

A SOCIALIST IN THE INDIES: REVIEW OF JOOP MORRIEN,  
"AROEN" JAN STAM, REBEL IN INDONESIË EN NEDERLAND\*

Michael C. Williams

This short book is an account of the life of the Dutch socialist Jan Stam, one of a generation of Dutch socialists, many of them schoolteachers, who played such a striking role in the development of the early left-wing movement in Indonesia. In no other colonial territory in Asia did socialists from the metropolitan country play such a prominent part in establishing local Marxist parties as Dutch socialists did in Indonesia. This singular achievement also meant that the socialist movement "at home" was on the whole better informed about developments in the colonies than was the case either in England or France. With rare exceptions, such as George Orwell, few socialist writers elsewhere wrote about colonialism from direct personal experience.

Jan Cornelis Stam (b. 1884) was a founder member of both the Indies Social Democratic Association (Indische Sociaal Democratische Vereeniging, ISDV) and of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). At the same time, Stam, a schoolteacher by profession, was also an active journalist, contributing regular "Indische Brieven" to the Dutch newspaper *De Tribune*, journal of the Dutch Social Democratic Party (Sociaal Democratische Partij, SDP). The SDP was a revolutionary breakaway from the orthodox and more moderate Social-Democratic Workers Party.<sup>1</sup> Stam was also a frequent contributor to progressive journals in Indonesia itself, notably the ISDV party newspaper, *Het Vrije Woord*, and the teachers' paper, *De School*.<sup>2</sup> In April 1918 Stam founded the short-lived socialist teachers' paper, *De Indische Volksschool* with B. Coster and W. Snel. When the ISDV became the PKI in May 1920, Stam was elected a member of its executive committee and was later proposed by the party as its candidate for the Volksraad, the colonial representative council.

Jan Stam had arrived in Indonesia in August 1912, one year before his contemporary and fellow socialist, Henk Sneevliet. And despite the fact that Stam's first posting as a teacher was to the relatively isolated island of Bangka, he quickly threw himself into writing a series of sketches of contemporary political parties, such as the recently formed Indische Party and the Sarekat Islam. The causes of political development, the social composition of the parties, and the reactions of the Dutch to the awakening of the colonized

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\* Amsterdam: Pegasus, 1984. 160 pp.

1. The SDP, led by Henriette Roland-Holst and Herman Gorter, broke from the SDAP in 1909. Its political position was similar to that adopted by Rosa Luxemburg within the German Social Democratic Party. Max Perthus, *Henk Sneevliet: Revolutionair Socialist in Europa en Azië* (Nijmegen: Socialistiese Uitgeverij, 1976), pp. 48 ff.

2. *De School* was the journal of the Dutch schoolteachers' association, NIOG (Nederlandsch Indisch Onderwijzers Genootschap).

peoples of Indonesia were the subjects of a series of "Indische Brieven" that Stam wrote under the pseudonym "Aroen" for *De Tribune* from November 1912.

A transfer in June 1914 to West Java and the Bantenese town of Serang enabled Stam to embark upon a more active political involvement. His posting to Java coincided with the establishment of the Indies Social Democratic Association (ISDV). The publication from October 1915 of a party journal, *Het Vrije Woord*, gave Stam for the first time a platform in Indonesia itself for his considerable journalistic skills.

It was during his years in Banten from 1914 to 1919 that Stam developed a close relationship with Hasan Djajadiningrat, who like Stam became an active member of the ISDV. The younger brother of the Regent of Serang, Achmad Djajadiningrat, Hasan eschewed a career in the ranks of the native administration, the *priyayi*, in favor of an active involvement in the nationalist movement. At first a member of the short-lived Indische Party, he later became an executive committee member of both the ISDV and the Sarekat Islam.<sup>3</sup> Together with Stam, Hasan Djajadiningrat set up debating clubs in Banten which acted as a channel for spreading political ideas in this otherwise isolated corner of Java. Hasan Djajadiningrat's early death in December 1920 was a severe blow to Stam.<sup>4</sup>

By that time Stam had already moved to Tuban in East Java. When the PKI was formed in May 1920, he became a member of its executive committee. The following year, during a period of home leave in the Netherlands Stam made a secret trip to the Soviet Union to attend the Third Congress of the Communist International, where he accompanied the official representative of the PKI, Darsono. On his return to Indonesia, Stam's political activities declined with a transfer to Banjarmasin in Borneo and increasing government repression against the PKI. Nevertheless, he remained a teacher in Indonesia until his final retirement in 1932, a lonely survivor of a once numerous band of Dutch socialists who had contributed greatly to Indonesia's struggle for independence. An active participant in the wartime resistance against the Nazi occupation, Stam died in Neuengamme concentration camp in January 1943.

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3. On Hasan Djajadiningrat's political career see my "Communism, Religion and Revolt in Banten in the Early Twentieth Century" (Ph.D. thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1984), pp. 182-203.

4. See Stam's obituary of Hasan Djajadiningrat in *Het Vrije Woord* of January 21, 1921, reprinted in Morrien, "Aroen," pp. 157-58.