil society. In the press report it was disclosed that Boerhanoedin headed the Malay Department of the NIGIS, but his Digoel past remained unmentioned.²³ Boerhanoedin was also instrumental in the establishment of Mekkah-Fonds (Mekka Fund), which helped Indonesian religious students who found themselves in dire straits in Saudi Arabia. It all followed an appeal in *Penjoeloeh*.²⁴ On the board of the fund, four exiles joined Almassawa, whose Arab background qualified him as chairman. Boerhanoedin and Moerad were joined by Hadji Djalaloeddin Thaib

¹⁹ "1 Sjawal 1363: Hari Raja di Cowra," *Penjoeloeh*, October 29, 1943.

²⁰ Abimanju, "Kemerdekaan Mesti Timboel di Doenia," *Penjoeloeh*, January 21, 1944. In the same vein, see Abimanju, "Menoedjoe Indonesia Merdeka," *Penjoeloeh*, March 17, 1944.

²¹ Abioso, "Kewadajiban," *Penjoeloeh*, April 14, 1944.

²² Redaksi, "'Penjoeloeh' Beroesia Doea Tahoen," *Penjoeloeh*, August 4, 1944.

²³ "Benoeman Baroe," *Oetoesan Penjoeloeh*, June 23, 1944. From April to September 1944, Allied Forces landed on New Guinea's north coast and on the small island of Morotai and established bases. However, the war was not over, and mopping-up operations continued for many months.

²⁴ Muslimia, "Penghidoopan Peladjar2 Bangsa Indonesia di Hedjaz!!!"

(of Permi) and Alibasah Winanta (PKI). The committee met with success, as attested to by the regular lists of donors in *Penjoeloeh*. And the Dutch government, by facilitating the fund's actions, showed its commitment to improving the lot of its pious subjects in Arabia.²⁵

SIBAR Founded

On May 24, 1944, sixteen Indonesians met as members of the Raad van Departementshoofden to discuss the formation of an association of the Indonesians in Australia and reconquered Indonesia. The meeting took place on the initiative of Sardjono and Ma'moen Al Rasjid Koesoemadilaga, a doctor in government service (and Loekman Djajadiningrat's successor as a member of the Raad van Departementshoofden after his untimely death in July 1944). Loekman, shortly before his demise, also took part in the meeting, as did R. Moh. Singer, who was a *wedana* (district head) in Digoel before its evacuation; two navy lieutenants, Abdoelrachman Atmosoediredjo and M. Nelwan; a former civil servant, Limahelu; former navigating officer E. Runtulalo; Poedjosoebroto, who had a New Caledonia background; Almassawa; and seven exiles: Boerhanoedin, Soeka, Maskoen, T. A. Moerad, Hadji Djalaloeddin Thaib, Sardjono, and Winanta. The majority were working with NIGIS, or somehow involved with it. All agreed with the idea of forming an association, and a committee of five was commissioned to work out the details. Sardjono was trusted to chair the committee, with Almassawa, Poedjosoebroto, Djalaloeddin Thaib, and Nelwan as other members. The committee drafted statutes, by-laws, and a founding statement. These were all discussed with Van der Plas, who consented. On August 6, 1944, the new organization, Serikat Indonesia Baroe (SIBAR, Association for a New Indonesia), was officially founded. Sardjono became chairman; Almassawa, secretary; and Runtulalo, treasurer. Djalaloeddin Thaib, Poedjosoebroto, Maskoen, and Abdoelrachman completed the board.²⁶ SIBAR's most important document, the Founding Statement, is included on the next page.

The criticism in the Founding Statement is severe, and the majority of the Dutch living in Australia, if only they could read Indonesian, would have disapproved strongly. But Van der Plas swallowed it, as did Loekman and Ma'moen, probably for the sake of the broad cooperation it promised. They could not object to the lines on the struggle between fascism and democracy, and the references to the Atlantic Charter and the promises in the Queen's December 7 speech. And the last line probably served to wash down the bitter taste. Curiously, SIBAR was never discussed in the meetings of the Raad van Departementshoofden until the end of the war. Was it an affair of Van der Plas and the Indonesian members of the Raad, Loekman and Ma'moen, and was it better not to involve others with the scheme?²⁷ And does the fact SIBAR was never mentioned in *Oranje* indicate that it was deemed better not to cause commotion among the Dutch community? Even without detailed knowledge of their political sympathies,

²⁵ "Mekkah-Fonds," *Oetoesan Penjoeloeh*, July 25, 1944.

²⁶ Pemberita, "Serikat Indonesia Baroe (SIBAR)," *Penjoeloeh*, August 18, 1944; "Openbare Vergadering SIBAR," *Penjoeloeh*, August 9 and August 13, 1945.

²⁷ "Korte Verslagen van de Vergaderingen van de Raad van Departementshoofden, mei 1944–augustus 1945," in NA, collection Van der Plas, no. 8.

Founding Statement—Serikat Indonesia Baroe²⁸

- 1a In the past, before the Second World War, for some time already in Indonesia were founded political movements of different kinds, which demanded an end to racial discrimination, and freedom of speech, writing, assembly and association, and demanded people's rights in political matters, to have a hand in the organization of government in Indonesia, in a broad sense, so that in the end it will be able to stand on its own feet and obtain a position at the same level with any other people in the whole world.
- 1b The Dutch government is a government that embraces the principle of democracy, but in this respect, it is limited to the territory of the Netherlands only. Freedom of speech, writing, assembly and association, and the right to have a hand in the organization of government of the country, that is the right to vote (active) and the right to be elected (passive) to become a member of a people's representative body to make laws for the whole "Kingdom," with the name of "Parlement" or "Staten Generaal," is only a right possessed by the Dutch people in the Netherlands. The Indonesian people that also are a people within the "Dutch Kingdom" do not have the freedom and rights mentioned above. Although the government carried out "Decentralisatie," installed Volksraad [semi-parliamentary body] and executed the "Indianisatie" policy, these government measures are not yet sufficient to satisfy the demands of the Indonesian people's movement. Until the coming of the rapacious Japanese [the Dutch] government and [the Indonesian] people had not yet found a basis for agreement.
- 2a The Second World War is not a war between one people and another one, but a war between two political systems. That is fascism and democracy. The two systems cannot exist next to each other. It is only one that can survive. For that reason, the struggle is very violent—this struggle to capture this place [world power]. "Fascism" is a new system that is on the offensive here and there to look for this position [foothold], while "Democracy" as an older system, that already holds a position, has to defend this position.
- 2b To avert the danger of "Fascism," all countries that embrace "the Principle of Democracy" as the basis of their government have united. This unity, that is sustained by the Atlantic Charter, that amongst other things contains the obligation that the countries involved [in the Charter] will respect the rights of all peoples to choose the form of government they want and that they intend to return the sovereign rights and the right to govern themselves to all peoples that have lost these, because they were deprived of these by force.
- The Dutch government, as a Democratic government, and a member of the United Nations, has already taken measures to establish a new Government system for all its "Kingdom" (including Indonesia and the West Indies), a system with democratic features that does not distinguish between races. And it also hopes to work together with the Indonesian people in general and the Indonesians that reside outside their fatherland (for instance, in Australia) in particular, in its effort to reach and establish a "New System."
- 3 By making public this hope, the [Dutch] Government begins to find an agreement with us, the Indonesian people, which for such a long time continuously lived at such a great distance. And the hand stretched out towards us we accept wholeheartedly. This reaction is not an individual act on the basis of our personal desire, but by a people that is united in an association that also is filled with the spirit of democracy.
- Next we also realize that at this time we do not possess the means that will allow us to establish a "New System" for Indonesia, but that we have to cooperate with other peoples that already have the experience of standing on their own feet, at the same level with any other people in the world.
- The people who [will be] our partner in the achievement of that goal has already been decided by the course of time, and it will be the Dutch people.

August 1944²⁹

there was discord among the Dutch in Australia as to the exiles. As one of them put it, money was misused to spoil them and lots of money was spent on their nutrition, housing, clothing, and allowances.³⁰

²⁸ I translated this from the original Malay, and, by translating literally, I hope that I have retained its purposeful ambiguity and vagueness. The long, awkward sentences show how much this text was a compromise.

²⁹ "Keterangan Pendirian 'Serikat Indonesia Baroe' (SIBAR)," *Penjoeloeh*, February 7, 1945.

In the statutes, SIBAR's aims were formulated as: a. To endeavor, together with the Dutch government, to accomplish the liberation of Indonesia from the enemy; b. To prepare the basis for a new, democratic Indonesia. It was explicitly stated that SIBAR would not infringe upon the laws of the Dutch and Australian governments. SIBAR was to solicit members, all of whom had to pay an admission fee and a monthly subscription. In places with at least twenty-five members, a branch was established. Highest authority rested with the congress, to be convened once a year.³¹

Curiously, the founding statement was not included in full in *Penjoeloeh*. The concluding statement about the lasting cooperation with the Dutch, however, was quoted or adapted regularly. It took until February 7, 1945, before the entire founding statement was published in *Penjoeloeh*. Until then, anyone interested could write to NIGIS to request that SIBAR documents be sent to him or her.³² The absence of the published statement seems to have been a sign of uneasiness on the Dutch authorities' part.

Sardjono himself contributed two articles to *Penjoeloeh* in the period when SIBAR's contents took shape. The first article emphasizes the spirit of democracy that provided the worldwide motivation to fight against Germany and Japan. The article goes on to state that, in Indonesia, in the past, promises of democratic reform were not kept, notwithstanding the demands of the political parties. The Dutch government could ignore these demands because the people at large did not support them. And, he adds: "A sharp *kelewang* [sword] might bring about a change, but only temporarily, because there is no *kelewang*, how sharp it might be, that cannot be broken by the common people, when it is convinced that it needs to be broken."³³ And Sardjono continues: "Why should we, the Indonesians, join the defense of the Allies? We have never had democratic rights; these were taken from us by force. We must struggle on to obtain these rights, and we know that the Dutch government now is ready to allow democratic reforms. And thus we have common interests. And we will see that after the war no colored people will not be governing itself."³⁴

In a second article, Sardjono points to the Queen's December 7 speech, the one in which she acknowledged past mistakes and promised to end racial discrimination. If this does not happen, he writes, the Dutch government will be taken to task by the Great Powers America, England, China, and Russia. The people who never enjoyed complete democratic rights will now have to dedicate themselves to achieve these, in cooperation with the Dutch.³⁵

³⁰ Hearing L. E. C. van Bovene-Beynon, May 31, 1949, *Enquêtecommissie Regeringsbeleid 1940-1945*, vol. 3C, p. 769.

³¹ "Perhimpoean Serikat Indonesia Baroe (SIBAR)," *Penjoeloeh*, August 25, 1944. The complete statutes and bylaws are only available, in translation, in Australian Archives (AA) Canberra Series A989/1, item 44/600/5/1/8 and Canberra A 6122/40-136. It is stated here that these were approved by the SIBAR congress on September 6, 1944, at what probably amounted to a meeting of the founders.

³² "Perhimpoean Serikat Indonesia Baroe (SIBAR)," *Penjoeloeh*, August 25, 1944.

³³ Sardjono, "Apa jang Haroes Kita Bela," *Penjoeloeh*, May 26, 1944.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Sardjono, "Bersalah Paham," *Penjoeloeh*, June 9, 1944.

SIBAR Actions

In *Penjoeloeh*, news about tangible SIBAR activities was absent. In its articles, including one by Sardjono, the usual sentences about the union of Indonesians and Dutch against Japan and for a new democratic Indonesia, without discrimination based on race or legislation, were now followed by an optimistic reference to SIBAR and its future role.³⁶

In an article on September 4, 1944, it was hoped that SIBAR would become the vehicle by which the Indonesian people could receive political education in democracy and its workings.³⁷ Similarly, on October 18, 1944, it was vaguely reported that SIBAR was not yet able to become active as certain conditions had not yet been met.³⁸ Menderita (pseudonym, translated as “one who suffers”) writes about SIBAR in an ecstatic tone as the culmination of the Indonesian people’s wishes and hopes, asserting that SIBAR will bring freedom in political, economic, and social respects.³⁹ The poetic veins were opened by SIBAR and acrostics ranging from five to forty lines adorned the journal. This example is titled “SIBAR,” by Sawun Uba:⁴⁰

S ibar itoe soeatoe perhimpoean,	Sibar is an association
I ndonesia Baroe, akan dirantjangnja!	Of the new Indonesia that will be designed
B ersama dgn. Pemerintah Nederland,	Together with the Dutch government
A kan mengoesir semoea moesoehnja!	All enemies will be driven away
R a’jat Indonesia, Insjafilah semoea!!!	People of Indonesia, all be aware of this

At the branch level, there was activity that was not covered in *Penjoeloeh*. In Mackay, a committee of three PKI exiles—Ditawilastra, Toekiman, and Haroen Al-Rasjid—was formed on August 29, 1944, and they invited exiles living there to meet to form a SIBAR branch. The Dutch representative in Mackay allowed the committee to form a SIBAR branch.⁴¹ Without such permission a branch was formed in Camp

³⁶ Sardjono, “Bangsa Indonesia tidak Berlalai-lalai,” *Penjoeloeh*, September 4, 1944; Si’mbah, “Kenangan pada Masa Datang,” *Penjoeloeh*, September 11, 1944. Si’mbah called SIBAR the signpost to the new democratic order; see Si’mbah, “Tiba Waktoenja Kita Berkemas,” *Penjoeloeh*, September 27, 1944.

³⁷ “Pendidikan Politik,” *Penjoeloeh*, September 4, 1944.

³⁸ T., “Persatoean Kita dan Indonesia Baroe,” *Penjoeloeh*, October 18, 1944.

³⁹ Menderita, “Samboetan Ra’jat Indonesia terhadap ‘Serikat Indonesia Baroe,’” *Penjoeloeh*, November 8, 1944.

⁴⁰ Sawun Uba, “SIBAR,” *Penjoeloeh*, September 1, 1944.

⁴¹ English translation of the convocation letter and letter of the district security officer, Mackay, to the deputy director of security, K. C. Plumb, Brisbane, September 12, 1944. The addressee replied on September 25, 1944, that the organization should be kept under discreet observation and that communist attempts to infiltrate or influence SIBAR should be reported. The letter from W. B. Simpson, director general of security, Canberra, to K. C. Plumb (deputy director of security), Brisbane, November 21, 1944, summarizes Australian intelligence concerning SIBAR. All documents in AA Canberra A6122/40–136.

Casino,⁴² and a third branch, probably without permission, was established in Sydney.⁴³

The Australian Security Service reported that the Netherlands Forces Intelligence Service (NEFIS) called SIBAR the “natural consequence of the growing trend toward Indonesian unity.” According to the report, the Dutch government recognizes “that a return to the old order is out of the question and is prepared to compromise with the Indonesians, offering them a greater part in the government of the N.E.I. [Netherlands East Indies] than hitherto. [...] Persons like Van der Plas have long foreseen what the future holds in the N.E.I. and are hastily climbing onto the Indonesian bandwagon.” Moreover, NEFIS reported reassuringly that a NEFIS special agent was a member of the SIBAR board and “may be relied upon to report any undesirable developments.”⁴⁴

On November 8, 1944, the SIBAR Board informed *Penjoeloeh* readers that it was not yet able to engage in public activities, as it had not received permission yet from the Australian government to do so. The Dutch government had advised SIBAR that such permission was necessary, and, as SIBAR did not want to offend its host, it followed this advice. This explained why there had not been meetings or any other public SIBAR presence as yet.⁴⁵ And, one may add, why branch level activity went unreported.

It was only on December 12, 1944, that Van der Plas wrote his letter to Minister of External Affairs Evatt, at the request of SIBAR, to ask whether “a special permission from the Commonwealth Government is needed to work openly in Australia among Indonesians residing in or passing through Australia.” He added a passage about SIBAR’s mission:

In its original composition the association was sincerely intended to devote its activities to furthering the war effort by making the Indonesians conscious of their duty towards their people and country and the united nations to fight the barbarous invaders and also to plead for close cooperation with the Netherlands Indies Government and between all groups of the population. However, the communist ex-internees from New Guinea, brought over here by request of the allied Commander-in-Chief, have—from what I learned after having established contact with the communist party in Australia—grasped the leadership, especially of the branches formed in Casino and Sydney. In the central committee

⁴² Letter from deputy director general of security, K.C. Plumb, N.S.W., Melbourne, to director general of security, W. B. Simpson, Canberra, November 9, 1944, in AA Canberra A6122/40–136. *Citra dan Perjuangan Ex Digul*, p. 110, mentions Achmad Soemadhi as SIBAR chairman in Mackay.

⁴³ The board in Sydney in April 1945 consisted of Soeparmin, Noerhadi, Soekirno, Doelrachman, and Toekliwon, according to a letter from Consul General J. B. D. Pennink to Th. Kist, Sydney, April 24, 1945, in NA, collection Van der Plas, no. 30. The background of the five was Pari (2), PKI (2), and unknown (1). *Citra dan Perjuangan Ex Digul*, p. 110, names Soeparmin and Moh. Senan as the Sydney leaders. Together they established a trade union for Indonesian seamen. The Sydney branch is also mentioned in a survey of SIBAR, certainly by the security service, of September 12, 1945, in AA Canberra A6122/40–136. Curiously, *Penjoeloeh*, January 3, 1945, reported that no branches yet existed in Australia (in an editorial note following “Rapat oemoem ‘Sibar’ in Merauke”).

⁴⁴ Deputy Director General of Security K. C. Plumb, Canberra, to Director General of Security W. B. Simpson, Canberra, December 2, 1944, in AA Canberra A 6122/40–136.

⁴⁵ Pengoeroes Besar Serikat Indonesia Baroe, “Sedikit keterangan tentang ‘SIBAR,’” *Penjoeloeh*, November 8, 1944. A month later it was reported that permission had yet to be granted (“Soerat Menjoerat,” *Penjoeloeh*, December 8, 1944).

the communist Sardjono has become chairman and he has already several times had friction with the nationalist other members, because of his acting without their knowledge.⁴⁶

The director general of security, in his advice to Evatt, noted with some anxiety that the CPA threatened to infiltrate SIBAR, "in accordance with the usual Communist policy of fostering independence movements among native races and of using such movements for the advancement of Communist policy." But the answer to Van der Plas was a clear one: "There is no need for any association to obtain permission to organize in Australia and unless its activities are such as to bring it within the scope of National Security (Subversive Associations) Regulations I know of no action which can be taken to prevent it from operating."⁴⁷

Why did Van der Plas wait four months to write this letter, and why didn't he use a more informal way to find out what Australians' opinions would be? His many contacts would have told him what the legislation on the freedom of association would imply. But perhaps he was not altogether unhappy with this moratorium on SIBAR activities. He was worried, the letter shows, about communist influence in SIBAR. He wrote a letter to Sardjono, probably in the latter part of October 1944, in which he tried to find out what Sardjono's, or even the communists', objectives were concerning SIBAR.

Sardjono's answer, with some irony and a bit haughty, deserves to be included in full.⁴⁸

Melbourne, 9 November 1944

Right Honourable Sir,

I sincerely hope that Your Right Honourable did not have to wait too long for my answer. I bring the following respectfully to the attention of Your Right Honourable. Your question is basically a very simple question. Every communist would be able to give it an immediate answer. As, however, it was asked by Your Right Honourable I was surprised to no small extent, as Your Right Honourable might not be expected to be completely unfamiliar with the party system.

I cannot doubt your trust in me for a single moment, but I suppose that I only perceive a certain measure of anxiety on Your part about eventualities, that must have been at the basis of your question, all this only being witness of Your prudent statesmanship.

⁴⁶ Letter Ch.O. van der Plas, Brisbane, to H. V. Evatt, minister for external affairs, December 12, 1944, in Canberra, AA Canberra A989/1-44/600/5/1/8. The ministry sent a copy for advice to W. B. Simpson, director general of security, Canberra, in AA Canberra A6122/40-136. The letter is also found in NA, collection Van der Plas, no. 34.

⁴⁷ Letter from W. B. Simpson, director general of security, Canberra, to the acting secretary, Department of External Affairs, Canberra, January 11, 1945, in AA Canberra A6122/40-136.

⁴⁸ I have not found the Van der Plas letter. Sardjono's reply, in Dutch, is kept in NA, collection Van der Plas, no. 30. De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*, vol. 11C, pp. 146-47, quotes this letter in part. I translate Sardjono's letter as accurately as possible, but some of it is unclear, perhaps because of Sardjono's lack of Dutch language skills—or could Sardjono's vagueness be intentional?

A communist, like anyone else who embraces a certain conviction, is governed by his political faith. And the communist party, as well as any other party, is the embodiment of that conviction.

Now that I am free of any party ties, since the day that I was put in jail to be interned, henceforth, according to the all but democratic extraordinary rights, it is from then on my political faith that dictates my position. This faith directed me inexorably to immediately and wholeheartedly accept the hand, outstretched so with such good intentions.

This willingness to cooperate and join with the government to work for a Democratic Indonesia underlies my participation in the establishment of SIBAR. The aforementioned faith has unequivocally brought me to understand that only a Democratic Indonesia will offer SIBAR the opportunity to materialize as a party. To live and to die for the sake of Democracy is indeed the common line of conduct of all the communists in the world.

There is not any more talk of a command by our international organization, with which Your Right Honourable certainly meant to have referred to our Comintern [Communist International]. Since this organization was dissolved long ago, [...] the communists in every country have to fend for themselves.

The only source that obliges us to a serious extent, thus, is our faith, against which we can only set our abilities to put it into effect or not.

As to the transformation of SIBAR in our own party, I remark the following. If I am able to convert it [to] a communist party, I am certainly also able to establish such a party directly. My faith will never induce me to do the first thing.

I hope that in this way I have given the answer Your Right Honourable expected to receive.

With my highest respect,

Your most obliging servant,

Sardjono

Three months later Van der Plas gave his analysis of Sardjono's personality. In his opinion, Sardjono possessed qualities, but he was a fanatic and a dreamer. In daily dealings with the Communist Party in Australia he was definitely dangerous, precisely because he was a dreamer.⁴⁹

PKI, CPA, and SIBAR

Was the cooperation of the PKI exiles with the Dutch a conscious, well-coordinated policy mapped out in consultation with the CPA? Rupert Lockwood's *Black Armada* gives an insider's view of CPA-PKI relations. The CPA was active in securing the

⁴⁹ A letter from Van der Plas to a NICA officer on Morotai, February 13, 1945, in De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*, vol. 11C, p. 144.

release of the exiles, and must soon have discovered how completely uninformed they were about world current events. The CPA educated its Indonesian comrades in political study groups and language courses. "The knowledge and damage of past errors of the PKI" had to be corrected.⁵⁰ The CPA was instrumental in "their advance from a bottomless marsh of enforced ignorance, sectarian wrangling, and mangled lives to an understanding of the new approaches demanded in the era of the second world war." It relied on "New PKI intellectuals" who were able to shake off the "old reformist and anarchist influences." But it was not easy. "There were numerous discussions between CPA and PKI leaders: the Australian advice was delivered in firm terms, that support of the war against the Axis was essential, because victory would spark anti-colonial revolutions in Asia." Sardjono, although originating from the "Old PKI" "had ameliorated his views sufficiently to lead the PKI in Australia, as President." The PKI organized secretly in Cowra, and some other branches. Its peculiar position as a communist party in the territory of another party was expressed in its name as Foreign Section of the PKI operating among the Indonesian People in Australia. The PKI was independent, though advised by the CPA, and "at first made sectarian errors that made CPA hairs stand on end." Sardjono, according to Lockwood, set an example by "donning a Dutch uniform." But the PKI commitment to the Dutch was fragile. Lockwood points out that the employment of Indonesian exiles by the Dutch also allowed them to read important Allied and Dutch documents, and that this information was used appropriately.⁵¹

The secret PKI even managed to publish a ten-page mimeographed bulletin, named *Red Front*. The title was in English, but the text was in Indonesian. On the title page the bulletin declared itself to be the "Official Voice of the Foreign Section of the PKI." It was said by Australian intelligence to have been produced by the CPA in Sydney. The third issue, in December 1944, was confiscated by the Dutch or Australian intelligence service. It dramatically opened with the words "Don't keep this number! After it has been read it must be burnt!" Its contents, however, for the greater part, were repetitions of well-known opinions based on the Comintern guidelines advising comrades to cooperate with democratic forces against fascism. After the defeat of fascism, Indonesia should become completely independent and the structure of government should be left to its people. But drama was added in the few pages on the PKI in Australia. It emphasized that there was only one PKI, neither an old nor a new one. That party was an illegal party, and all members should keep everything secret relating to party work. Utmost secrecy, strict discipline, and tight organization were to be observed. Without disclosing their PKI background, members should enter other organizations and gain influence or control of these. And "Oom" (Uncle) gave some practical advice along the lines below:

Going to the pictures, brother? Excellent. Remember! Before you step out of the door of your room, stop a moment. Have objects or letters that should not be

⁵⁰ All quotations in this paragraph from Lockwood, *Black Armada*, pp. 27–38.

⁵¹ It is remarkable that Lockwood does not mention SIBAR at all. In 1975, SIBAR probably was considered an organization best forgotten. See also De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*, vol. 11C, p. 144. P. Honig, in his hearing of May 31, 1949, in *Enquêtecommissie Regeringsbeleid 1940–1945*, vol. 3C, p. 783, describes the exiles as smart people, almost all speaking Dutch, who were posted in a great number of offices and who must have been struck by the Dutch insincerity about equality between Dutch and Indonesians.

known by others already been well locked up? Perhaps, later somebody will come into your room to ferret about. Such errors are sure to bring danger. Remember, our enemies are always watching us!⁵²

In 1947, PKI published in a brochure its view on SIBAR. It was on CPA advice that an illegal PKI section was established along with the legally operating SIBAR. Sardjono played a key role in both organizations. SIBAR would only cooperate with the Dutch as long as the war lasted. Van der Plas failed in his intention to use SIBAR for his own purposes. SIBAR was successful in recruiting a considerable number of seamen and also won members for the illegal PKI. CPA and SIBAR sacrificed their radical demands in favor of a united democratic resistance until the Japanese surrender. Then, at once, SIBAR would be dissolved and cooperation with the Dutch would end.⁵³

Uneasy Alliance

On February 7, 1945, the SIBAR Board reported that the Australian government had not voiced objections to its proposed activities, and there were no obstacles to SIBAR's taking public action.⁵⁴ The honor of hosting SIBAR's first public meeting fell to Merauke, a town never occupied by the Japanese. On December 5, 1944, eighty people gathered. Ma'moen undertook the trip together with SIBAR board members Almassawa and Moerad. The local SIBAR chairman was Mohamad Djoni, the last one, in 1939, to be exiled to Digoel. He was not brought to Australia but left behind in Merauke, "as he had many children." The three speakers called upon those present, probably of mixed backgrounds and including a few more exiles, to join SIBAR; and called for unity and democracy that would, in a new spirit, bring into being a free Indonesia, and invited participants to work together with all democratic countries, especially the Netherlands. Moerad called on all Indonesians to unite in SIBAR for the good of the fatherland.⁵⁵

Maybe Almassawa and Moerad were already in New Guinea. On September 25, 1944, both were made NIGIS public relations officers, and their new occupation would generally involve postings in newly liberated areas.⁵⁶ On February 1, 1945, two more officers were added. And thus Sardjono, as a lieutenant, and Soeka became uniformed officers in KNIL, after having sworn their oath of allegiance to the Dutch Queen.⁵⁷ Sardjono worked for some time on Morotai. His transfer might have suited Van der

⁵² *Red Front* is available in NA, collection Van der Plas, no. 30 (original and translation), and in AA Canberra A6122/40-136 (original and translation). The information on its production may be found in Van der Plas to Van Mook, Brisbane, April 6, 1945, in NA, collection Van der Plas, no. 30.

⁵³ *Rahasia Sibar* (Djakarta: Bintang Merah, 1947). For a summary, see Harry A. Poeze, *Verguisd en Vergeten; Tan Malaka, de Linkse Beweging en de Indonesische Revolutie, 1945-1949* (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 2007), p. 582.

⁵⁴ "Perkabaran tentang Sibar," *Penjoeloeh*, February 7, 1945. I have not found Minister Evatt's letter to Van der Plas. In "Openbare Vergadering SIBAR," *Penjoeloeh*, August 13, 1945, it is stated that the Dutch government's letter, which informed SIBAR about the Australian position, was dated February 13, 1945.

⁵⁵ "Rapat oemoem 'Sibar' di Merauke," *Penjoeloeh*, January 3, 1945. The information on Djoni may be found in *Citra dan Perjuangan Ex Digul*, p. 110.

⁵⁶ "Angkatan Doca Orang Public Relations Officers Baharoe," *Penjoeloeh*, October 4, 1944.

⁵⁷ "Public Relations Officer Baroe," *Penjoeloeh*, February 7, 1945.

Plas and NEFIS as it prevented Sardjono from influencing SIBAR policies.⁵⁸ According to PKI, in 1947 Van der Plas had sent Sardjono to Morotai, as Van der Plas suspected him of illegal activities.⁵⁹

Van der Plas already harbored some reservations concerning Sardjono's role. Van der Plas noted the changed course of *Penjoeloeh* since Boerhanoedin was succeeded by Sardjono. The journal created unfavorable impressions and had a "hidden tendency."⁶⁰ Around March 1945, Mohamad Bondan joined the editorial staff of *Penjoeloeh*. Winanta was the editor-in-chief and asked Bondan to translate news items and to write articles himself. Bondan soon was told that his articles, with criticisms on fascism and imperialism, were not appreciated by the head of NIGIS. Bondan resigned, so as not to make matters worse for Winanta.⁶¹

When *Red Front* landed on Van der Plas's desk, he contemplated the measures to be taken. A re-internment in Digoel was, for practical reasons, not possible. Informing the Allies about these secret activities would be useful. Van der Plas saw Sardjono as primarily responsible for the anti-Dutch sentiment, and believed action should be taken against Sardjono when the opportunity was there.⁶²

Van der Plas also noted with some pleasure that a split had developed among the exiles, between nationalists and communists. He referred to the founding of Partai Kebangsaan Indonesia (Indonesian Nationalist Party) in March 1945 in Mackay. The provocative abbreviation of the new party (PKI, the same as for Partai Komoenis Indonesia) emphasized its claim to being the rally point of the real Indonesian communists—and in this way the bitter feud between Moscow communists and national communists under the banner of Tan Malaka was once again ignited. A clear foreboding of this was an incident during a SIBAR meeting on February 21, 1945, when Jahja Nasoetion spoke out against SIBAR views, and was slapped, after which the meeting was adjourned in turmoil. On March 15, SIBAR pitted Harjono and Jahja Nasoetion against each other in a debate.⁶³

Prominent in the new party were A. J. Patty and Jahja Nasoetion. The program of the Parki—as it usually was abbreviated later on—also referred to the Atlantic Charter and other Allied declarations about a new democratic world order, one in which Indonesia was to be completely independent and would have the sovereignty to

⁵⁸ Letter from Van der Plas to Van Mook, Brisbane, April 6, 1945, in NA, collection Van der Plas, no. 30.

⁵⁹ *Rahasia SIBAR*, p. 32.

⁶⁰ Memorandum from Van der Plas to Head NIGIS, April 30, 1945, in NA, collection Van der Plas, no. 30.

⁶¹ Bondan, *Spanning a Revolution*, pp. 200–3.

⁶² Van der Plas to Van Mook, Brisbane, April 6, 1945, in NA, collection Van der Plas, no. 30. In his hearing before the inquiry committee, on March 3, 1953, Van der Plas referred again to *Red Front* and to the cooperation between the CPA and the exiles, who cooperated with the Dutch to further their own objectives. SIBAR is not mentioned, neither by name nor as an unnamed organization (*Enquêtecommissie Regeringsbeleid 1940–1945*, vol. 8C-2, pp. 1394–95).

⁶³ H. M., "Tabir Rahasia SIBAR," *Murba*, April 29 and April 30, 1948. On Parki, see Jan Lingard Lingard, *Refugees and Rebels: Indonesian Exiles in Wartime Australia* (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2008), pp. 106–7; and Poeze, *Verguisd en Vergeten*, p. 350.

structure its own state system. No role, however, for the Dutch was foreseen.⁶⁴ Parki attacked SIBAR, and thus PKI, for its cooperation with the Dutch. Both SIBAR and Parki tried to obtain some latitude from Dutch Mackay authorities, who, of course, favored SIBAR. Parki was smaller than SIBAR, but not as small as a one or two-person enterprise. It had at least twenty-two members in Mackay, compared to SIBAR's forty-six. Some PKI exiles even proposed to Dutch officials in Mackay that they return the Parki board to Digoel, a suggestion that shows how implacably bad relations were.⁶⁵ In public, SIBAR manifested itself in the May 1 parade in Mackay with a decorated truck, with banners reading "Smash the Japs first and then towards democratic Indonesia" and "'SIBAR,' the new Indonesian League."⁶⁶

Indicative of the strained relations between the Dutch and the exiles was the reaction to the plan of Max Soeprapto and Willi Pande Iroot to publish an "anti-Fascist newspaper" in Sydney. Soeprapto and Iroot were arrested, at Dutch instigation, and deported to Hollandia, in New Guinea. SIBAR, together with two other organizations of Indonesians, protested to Van Mook, and CPA and trade unions followed suit.⁶⁷

SIBAR's Downfall

According to *Penjoeloeh* reports, there was not much SIBAR action in the first half of 1945. On June 24, 1945, a meeting was held in Camp Columbia, Brisbane, with the object to establish a SIBAR branch there. Among the two conveners was PKI exile Djajadiredja. Harjono, a PNI Baroe exile, and prominent in the PKI after 1945, stressed the need to forge an anti-fascist united front. Ma'moen was there, too, and pointed at the indispensable Dutch role in creating that solidarity.⁶⁸

The first anniversary of SIBAR was celebrated in Melbourne and Casino on August 6, 1945. Maskoen chaired the meeting in Melbourne that opened with "Indonesia Raja," the song that embodied the Indonesian national ideals. The first speaker was Navy Lieutenant Abdoelrachman, who, at length, sketched the history, objectives, and future of SIBAR. He noted SIBAR's six branches—in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Mackay, Casino, and Merauke—and remarked on its almost six hundred members. SIBAR's goal was a new democratic Indonesia, not a Japanese or Dutch colony, to be achieved by a national front, according to Abdoelrachman. In this, Allied—and Dutch—help was necessary, at first to defeat the Japanese. The past should now be forgotten. The Dutch had shown their good intentions already by renaming the Ministry of Colonies to become the Ministry of Overseas Territories. For SIBAR, it was

⁶⁴ "Keterangan Pendirian Party Kebangsaan Indonesia (P.K.I.)" and "Urgentie Program," appendix to letter from Van der Plas to Assistant-Resident Merauke, April 30, 1945, in NA, collection Van der Plas, no. 30.

⁶⁵ Letter from Van der Plas to Assistant-Resident Merauke, April 30, 1945; "Camp Mackay, Kort Verslag over de Maand April 1945"; letter from N. S. Blom, director of justice, to minister of Overseas Territories, May 14, 1945; and "Camp Mackay, Kort Verslag over de Maand Mei 1945," all in NA, collection Van der Plas, no. 30.

⁶⁶ "Camp Mackay, Kort Verslag over de Maand Mei 1945," in NA, collection Van der Plas, no. 30.

⁶⁷ Mentioned in a survey of SIBAR, certainly by the security service, of September 12, 1945, in AA Canberra A6122/40-136. See also Lockwood, *Black Armada*, pp. 71-72; and the CPA journal, *Tribune*, September 24, 1945, copied in NA, collection Van der Plas, no. 30.

⁶⁸ Verslaggever, "Sibar Berkibar di Columbia Camp," *Penjoeloeh*, July 16, 1945.

important to draft a program on political, economic, and social matters that was to be discussed and approved at a SIBAR congress. Then, the program would become the subject of discussion with the Dutch. Following Abdoelrachman, Almassawa's speech was of a more abstract kind.⁶⁹

In Casino, the festive celebration included music and gamelan, and attracted five hundred people. The meeting was arranged by former exiles: Mohammad Toha, Ngadiman, Sabariman, and Roekmanda, all of whom had PKI connections.⁷⁰

At that time, no one present at the celebrations could predict that the war would be over in ten days. The expected prolonged struggle with a gradual liberation of Indonesia suddenly was not a prospect anymore. And, in the new circumstances, the common interest of SIBAR and the Dutch government to cooperate in that struggle also evaporated. The center of gravity shifted to Java, where a declaration of independence was made on August 17, 1945. But news about that event was still ambiguous, and left a lot to be explained, so that any realistic evaluation of its consequences was impossible.

In what was probably its last public action, SIBAR sent a telegram to Van Mook: "In the name of the Indonesian people we pay respect and wish the best to Your Excellency, and we also speak out our endless gratefulness to the Almighty God, as to the defeat of Japan and the liberation of Indonesia. May the Almighty God bless all Your Excellency's efforts and leadership in relation to the liberation of the New Indonesia." Van Mook sent a thank-you telegram in reply and added that he had forwarded the SIBAR telegram to Queen Wilhelmina.⁷¹

SIBAR's chairman and secretary signed the telegram. Not Sardjono, but Hadji Djajaloedin Thaib signed as chairman, along with secretary Almassawa.⁷² Sardjono had already been replaced, but such a move had not been reported in *Penjoeloeh*. Was it because his tasks as a public relations officer prevented him from taking part in SIBAR's daily routine? And was this a welcome pretext for pro-Dutch board members to oust him? Altogether, information on Sardjono's resignation, separation, or ouster is not available, nor is the exact date of the event known.

In 1947, PKI reported that in May 1945 a meeting in Casino had been convened to prepare collective action to be implemented as soon as Japan surrendered. Moreover, at such time SIBAR was to be dissolved. Sabariman, Ngadiman, Djokosoedjono, Harjono, and Achmad Soemadhi were given tasks to execute those plans. After August 15, 1945, all the branches, indeed, were disbanded, or all members resigned, and the Central Board followed suit.⁷³ According to Maskoen, on September 3 he signed a statement, on behalf of all branches, that SIBAR ceased to exist, since, as a result of

⁶⁹ "Openbare Vergadering SIBAR," *Penjoeloeh*, August 9, August 13, and September 8, 1945. The last installment ended with "to be continued," but no more issues were published.

⁷⁰ Pendengar, "Semangat Berkobar: Pemikoel Sendjata dan Keinsjafan," *Penjoeloeh*, August 20, 1945. *Citra dan Perjuangan Ex Digul*, p. 110, names Toha as the SIBAR leader in Casino.

⁷¹ "Oetjapan Terima Kasih," *Penjoeloeh*, August 23, 1945. The dates of the telegrams are not given.

⁷² Both Thaib and Almassawa were the only two to be nominated to become members of Madjelis Islam Tinggi (High Islam Council), instituted as an advisory body by Van Mook on August 21, 1945. The biography of Thaib mentioned his Digoel exile ("Madjelis Islam Tinggi," *Penjoeloeh*, September 10, 1945).

⁷³ *Rahasia SIBAR*, pp. 32–33.

Japan's surrender, SIBAR's objective to support the Allies against Japan had been achieved.⁷⁴

SIBAR's Legacy

The close involvement of the PKI with SIBAR was used by PKI's opponents in the internal political struggle of the Republik Indonesia. In the forefront were the "national communists," exiled to Digoel for their involvement in Tan Malaka's Partai Republik Indonesia, and who organized in Parki in Australia. After their return home in 1946 they were banned from the reconstituted PKI, whose first chairman was Sardjono—the most prominent SIBAR leader. Tan Malaka's followers did not fare well in the Republik Indonesia, but found in Sardjono's association with Van der Plas fuel to attack "PKI SIBAR," as they called PKI. These attacks were considered so detrimental to PKI that its congress in January 1947 decided to publish a brochure, *Rahasia SIBAR* (The secret of SIBAR), serialized first, to counter the slanders by trustworthy information. The Congress explicitly approved SIBAR's actions as being in conformity with Comintern guidelines and the advice of the CPA.⁷⁵

The case, however, was not closed with *Rahasia SIBAR*. The subject remained sensitive, and made PKI vulnerable. Tan Malaka followers continued to criticize PKI for its cooperation with SIBAR. Its daily *Murba*, published in Surakarta, started a series called "Tabir rahasia SIBAR" (The secret of SIBAR revealed) on April 22, 1948, and written by "H. M."⁷⁶ Sixteen installments appeared intermittently until July 31, 1948. The series was never published as a brochure, however. The author was well-informed, and his partisan interpretations were often backed up by original documents, quoted at length, that could not be dismissed by the PKI as slander or forgery. The PKI chose not to react at all, considering this strategy the best way to limit damage.⁷⁷ One last time, in 1962, Partai Murba, which united radicals inspired by Tan Malaka, and political enemies of the PKI, tried to rekindle the feud. In 1962, Soedijono Djojoprajitno, prominent in Partai Murba, edited a diverse collection on the subject,⁷⁸ pleading that Tan Malaka made the right political choices, and PKI did not—not in 1926, not in Digoel, not in Australia.⁷⁹

As to SIBAR, the case is closed. The monographs on Indonesian activities in Australia do not find SIBAR worth more than an occasional mention, with two

⁷⁴ Citra dan Perjuangan Ex Digul, p. 112.

⁷⁵ D. N. Aidit, "Kongres ke-empat," *Bintang Merah* 2,19 (January 15, 1947). The series appeared in *Penghela Rakjat* during April 2–12, 1947. The introduction may be found in *Rahasia SIBAR*, pp. 3–6, and a summary may be found in Poeze, *Verguisd en Vergeten*, pp. 581–82.

⁷⁶ There is no Pari exile with these initials, so the author is still unknown.

⁷⁷ H. M., "Tabir Rahasia SIBAR," *Murba*, serialized from April 22–July 31, 1948. The series is summarized in Poeze, *Verguisd en Vergeten*, pp. 725–27.

⁷⁸ P.K.I.-Sibar contra Tan Malaka; Pemberontakan 1926 & kambing hitam Tan Malaka (PKI Sibar against Tan Malaka; The insurrection of 1926 and the scapegoat Tan Malaka).

⁷⁹ Soedijono Djojoprajitno, *P.K.I.-Sibar contra Tan Malaka (Pemberontakan 1926 & "Kambing Hitam" Tan Malaka)* (Jakarta: Jajasan Massa, 1962), with a contribution by exile Wiro Samiardo (pp. 72–80) giving details on SIBAR. The collection is discussed in Poeze, *Verguisd en Vergeten*, p. 1761.

exceptions.⁸⁰ These publications concentrate on the fate of the Indonesians in Australia, who had to wait many months before they could be repatriated, and who mobilized support for the new Republik Indonesia. They had a hand in the successful postwar boycott of Dutch ships that were to bring men and military and civil supplies to a Dutch government in Jakarta that was trying to restore an order in which it would be, for the time being, master again.

The protagonists in SIBAR all returned to Indonesia. Sardjono became PKI chairman again in 1946 and embodied the continuity between the PKI of 1926 and that of 1946. Harjono, sent by NEFIS to be a clerk in Hollandia, made his way back, became a PKI member, and chaired the powerful trade-union federation SOBSI. Both men were, after the communist insurrection in September 1948, arrested and executed together by their countrymen in December 1948. Achmad Soemadhi, a PKI Politburo member in 1948, survived imprisonment in 1948, and also detention and exile after 1965—one of the few PKI members to suffer three times for his convictions. Boerhanoedin's Australian career is dazzling. He became the trusted adviser of Van der Plas, who sent him for about five months to the Bestuurs Academie in Brisbane, established to educate government officials at an advanced level. Hereupon he was chosen to become a member of the Dutch delegation to the San Francisco (California) United Nations Conference on International Organization, which convened from April 25 until June 26, 1945. It laid the foundations for the United Nations Organization, inaugurated in October 1945. He then went on to the Netherlands and was the first Indonesian from the Pacific region to provide Netherlands Indonesians with firsthand accounts about developments back home.⁸¹ Not much is known about the postwar careers of Boerhanoedin and his PNI Baroe comrades. In general, they joined Sjahrir's Partai Sosialis, and made a career in party and government. More spectacular was Abdoelrachman's career. From being a Dutch naval officer, he became head of intelligence of the Republik's Defence Ministry. Poedjosoebroto, too, made a switch and became an interpreter with Sjahrir. Djalaloeddin Thaib was in Indonesia after August 1945 and still in Dutch service as an Army Ulama, but probably resigned soon after, as traces of his life in Dutch archives cease thereafter.⁸² Almassawa, not a Digoel inmate, remained faithful to the Dutch and worked for Dutch radio in Jakarta, commenting as Budiman. He wrote regularly in the pro-Dutch journal *Pandji Ra'jat* under the pen name of Atomia, and was later an adviser on Arab affairs.

⁸⁰ The exceptions are Lingard, *Refugees and Rebels*, with a subchapter on SIBAR (pp. 104–6); and Citra dan Perjuangan Ex Digul, pp. 108–12. The second title, published by the Ministry of Social Affairs, in accordance with official policies, had to downplay the PKI role in the course of events, thus rendering the account untrustworthy. The judgment on SIBAR, however, is a positive one. See also Bondan, *Spanning a Revolution*; Molly Bondan, *Spanning a Revolution: Kisah Mohamad Bondan, Eks-Digulis, dan Pergerakan Nasional Indonesia* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2008); Joan Hardjono and Charles Warner, eds., *In Love with a Nation: Molly Bondan and Indonesia* (Picton, NSW: Charles Warner, 1995); Joan Hardjono and Charles Warner, eds., *Molly Bondan, Pengabdian pada Bangsa: Penuturan dalam Kata-katanya Sendiri* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2008); and Frank C. Bennett, Jr., *The Return of the Exiles: Australia's Repatriation of the Indonesians, 1945–47* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash Asia Institute, 2003).

⁸¹ "Toeian Boerhanoedin ke-Konperensi di San Francisco," *Penjoeloeh*, July 1, 1945; "Bantoean dari Kawan-kawan se-Keradjaan," *Penjoeloeh*, August 16, 1945. On the Bestuurs Academie, see De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden*, vol. 11C, pp. 352–55.

⁸² Djalaloeddin Thaib was kidnapped and arrested in West Sumatra by the Republican army and then retired to his home village, according to information from Audrey Kahin. This information she obtained from an army officer she interviewed.

SIBAR: A Footnote in Colonial History?

All parties concerned had reason to forget SIBAR as soon as the war was over. PKI and PNI Baroe, reconstituted in the Republik in 1945 as Partai Sosialis, under Sjahrir, had ample reason, as affiliation with SIBAR represented an incriminating union with the colonial power (notwithstanding how much this alliance had made sense at the time, seen from the perspective of the worldwide struggle between Allies and Axis).

As for SIBAR, it looks as if the initiative first was with Van der Plas and Loekman Djajadiningrat, who were aware of the necessity to win the hearts of the Indonesian people by a policy that radically differed from prewar political immobility. Among the Digoel exiles they recruited able Indonesians, first from among the former PNI Baroe, supplemented later by PKI members. But what motivated them, or in particular Van der Plas, to set up SIBAR? This was to be a party that can only be characterized as an official national, even a state party, backed by official support. And Van der Plas consciously entered in a close alliance with communists. He must have known that they would only act in conformity with the general communist line, in this case, in consultation with the comrades in the CPA. Van der Plas's prospects at first were bright, but after a short time he lost hold of the reins, and what he did amounted to crisis management only. The Indies authorities were wrong in expecting to be able to control the communist activities within the limits they would set.

For the PKI, supporting the antifascist struggle bore fruit—PKI gained the opportunity to set up an internal communication network, operated by its members in Dutch service. In this way, valuable information was gathered. The expertise and guidance of the Australian Communist Party were of great importance in this respect. Also aided by the sheer number of PKI exiles, PKI became the leading faction among the exiles and seamen in Australia. It came to dominate SIBAR, much to the authorities' dismay. They had created an organization—SIBAR—that transgressed their "official" boundaries. But so as not to lose credibility, they could not take harsh measures to force SIBAR to comply with the government's aims. Cautious obstruction of PKI influence was thus applied. However, the ideals of SIBAR as an official national party, during the first half of 1945, were held aloft by the government, despite the communist participation.

For the Dutch, Japan's sudden surrender came, as it did for the Indonesians in Australia, as a great surprise. It was probably greeted with great relief by government and PKI leaders, as it ended their uneasy alliance in SIBAR. And with the Proclamation of Independence, and the support it roused, all postwar plans could be thrown away—and the government abandoned SIBAR, too.

A question that cannot be answered is, to what extent was SIBAR an enterprise entirely of Van der Plas's making? Nowhere is there mention of Van Mook, head of the cabinet in exile, as being informed about SIBAR—and looking at the scope of SIBAR, he certainly should have known.

The PKI's junior partnership with the CPA, which was well-informed about Moscow's political aims, added to the prestige of PKI exiles when, in March 1946, they returned to Indonesia. Their martyr's aureole, moreover, secured them leading positions in the reconstituted PKI, which purged communists with "nationalist" tendencies.

An interesting last question concerns whether this Dutch–Communist alliance was similar to other Southeast Asian cooperation schemes? These all took a very different form. In Vietnam, the US intelligence organization Office of Strategic Services (OSS) supported Communist leader Ho Chi Minh—who, as such, kept a low profile—in his armed resistance against Japan and the pro-Japanese French colonial government. The Free French, reinstated in the mother country in 1944, and looking for their return in Vietnam, were not pleased. There was no official agreement between OSS and Ho’s organization, let alone US official recognition.

In the Philippines, the strong Communist-inspired Huk organization fought alongside other guerrilla units during the Japanese occupation. But it received disproportionately less support, both material and immaterial, than did other anti-Japanese guerrilla forces from the pro-US underground network in the Philippines. And after the war, with US colonial rule restored, the Huk was cleverly prevented from taking a share of power in the independent Philippines, a feat that the US and the national elite accomplished.

In Malaya, the case was different again. Anti-Japanese guerrillas, known as the Malayan People’s Anti-Japanese Union, controlled by the Malay Communist Party, an almost exclusive ethnic Chinese affair, joined hands with the British equivalent of the OSS, the Special Operations Executive (SOE). An agreement was signed in which the military cooperation was recorded. Political matters, however, were excluded from it. Later efforts by the British Army to come to some agreement on future political terms found no conclusion. The reinstatement of British rule after the Japanese surrender involved the disarming of the guerrillas—they were unhappy to comply, and sabotaged the measures. Soon the war coalition broke up altogether, and before long communist-inspired legal and illegal opposition plagued the country, exacerbated by race riots between Chinese and Malay.

SIBAR radically differs from the cooperation initiated in other Southeast Asian colonies. As for Indonesia, the highest Dutch civil authorities were involved, as were legitimate communist leaders; and the agreement—on fundamental issues—was officially signed and made public, and was intended to last beyond the Japanese surrender.⁸³

The course of history explains why SIBAR was, indeed, relegated to a footnote in history, but, in retrospect, it deserves more than the scant attention it has received hitherto.

⁸³ On two of the three countries, see F. S. V. Donnison, *British Military Administration in the Far East, 1943–46* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1956). On Vietnam, see Stein Tønnesson, *The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945: Roosevelt, Ho Chi Minh, and de Gaulle in a World at War* (London, Newbury Park, and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991); David G. Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1995); William J. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh* (New York, NY: Hyperion, 2000); and Dixee R. Bartholemew-Feis, *The OSS and Ho Chi Minh: Unexpected Allies in the War against Japan* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006). On the Philippines, see David Joel Steinberg, *Philippine Collaboration in World War II* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1967); Stanley Karnow, *In Our Image: America’s Empire in the Philippines* (New York, NY: Random House, 1989); and Benedict J. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines*, second printing (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002). On Malaya, see Cheah Boon Kheng, *Red Star over Malaya: Resistance and Social Conflict during and after the Japanese Occupation, 1941–1946* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1983).