

REVIEW

ANTON LUCAS, ED., *LOCAL OPPOSITION AND UNDERGROUND RESISTANCE TO THE JAPANESE IN JAVA 1942-1945**

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The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) was established in 1920, the first in Asia. It was dismembered by the Dutch after abortive revolts in 1926-27; a revived underground was badly mauled by the Japanese during the Second World War; it was devastated in the Madiun revolt of 1948; and having subsequently grown to become the largest Communist party outside the Soviet Union and China, it was destroyed in the massacres and imprisonments triggered by the so-called September 30th Movement of 1965. Anton Lucas, who has written elsewhere on the Tiga Daerah Affair of late 1945 in Pekalongan Residency,¹ here presents both an historical overview of the Party's existence during the Japanese occupation and two eyewitness accounts from Party activists who are among the few survivors of that experience.

The overview is a remarkable work of reconstruction, given the sources still extant in the 1970s and 1980s; the bibliographical underpinning was enhanced by some thirty informants, fourteen of whom had worked in the underground. The PKI, illegal, was reestablished in 1936 in the wake of Musso's clandestine visit to the Indies. Then, as the Dutch surrendered in 1942, the Japanese seized the colonial police files and, with the assistance of the native agents of the Dutch, proceeded quickly to apprehend leftist suspects. Few remained free. Party members still at large continued to hew to the Musso line of resisting the Japanese while attempting to build a broad antifascist front. To make a brief precis of rich detail: the Party put together an all-Java network of underground groups; produced a small journal (of which no copy is known to survive); disseminated anti-Japanese propaganda; attempted to infiltrate the paramilitary organizations; committed minor acts of sabotage; but did succumb, with very few exceptions, to the Japanese police. At war's end, Party activists were involved in late 1945 in a failed attempt to establish revolutionary power in Pekalongan. They were quickly and easily routed by the Republican army and denounced by the new Party leaders. S. Widarta, a principal actor in the wartime underground and the Pekalongan incident, was executed as a deviationist by his own Party in 1947.

That is, the PKI underground was at best a minor footnote in the history of the Japanese occupation. I suspect that Lucas is moved by compassion to ensure that the footnote is written. Two Indonesian accounts are provided in this

* Monash University, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash Papers on Southeast Asia, No. 13, 1986. xviii + 368 pp.

1. "The Tiga Daerah Affair: Social Revolution or Rebellion?" in *Regional Dynamics of the Indonesian Revolution: Unity from Diversity*, ed. Audrey R. Kahin (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), pp. 22-53.

endeavor. The first is by a Sintha Melati (pseudonym), which Lucas first learned of in 1982; the second, by Soeryana, an exile, was written in response to reading the first.

Melati was sent by the underground to Lasem on the north coast of Central Java; acted as a courier on several occasions; visited Jakarta; by early 1945 belonged to a group that ran a restaurant in Blitar, East Java; and was in prison as the war ended. Soeryana was part of the movement in Blitar, and was arrested in the wave of Japanese razzias in 1942 and 1943, being released on probation, if I understand correctly, during 1944 because he was only 16 at the time of his sentencing.

Although Lucas has performed a most laudable job of providing explanatory notes to the texts, one still must ask: are these accounts accurate and truthful? At one level they are works of fiction. Written decades after the events they describe, they are too replete with incredible details as to places, people, their appearance, names, characters, and conversations "remembered" verbatim. But assuming the veracity of at least their core, what does it provide of political interest? To be subjectively selective: the movement itself was extremely small, its members apparently from more advantaged socioeconomic sectors but with minimal (at best) knowledge of Marxism-Leninism, its purpose unclear as couriers passed through on mysterious errands, and its existence always precarious. Sympathizers included *santri*. Among the fellow prisoners were both Moslems and Christians who refused to obey imperial strictures. The Japanese and their Indonesian agents were extremely efficient at rooting out dissenters--and brutal with those they captured: Soeryana claims, for example, that of the 366 people seized in the Blitar area, only 22 reappeared after the Japanese surrender (and over half of those were soon to die in intra-nationalist fighting). And passing reference is made to the terrible conditions of the *romusha*.

Surprisingly the February 1945 Peta (Pembela Tanah Air, Defenders of the Fatherland) uprising in Blitar is ignored by Soeryana although he was, I believe, free in the town at the time.² Melati makes little of the uprising itself, but claims that a Communist-led BKRI (Barisan Kemerdekaan Republik Indonesia, Republic of Indonesia Freedom Forces) provided shelter for some of the survivors.

Soeryana, more politically astute than Melati, makes bitter comment on the events that immediately followed the declaration of independence. The *pangreh praja*, he observes, swore allegiance to yet a third master: first the Dutch, then the Japanese, and now the Republic. The backbone of the anti-Communist forces was soon to shift from the ex-colonial, ex-imperial *pangreh praja* and police to the Republican army officers. "[O]nce again, the same old people were in charge" (p. 307). So much for an Indonesian *revolution*.

An air of poignancy and tragedy pervades the two memoirs. Their authors are, after all, rare survivors, on the edge of extinction, of a movement that failed, denigrated as murderous traitors by those presently in control of

2. The dating of the Blitar uprising as February 1945 made me reach for my bookshelf. George Kahin (*Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952], p. 114) places the revolt in 1944, John Legge (*Sukarno: A Political Bibliography* [New York: Praeger, 1972], p. 171) and Sukarno (*Sukarno: An Autobiography as Told to Cindy Adams* [Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965], p. 190) quite specifically in February 1944. A further search has convinced me that Lucas/Melati are correct.

Indonesia's own historiography. But neither they nor Lucas explain what motivated these activists in the face of such horrendous odds, what they thought their movement could achieve despite those odds, and what vision they cherished for a free Indonesia. And Jacques Leclerc, in a sensitive, even poetic, requiem poses the possibility that the Party's strategy of that era was fundamentally flawed, when he argues: "An anti-Japanese stand and anti-Japanese activities had never enjoyed much support in Indonesia; therefore, those involved in such activities never reached the point of building even so much as a rudimentary anti-fascist liberation army" (p. 334)--or even one might add, much popular awareness of the movement's existence.

With this monograph, a historical footnote is in place. The dead, the few living, and their activities and heroism are remembered, if largely and ironically among academics in Western capitalist countries. How different their place in "history" would have been had the PKI succeeded in its struggle for control of the state!

