

Bersatoe kita berdiri bertjerai kita djatoeh [United we stand divided we fall]: workers and unions in Indonesia: Jakarta 1945-1965

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‘Bersatoe Kita Berdiri Bertjerai Kita Djatoeh’
[United We Stand Divided We Fall]

Workers and Unions in Indonesia: Jakarta 1945–1965

Jan Elliott

**Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
The University of New South Wales
1997**

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at UNSW or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by others, with whom I have worked at UNSW or elsewhere, is explicitly acknowledged in the thesis.

I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, except to the extent that assistance from others in the project's design and conception or in style, presentation and linguistic expression is acknowledged.

(Signed)

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	
<i>Abbreviations</i>	
<i>Glossary</i>	
<i>List of Tables and Charts</i>	
Introduction	i
<u>Part I: Workers and Unions in the 'New Indonesia'</u>	
I Ours!	1
<u>Part II: Case Studies</u>	
<u>Railway Workers</u>	
II Front-Line Troops	35
III A Light In The Darkness	66
<u>Maritime Workers</u>	
IV Coolies In The Workforce	94
V Action On The Waterfront	122
<u>Women Workers</u>	
VI Separate But Equal?	155
VII By Women For Women	194
Conclusion	221
Appendices	225
Bibliography	236

Abstract

The history of individual trade unions and their efforts on behalf of workers between 1945–1965 has been an under-researched area in Indonesian history. It is argued that a more complete understanding of the social history of Indonesian workers during the post-independence period until the advent of the 'New Order' is to be found in individual histories.

The study is divided into two parts:

Part I deals with the relationship between workers, unions and the State, primarily the legislation and general measures taken by the State to make changes in the conditions of the workforce. It then looks to the city of Jakarta to give place to the everyday conditions and experience of urban workers.

Part II consists of three self-contained case studies on railway, maritime and women workers. Each case study analyses the issues and legislation pertinent to each group and the work of trade unions in their representative role for the respective workforces.

Railway workers—in the main—had *pegawai negeri* status and a less casualized workforce. The actions of the two largest and most powerful railway unions—the *Serikat Buruh Kereta Api*—SBKA—and the *Persatuan Buruh Kereta Api*—PBKA—are examined. Maritime workers for the greater part of the study time-frame worked for the 'flagship' of the former colonial power and were a highly casualized workforce. To a major degree this determined the type of actions undertaken by unions and workers to win improvements in their working conditions. The focus of the study is the *Serikat Buruh Pelabuhan Pelajaran* —SBPP—the largest and strongest trade union on the waterfront. Women were part of the railway and maritime workforces, but in order to understand the position of women wage earners—and to move beyond the rhetoric of equality—it is necessary to look to them as a 'group' and to explore both the efforts of trade unions and the work of women's organizations on their behalf.

The study concludes that trade unions and women's organizations, although part of the ideational politics of the day, in general fulfilled a necessary and crucial social economic role for workers.

* * * * *

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I offer a warm thank you to Iskandar Nugroho, my friends in Indonesia Sriwati and Drs Soetardi Moelyodarsono, and Lina Sentani for her help in finding ways 'around'; and to the workers of Jakarta who wish to remain anonymous.

Finally—but most of all—to my family Dixon, dear friends Susan T and Donna, children Geoff, Jenny and Jane, and especially to my husband and friend, Reg—love has seen me home.

•

* * * * *

Abbreviations

AMACAB	Allied Military Administration, Civil Affairs Branch.
API	Angkatan Pemuda Indonesia [Youth Generation of Indonesia].
BDKA	Badan Distribusi Buruh Kereta Api [Distribution Body for Railway Workers].
BPS	Badan Pendukung Sukarnoisme [Body to Support Sukarnoism].
BPSS	Badan Pusat Serikat Sekerja [Central Body of Unions].
BSP/KWKA	Badan Sosial Pusat/Kematian Warga Kereta Api [Central Social Welfare Body/Members' Death Benefit Fund for the Railways].
DOBIN	Dagelijks Overzicht Belangrijkste Inlichtingen Daily survey of the most important intelligence information.
DKA	Djawatan Kereta Api. [Indonesian Railways].
DPP	Dewan Pimpinan Pusat [Nasional Leadership Council].
DSM	Deli Spoorweg Mij.
Gerwani	Gerakan Wanita Indonesia [Indonesian Women's Movement].
Gestapu	Gerakan September Tiga Puluh [Movement of 30 September].
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.
JFKPKA	Jajasan Fonds Ketjelakaan Pegawai Kereta Api [Accident Insurance Fund for Railway Workers].
KBKI	Kesatuan Buruh Kerakjatan Indonesia [Democratic Workers' Union of Indonesia].
KBSI	Kongres Seluruh Buruh Indonesia [All Indonesian Workers' Congress].
KPM	Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij.
KMP	Keputusan Menteri Perburuhan [Decision of the Minister of Labour].

Kowani	Kongres Wanita Indonesia [Indonesian Women's Congress].
NEFIS	Netherlands Forces Intelligence Service.
NICA	Netherlands Indies Civil Administration.
PB	Pengurus Besar [Executive Board].
PBKA	Persatuan Buruh Kereta Api [Railway Workers' Union].
Perwari	Persatuan Wanita Indonesia [Union of Indonesian Women].
PGPN	Peraturan Gaji Pegawai Negeri [Regulations Concerning Wages/Salary for Civil Servants].
PGRI	Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia [Indonesian Teachers' Union].
PKI	Partai Komunis Indonesia [Indonesian Communist Party].
PMP	Peraturan Menteri Perburuhan [Regulation of the Minister of Labour].
PN	Perusahaan Negara [State Enterprise].
PNI	Partai Nasional Indonesia [Indonesian Nationalist Party].
PP	Peraturan Pemerintah [Government Regulation].
PSI	Partai Sosialis Indonesia [Socialist Party of Indonesia].
PSII	Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia [Party of the Indonesian Islamic Union].
P4P	Panitia Penyelesaian Perselisihan Perburuhan Pusat [Central Committee for Resolution of Labour Disputes].
P4D	Panitia Penyelesaian Perselisihan Perburuhan Daerah [Regional Committee for Resolution of Labour Disputes].
Sarbupri	Sarikat Buruh Perkebunan Republik Indonesia [Union of Plantation Workers].
SBII	Serikat Buruh Islam Indonesia [Union of Islamic Workers].
SBKA	Serikat Buruh Kereta Api [Railway Workers' Union].

SBP	Serikat Buruh Pegadaian [Union of Pawnshop Workers].
SBPN	Serikat Buruh Percetakan Negara [State Printing Office Union].
SBPP	Serikat Buruh Pelabuhan Pelajaran Indonesia [Harbour and Dockworkers' Union].
SBRI	Serikat Buruh Rokok Indonesia [Tobacco and Cigarette Workers' Union].
S.H.	Sarjana Hukum [Master of Law].
SOBSI	Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia [All Indonesian Organization of Trade Unions].
SOKSI	Sentral Organisasi Karyawan Sosialis Indonesia [Central Organization of Indonesian Socialist Employees].
Takari	Tahun Berdiri diatas Kaki Sendiri [Year of Standing on Your Own Feet].
UU	Undang–Undang [Law].

* * * * * *

Glossary

<i>aksi ketjil—hasil</i>	small yield actions.
<i>Algemene Secretarie</i>	General Secretariat.
<i>bupati</i>	regent—administrative head of a regency.
<i>buruh halus</i>	white-collar worker.
<i>buruh harian</i>	day labourer.
<i>buruh kasar</i>	blue-collar worker.
<i>buruh kecil</i>	lowest-level worker.
<i>hukuman</i>	punishment/sentence.
<i>jajasan/yayasan</i>	foundation/institute.
<i>kampong/kampung</i>	urban neighbourhood
<i>mandor/mandur</i>	foreman.
<i>panitia/panitya</i>	committee.
<i>pegawai negeri</i>	civil servant.
<i>pemogokan politik</i>	political strike.
<i>pekerja lepas</i>	casual worker.
<i>tjabang/cabang</i>	branch.
<i>tukang</i>	skilled labourer or craftsman.
<i>tuntutan ketjil—hasil</i>	small yield demands.

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List of Tables and Charts

Table 1.

Income Per Head in Ten Asian Countries and Ten Economically Developed Countries, 1949.

Table 2.

Density of the Population Five Administrative Regions, Java.

Table 3.

Number of members in Registered Unions in Indonesia Classified by Areas, June 30, 1956 and June 30, 1957.

Chart.

Maritime Unions on the Jakarta Waterfront.

* * * * *

Introduction

This thesis is based primarily on library research. Within Australia the following library collections have proved invaluable; The National Library of Australia, The University of Sydney, The State Library of New South Wales, The Australian National University, The Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies (Canberra), Monash University and The University of New South Wales. Overseas, personal use was made of the collections of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, The National Library of Indonesia and The University of Indonesia. The librarians at Cornell University have been kind enough to forward photocopied material from their collection and I thank them for their time and effort. Since 1989 I have visited Indonesia five times, each time on a tourist visa. The last visit, in 1995, proved the most productive for me with a wealth of material photocopied and microfilmed at the National Library, although there were many times when a request for items concerning labour unions was met with a polite refusal that the particular item was either “forbidden” or “lost”. This reinforced the advice I had been given on the particular difficulties associated with researching labour affairs in Indonesia, and of applying for a study visa to do so.

The *Noel Butlin Archives of Business and Labour* at the Australian National University, through its holdings of the C.H. Campbell Deposit, Seamen’s Union of Australia Files and Waterside Worker’s Union of Australia Indonesia File, were also an invaluable source of information on the Indonesian communist labour federation, SOBSI [*Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia*], and its affiliated railway and maritime unions. Archival research in Indonesia posed similar difficulties to that of the National Library but I was fortunate indeed to have the services of an Indonesian colleague with ‘connections’. With his help I was able to peruse the bibliographic data available on labour/unions and have the material photocopied. The references in Chapters I (five), II (two), III (two), IV (two) and VI (one) to Dutch archival material from the Algemene Secretarie Files, Procureur Generaal and Rapportage Indonesië held by the *Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague*, and *Archieven Hulpdepot, Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken, The Hague*, are taken from material kindly made available to me by Professor John Ingleson. The Archief KPM [*Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij*] is a microfilm from the collection of the *Algemeen Rijksarchief*, and also made available to me through the generosity of Professor Ingleson. From the wealth of material on the microfilm about the overall activities of the KPM I have selected items focussing on labour affairs, and in particular, material concerning the largest maritime labour union, the *Serikat Buruh Pelabuhan Pelajaran* [Harbour and Dockworkers’ Union]. As I do not read Dutch where such material was in the Dutch language Ms Lina Sentani provided the appropriate translation. I am very

grateful for her skill and thoroughness. All translations from the Indonesian have been made by myself and I alone bear responsibility for any errors.

Readers will note that Appendix I of the thesis lists translations of interviews with seven Indonesian women and, also, that there is reference made in Chapters I, II and III to interviews with two male informants. The thesis was not conceived as an oral history, nonetheless, I felt that if it were possible to have some oral testimony from ordinary Indonesian men and women who had worked in Jakarta during the period under study, such testimony would add extra nuance to my attempt to research workers and unions. In this I was fortunate to have the assistance of two friends, one of whom had worked in Jakarta during the period. Informants were thus randomly selected, one friend knowing a friend or neighbour and so on. From a questionnaire outline prepared by myself fourteen interviews were completed. The 1995 interviews were undertaken by Drs Soetardi Moelyodarsono and those in 1996 by Iskandar Nugroho. The translations from the Indonesian are my own.

The informants were asked specific questions concerning trade union and social organization membership and activities, and of their knowledge of government initiatives in the labour field. Very few spoke of belonging to a union, but there is a reluctance on the part of many Indonesians to claim union allegiance because of the events surrounding what has become known as Gestapu. Both age and the events of Gestapu have conspired to thin the numbers from amongst the ranks of the workers of the time of possible and willing informants.¹ I have included any information from the interviews which I felt was pertinent to the study in the main body of the thesis, and appended the women's stories because they appeared to me too valuable to leave out. From their stories we learn of the 'lure' of Jakarta and the promise it held for a better life for themselves and their families. We learn, not surprisingly, that education and connections were important in any upward work mobility, although clearly the large majority had a capacity for hard labour which is overwhelming. I feel privileged to have the opportunity to append their stories to this study.

* *

¹ The ramifications for unions and workers of *Gestapu*—*Gerakan September Tiga Puluh* [Movement of 30 September, also known as G30S] are dealt with in each case study, but there is a wide volume of literature dealing with the alleged attempted coup by the PKI and its mass organizations. See, for example, Harold Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia* [Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1988], revised edition; John Hughes, *Indonesian Upheaval* [David McKay: New York, 1967]; and Robert Cribb, *The Indonesian Killings 1965–1966: Studies from Java and Bali* [Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University: Clayton, 1990].

V.S. Naipul has written that Indonesian political history is “dizzying to read about”.² The history of Jakarta itself has been long, diverse, colourful and conflict ridden. To record the changes from fort to port, from ‘Graveyard of the East’ to ‘Queen City of the East’ during the colonial era, to ‘million’ city post-independence, is to distinguish the physical, cultural and social history of this great city. There were continuities to be found in the problems faced by wage earners from 1945 until 1965 with those faced by their fellow workers in colonial Jakarta. Workers’ aspirations for themselves and their families were rooted in concerns about their wages, salaries, *Lebaran* allowances, pensions, sick-pay and prospects for continual employment. At the same time, to note the continuities in the historical context of independence is to arrive at a point of departure. Through the new political, economic and social changes promised by independence, workers in the new nation looked forward to a better life than had been afforded them under colonialism. *Kemerdekaan* held the promise of a *Jaman Baru* [new era] for ordinary Indonesians and appeared to offer them real hope that their aspirations could be realized. In the achievement of this ‘new era’ for workers the relationship with the State was crucial to their welfare.

This study has three aims. The first, and this is the subject of Part I, is to explore the general legislative, political and economic conditions surrounding the development of trade unions after independence, and the effects such developments had on working conditions. The theme of government attitudes to workplace organization which underlies Chapter I is continued in the case studies to be found in Part II. The second aim is to present through the means of three case studies on railway, maritime, and women workers, as much as it is possible to do so, a sense of the history and of the changes in the lives of these three groups of workers. The aim is to look to what unions actually sought to do and what they achieved rather than concentrating on their very evident weaknesses. By looking at the changes over time for these workers we may gain a sense of the fluidity and dynamism in the work of their unions, and thus be able to place them in the context of the major ideological shifts during the period. For it is apparent from a study of union publications that a great deal of representative work was undertaken and that union failures were not alone of their own making. Two important themes which emerge from the case studies are the relationship of poverty to union membership, that is who joined and why, and particularly in the case study of women workers, the intersection between gender and class. The third and final aim, within the context of the other two and the one most difficult to realize, is to move from the general to the particular and attempt to gain some insight into the conditions of Jakarta’s wage earners.

The twenty year period of Indonesian history between 1945–65 was one of great political tumult. Japan had occupied Indonesia in 1942. When Japan surrendered unconditionally on 15 August 1945 Allied forces had not reconquered Indonesia, and in the uncertain political times following Indonesian nationalists seized the ‘window of opportunity’

² V.S. Naipul, *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* [Random House: New York, 1981], p.299.

and declared independence. The Republic of Indonesia was proclaimed on August 17 1945 with Sukarno as President, a position he was to hold until 1967. But for the next four years a bitter revolutionary war of independence was fought as the former colonial power, the Netherlands, sought to regain its colony. Finally, after a Round Table Conference in the Hague from 23 August to 2 November 1949, a political settlement was reached between the Republic and the Netherlands and on 27 December 1949 the Republic of the United States of Indonesia [RUSI] was formed. This proved to be short lived. On the 17 August in the following year [1950] the federal system was abandoned and Indonesia became one state—the Republic of Indonesia. In the agreement, large financial and commercial interests within Indonesia remained in Dutch hands and the Netherlands retained sovereignty over Irian. Both of these issues remained a focus for popular discontent and political mobilization until the former were nationalized in 1957–58 and Irian became part of the Republic on 1 May 1963. But Indonesians not only fought the Dutch they also fought each other. The tensions and enmity created over the struggle to determine the ‘nature’ of the Indonesian State continued throughout the next fifteen years. Religious and political differences found their expression in Muslim revolutionary movements such as *Darul Islam* [House of Islam] and the regional rebellions in Sumatra and Sulawesi between 1956–58. Political turmoil was exacerbated by the conflict within the Army and across the armed forces and the strengthening then rapid expansion of the Indonesian communist party, which by the general elections of 1955 had become an important ‘player’ in the political process. The Party’s ability to mobilize large numbers of peasants and workers sharpened political divisions between itself and the Army as well as with its religious opponents. The additional element in this tumultuous political landscape was the flamboyant and charismatic figure of President Sukarno, with his ability to mobilize nationalist sentiment and his increasing dominance in political life after his proclamation of martial law on 14 March 1957. Guided Democracy, the name given the political system introduced by Sukarno and the Army after the end of parliamentary democracy, was to last until 30 September 1965.

This was the broad ideological context in which Indonesian trade unions and workers operated during the period under study. It was a period which encompassed the Revolution, the years of parliamentary democracy—1950–1957, which by many writers are seen as years of pro-labour policies on the part of various governments,³ the introduction of Guided Democracy, and the simmering feud between the Army and the communist party which often had its staging on the streets of Jakarta. The announcement of martial law in 1957 was a crucial watershed of the period for it foreshadowed the Army as a “key element in the government coalition under Guided Democracy”.⁴ From then on “military men became part of the political

³ See Iskandar Tedjasukmana, *The Political Character of the Indonesian Trade Union Movement* [Modern Indonesia Project, Cornell University: Ithaca, 1958]; Everett D. Hawkins, ‘Indonesia’, in Walter Galenson, *Labor in Developing Economies* [Instit; Sayuti Hasibuan, “Political Unionism and Economic Development in Indonesia” [Unpublished PhD thesis, University of California: Berkeley, 1968]. All express this view.

⁴ Harold Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia*, p.22.

and economic elite with an interest in defending the existing social order which they felt was threatened by both the communists and Sukarno's chaos-inducing policies".⁵

Workers had been at the forefront of the seizures of many Dutch enterprises in late 1957, and they and the general populace became 'ideological troops' on the streets of Jakarta. Rioting, and the looting and burning of embassies such as the American and British over perceived support for the regional rebellions or the federation of Malaysia, or of perceived non-support for Indonesia's demand for the 'return' of West Irian took place. At various times between 1957 and 1965 the buildings and property of foreign enterprises such as Unilever, B.A.T and P.T. Shell in Jakarta were hung or daubed with signs proclaiming *milik Indonesia* [property of Indonesia].⁶ As the communist party's daily *Harian Rakjat*, with its usual rhetorical flourish, headlined in 1964: 'Djakarta is Aflame with the Spirit of Dwikora'.⁷ Despite the climate of inflamed nationalism political polarization continued. On July 3, 1959 The Central War Administration issued a decree restricting political activities and forcing parties to hold meetings behind closed doors. Further, the public were not allowed to attend such meetings with attendance restricted to card carrying members only, or persons authorized by the military authorities. In the latter part of 1959 the security forces tore down the huge posters and banners announcing the Sixth National Congress of the communist party. Such actions increased polarization, as did the bans issued by President Sukarno on newspapers, and political parties and their labour federations such as the PSI/KBSI, or the *Masjumi* and *Partai Murba*.⁸ It was also during this time that the indoctrination coaching for press men under the aegis of the 'Committee for the Promotion of the Revolutionary Spirit', chaired by Ruslan Abdulgani, commenced.

"United We Stand Divided We Fall" was essentially an invocation of trade unions to their respective memberships throughout this period. It could have been posted on government buildings, utilities and, later, the buildings belonging to trade unions in the same manner as was *milik RI* [property of the Republic of Indonesia] during the first days after the proclamation of independence. Yet, of the history of individual unions and their memberships who had a place in the ideological shifts over the period we have little knowledge. What scholarly research there has been for the twenty year span has concentrated primarily on the political connections of

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ News of events such as these was to be found in the pages of the newspapers of the day. For those above see, *London Times Intelligence File*, 25 February 1957; 9 July 1959; 7 September 1959; 9, 30 September 1960; 18 September 1963. [hereafter LTIF]. *Antara*, 18, 20 January 1964; 21, 22 January 1965. B.A.T—British American Tobacco Company. The year 1960 saw a final nationalization of those Dutch enterprises which had been under 'government supervision' since 1957.

⁷ *Harian Rakjat*, 16 August 1964.

⁸ PSI/KBSI—*Partai Sosialis Indonesia/Kongres Seluruh Buruh Indonesia*. On the life of Sukarno, and on his "dominance" in Indonesian political life after 1959, see J.D. Legge, *Sukarno: A Political Biography* [Allen and Unwin: Sydney, 1972].

unions and thus on their political role in the labour relationship.⁹ The history and role of the largest and most powerful labour federation SOBSI, and its political party the PKI [*Partai Komunis Indonesia*] has, for example, been well covered by Donald Hindley.¹⁰ In the work of Iskandar Tedjasukmana and Everett D. Hawkins, albeit Hawkins has a greater focus on worker's conditions, we also find a concentration on the political character of unions. As both writers chronicle union support for or antagonism towards government[s] policies, or each other, played out within the ideological shifts which took place over the twenty year period, the weaknesses of unions are all too evident.¹¹ Such concentration however has missed the opportunity to explore the everyday work of individual trade unions in their representative role for workers.

In his study of Jakarta gangsters during the period of the revolution Robert Cribb has warned: "one should be as wary of extrapolating from the whole to the part as from the part to the whole".¹² Whilst we should be aware of this danger we may still look to the workers of Jakarta for a sense of the national concerns, problems and work of individual unions and women's groups. With independence workers everywhere were entering a new work experience as free Indonesians, but in comparison with their own lot many thought the workers of Jakarta had greater advantage. This was a view which had much in common with the national centre versus periphery debate which was one of the causes of the regional rebellions of Sumatra and Sulawesi, and it leads to a question explored in the case studies: what did closeness to the centre mean for Jakarta's workers?

The case studies presented in the following pages are not discrete. They are self-contained in the sense that each group of workers has their own 'group history'. Here,

⁹ An exception has been the study by Ann Stoler of labour relations in the plantation economy of Sumatra. Although Stoler's account—using archival research and 'on the ground' data collection from workers—covers a 100 year history, we get one of the few studies of an individual union, the SOBSI affiliated Sarbupri—*Sarekat Buruh Perkebunan Republik Indonesia*, which covers the whole of the 'Old Order' period. Ann Laura Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation in Sumatra's Plantation Belt, 1870-1979* [Yale University Press: New Haven, 1985].

¹⁰ Donald Hindley, *The Communist Party of Indonesia 1951-1963* [University of California Press: Berkeley, 1966]. On the PKI see also Rex Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism Under Sukarno: Ideology and Politics, 1959-1965* [Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1974].

¹¹ See, especially, Iskandar Tedjasukmana, *The Political Character of the Indonesian Trade Union Movement*. As a member of the *Partai Buruh* [Labour Party] and Minister of Labour in the Cabinets of April 1951-January 1952; February 1952-August 1953 and August 1955-March 1956 Tedjasukmana was a 'participant observer' of these events. He was leader of the *Partai Buruh* and Vice-Chairman of the Parliamentary Economic Committee. Later, he was also President of The Mining and Development Corporation Company founded by the *Bank Industri Negara* [State Industrial Bank]. [The problems this might have caused for 'disinterested' observation are raised in Chapter III of this study]. Everett D. Hawkins, 'Indonesia', in Walter Galenson, *Labor in Developing Economies*, and Everett D. Hawkins, 'Labor in Developing Countries: Indonesia', in Bruce Glassburner [ed.] *The Economy of Indonesia: Selected Readings* [Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1971], pp.196-250 which has an addendum on labour relations in the last half of the 1960s and early 1970s. See also Sayuti Hasibuan, *Political Unionism and Economic Development in Indonesia*, and J. Henry Richardson, 'Indonesian Labor Relations in their Political Setting', *Industrial and Labour Relations Review* [October 1958], pp.56-78.

¹² Robert Cribb, *Gangsters and Revolutionaries: The Jakarta People's Militia and the Indonesian Revolution* [Allen and Unwin: Sydney, 1992], Introduction, p.5.

however, women are defined by their sex rather than by broad occupational status in the manner of the railway and maritime workers. The reason for this is twofold. One is the difficulty of finding records for any group of workers of the 1950/1960s. The insistence of the New Order government that these years, because of their association with the rise to prominence of the Indonesian communist party, represent a 'deviant' past from which all Indonesians must now be protected is well known. Organized urban women wage earners, by comparison a smaller number than their male compatriots, are harder still to document. The second reason is that women as a group of workers had different legislation, and different conditions based on perceived gender difference.

All of the workers in the case studies are connected through the measures of governments to both help and control workers, and through the national connections of the unions which represented the workers. And they are connected by place—Jakarta. At the political level and at the union level names recur in each case study. S.K. Trimurti, for example, was the Minister of Labour under whom the first piece of social legislation for workers was drawn up. A poem of hers appears in one of the early magazines of the communist railway worker's union, the *Serikat Buruh Kereta Api* [SBKA].¹³ Trimurti's name appears again in the case study of women wage earners. The name of Emma Poeradiredja appears in the history of railway workers through her leading position in the administrative section of the railways, and her connection with the non-communist and second largest union of railway workers, the PBKA [*Persatuan Buruh Kereta Api*]. Her name appears again in the chapter on women's groups because of her involvement in *Istri Sedar* and her commitment to the advancement of Indonesian women. Similarly does the name of a figure such as Njono, for the major part of the study the head of SOBSI. These are but some of the more familiar figures of the history of the period. But there are other names which belong more specifically to the history of a particular union or women's organization. Singgih of the SBKA, for example, and his union and ideological rival from the PBKA, R.H. Poeradiredja, and Tuk Subianto, the Secretary General of the SBPP [*Serikat Buruh Pelabuhan Pelajaran*], whose position as the Indonesian representative of the Trades Union International of Transport Workers linked him with the railway workers and their unions. In the study on women's organizations we find activists such as Sri Ambar from the Women's Bureau of SOBSI, Setiati Surasto SOBSI and *Gerwani* representative, Parjani Pradono from the *Gerwani* leadership and Sujatin Kartowijono from *Perwari* and *Kowani*. All of these people were connected by the desire to make changes in the lives of the working men and women of the 'new' Indonesia. As well as those who head unions or organizations there are the workers that the leadership spoke for. Some, with the skills that education had afforded, were able to write to their union magazines expressing their views or asking for help. Others, the great majority, did not write, so we have to deduce from

¹³ Trimoerti, 'Kemadjoen', *Kereta Api* 25 [August, 1946], p.15.

the work of their unions their problems and conditions and their aspirations. This is the reason for the case studies.

In the case studies of railway and maritime workers each has a different emphasis. To a certain extent this is a function of the available extant material. It is proposed, however, that in the main it is a function of the specific group. That is, primarily the emphasis is different because of the different work environments of the railway and maritime workers. Of course, in many respects the environment was the same—their ‘vital’ industry status and national economic and political difficulties. In both industries there was dissension within unions and outright ideological warfare between competing unions. However, it was at the level of employer/worker relationship where the difference in environments was located. At a general level, the *Djawatan Kereta Api* [DKA] as a government employer, and the KPM as a former ‘flagship’ of the colonial past, influenced the type of actions unions and workers in each industry were prepared to take in order to improve their working conditions. In spite of a continuing level of dissatisfaction amongst workers the DKA suffered fewer strikes and small actions against it than did the KPM. Conversely, the relationship of maritime workers with their employers, at least until 1957, was one of constant turmoil. In both the railway and maritime industries the largest unions were communist aligned through their membership of SOBSI. But the case study of railway workers explores the role and actions of two unions—the SBKA, and the PBKA. The latter, although with a smaller membership, was an important and capable representative of its membership and ideologically opposed to the communist union. The case study of the maritime workers focuses on the SBPP because it was, by all accounts, the largest and most powerful union on the waterfront.

In the case study of women workers no one union is prominent. The role of SOBSI as the largest, more vocal, and towards the end of the 1950s the federation with the most coherent plan to involve more women in union work is explored. It is argued, however, that it was left to women’s organizations, in the wider framework of improving the social and economic position of all women, to bring the conditions of women workers onto the labour agenda. Their role, and the gender and class views which influenced the actions of the leadership are explored in the second chapter of the case study. Here we find that there were tensions within and across organizations as there was with unions.

This study engages with the general argument in the historiography that Indonesian unions were political and not, in the common acceptance of trade union definition, with an objective to improve the economic well-being of members.¹⁴ It does not dispute the

¹⁴ Colin Brown in ‘The Politics of Trade Union Formation in the Java Sugar Industry, 1945–1949’, *Modern Asian Studies* 28, 1 [1994], pp.77–98, provides an excellent particular study of the formation of sugar industry trade unions for the period of the revolution in which he concludes: [they] “were primarily political institutions rather than industrial ones”. It was only after the achievement of sovereignty [that] “these unions began to fill out into industrial organizations seeking to promote the interests of their members within the industrial arena”. [pp. 97–98]. Sayuti Hasibuan, *Political Unionism and Economic Development*, also makes this point for the period of the revolution.

political/ideological role of the three major unions examined in this study. Politics coloured their actions and we have, in the end, to return to the politics of the time to close their histories. It seeks instead to look to the work carried out by unions on behalf of their members. It does so to the same extent in the case study on women workers. However, it is argued in this case study that even though trade unions voiced the ideal of equality for their women members other factors came into play which influenced the pace of change in their conditions. The critical underlying factor influencing the lives of women workers and the actions of organized labour and the leadership of women's groups were the dominant notions of gender within the society. It is this complexity of influences on women's working conditions which has been little researched.

The study does take issue with the argument expressed by Sayuti Hasibuan in his work on unions in Sumatra which holds that prior to Presidential Decree No.7/1963 on strikes and/or lockouts in vital enterprises, government departments and institutions, unions essentially had themselves to blame for their failures. Hasibuan asserts that the laws enacted before this date could not be said to have "constrained the parties from exercising their independence [it was] their failure to exercise their independence which resulted in a greater amount of government intervention".¹⁵ The particular laws to which Hasibuan refers—No.16/1951 and No.22/1957—are dealt with in Chapter I. Nonetheless, we may note here, that although the latter was designed to supersede the former, the unions argued that because of their vital industry status the retention of clauses on the public interest and the interest of the state were inimical to their welfare and that of their members for they were a constraint on their actions.

In another context, Robert Manne has drawn an eloquent distinction between what he has termed the "language of the heart—passion, dismay, outrage...and the language of the spleen—invective, slander and slur".¹⁶ The language of the spleen is easily identifiable in the ideological tensions between and across unions and women's groups in their representative role for workers. But it is the language of the heart which has been less researched. This study contends that for a greater understanding and a more complete history of workers and their unions over the twenty year span from 1945 until 1965, it is time to look to the language of the heart, as well as to the language of the spleen.

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¹⁵ Sayuti Hasibuan, *Political Unionism and Economic Development*, p.240. The clauses were 13[3] in No.16/1951; and 18[2] in No.22/1957. *Keputusan Presiden* 123/1963 [June] determined what industries were designated vital. Hasibuan notes the latter decision as 163. M.S. Hidajat, *Dasar Dasar Hubungan Perburuhan di Indonesia* [Erlangga: Djakarta, 1970] notes it as 123.

¹⁶ Robert Manne, *The Culture of Forgetting: Helen Demidenko and the Holocaust* [The Text Publishing Company: Melbourne, 1996], p.170.

Note on Spelling

The particular spelling convention used in a source, reference, speech or in the giving of a proper or place name has been kept as in the original. Usage in the body of the study has been at my own discretion. Where reference is made to organizations or newspapers which were central to the period I have used the convention of that time. For example, *Serikat Buruh Pelabuhan Pelajaran*, *Masjumi* or *Harian Rakjat*. For place names in the body of the text, unless part of a quote, I have used the new convention. For example, Jakarta, not Djakarta. For names of people I have used the more general usage from the source material.

* * * * *

Chapter I

Ours!

Introduction

As workers emerged from the repression and sufferings under the colonial and Japanese regimes and took up the revolutionary fight, Indonesian labour militancy grew. In 1947 one writer had this to say about prospective labour militancy: “post-war no one will have to take up matters on behalf of the field and factory workers for they have learned to look after themselves...learned it so well that we anticipate serious labour trouble in the years to come”.¹ In this period of Indonesian history which spanned the revolution for independence and Constitutional and Guided Democracy, years when “political change was rapid and ideological change dramatic”², wage earners had to negotiate both changing social structures and new patterns of work relations.³ In order to give place to the wage earners and their unions whose history is more fully drawn out in the three case studies, the intent of this chapter is to provide an overview of the legislative, political, economic and social conditions of the new nation from 1945 until the coup attempt of 1965. The emphasis is not on what unions fought over, nor on how their politically linked federations were formed, although both are important aspects of Indonesian labour history. Instead, the aim is to look at the general measures ventured by the State and unions to effect change in the lives of wage earners generally and, in particular, of wage earners in Jakarta.

A broad definition of wage earner is taken: all who sell their labour power in return for wages whether skilled, semi- or unskilled.⁴ The caveat is that here we are

¹ *Economic Review of Indonesia* 1, 5 [May 1947], p.82.

² Benedict Anderson and Audrey Kahin [eds.], *Interpreting Indonesian Politics: Thirteen Contributions to the Debate, 1964–1981* [Modern Indonesia Project, Cornell University: Ithaca, 1982], p.vi. For the authoritative account of the Constitutional Democracy period see Herbert Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia* [Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1962]. For the years of Guided Democracy, see Daniel Lev, *The Transition to Guided Democracy: Indonesian Politics, 1957–1959* [Modern Indonesia Project, Cornell University: Ithaca, 1966]. Also the essays in T.K. Tan [ed.] *Sukarno's Guided Democracy* [The Jacaranda Press: Brisbane, 1967].

³ Clifford Geertz has commented that the new patterns of organization needed to negotiate such changes was provided by the political parties through their myriad of formal and informal organizations—youth and student groups; women's clubs; peasant organizations; charitable associations; private schools; religious or philosophical societies; savings clubs and labour unions. Clifford Geertz, *Peddlers and Princes: Social Development and Economic Change in Two Indonesian Towns* [The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1963], p.14. Cf. Herbert Feith, Rodney Tiffen [eds.], Rex Mortimer, *Stubborn Survivors: Dissenting Essays on Peasants and Third World Development* [Monash Paper on Southeast Asia 10, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University: Clayton, 1983], pp.46–48, where Mortimer has concluded that the activity of the political parties and their voluntary organizations “made decisive inroads” into the small towns and villages.

⁴ This definition is used by Ronaldo Munck, *The International Labour Studies: An Introduction* [Zed Books: London 1988], p.90.

focusing on wage earners in the modern/formal sector of the economy with a primary emphasis on urban-based [Jakarta] formal sector workers. It is important to note, however, that there are inherent problems with the formal/informal dichotomy. Wage earners in the former might at the same time draw income from the latter, either to supplement their income or to 'mark time' during periods of unemployment: or, the size of the informal sector can itself be exaggerated because much work in this sector entails wage labour.⁵ Conversely, in his work on urbanisation and labour markets in developing countries, which explores the literature on the formal/informal dichotomy, Stuart Sinclair has expressed concern that many job-seekers may take work which is part-time, seasonal, illegal or for non-cash rewards, thus compounding the inadequacy of data.⁶

Clearly, in the period under study there was an inter-relationship between the two 'sectors'. In 1950, a survey by the Ministry of Labour found that workers on the lowest wage in Jakarta often took other work in the evenings as small traders selling knives or nails made during their wage employment, or as *becak* drivers.⁷ An interview with a *buruh harian* [day labourer] who worked for the Public Works Service during the 1950s and early 1960s confirms this point. Pak S stated that he was paid every 15 days and that his wage was only enough for a week of very basic living in Jakarta. With his friends, he earned extra income from work as a *tukang foto keliling* [a casual street photographer].⁸

Informal sector workers were an integral part of the economy, nonetheless, the focus of the study remains that group of wage earners targeted by government legislation for protection and control, and by unions for mobilization.⁹ Daniel Lev has argued that "other than the PKI, the parties did not identify social and economic issues as a means to mobilising support. [For them] Ideology had more to do with integrating party following

⁵ See Michael Pinches, 'All that we have is our muscle and sweat': The Rise of Wage Labour in a Manila Squatter Community', in Michael Pinches, Salim Lakha [eds.] *Wage Labour and Social Justice* [Centre of Southeast Studies Monash University: Clayton, 1987], pp.103–136. See also Peter Boomgaard, 'The Non-agricultural side of an agricultural economy, Java 1500–1900', in Paul Alexander, Peter Boomgaard, Ben White [eds.] *In the Shadow of Agriculture: Non-farm activities in the Javanese economy, past and present* [Royal Tropical Institute: Amsterdam, 1991], p.15 for the use of the terminology 'informal sector'.

⁶ Stuart Sinclair, *Urbanisation and Labour Markets in Developing Countries* [Croom Helm: London, 1978].

⁷ Kementerian Perburuahan, *Situasi Perburuahan Dalam dan Luar Negeri* [September 1950].

⁸ Interview August 1995, Jakarta. In a study of a Jakarta *kampung* during the 1970s, Lea Jellinek has pointed to the inter-relationship of the two sectors. If, for example, a wage earner prospered, the more mundane everyday tasks of washing, carting water, carrying from the market, cooking or cleaning the home might be given over to other workers—who then became part of the informal sector wage-earning group. Lea Jellinek, *The Wheel of Fortune: The History of a Poor Community in Jakarta* [Allen and Unwin: Sydney, 1991], pp.82–83.

⁹ Informal sector work and its connection to the gender division of the workforce is discussed in Chapter VI.

and legitimising leaders”.¹⁰ The *Partai Nasional Indonesia*—PNI, for example, used ideology “to educate the masses to elite determined goals rather than to mobilize them on the basis of their grievances”.¹¹ Therefore, any general discussion on the nexus of the three elements in the labour relationship, the State, unions and workers, which sought solutions to the social/economic needs of wage earners must, by necessity, lean towards the pronouncements and work of the SOBSI and its affiliated unions because of the links with the PKI. This does not mean that non-communist federations or individual unions were inactive in seeking to mobilize workers, or to educate workers in the rights and responsibilities of union membership.¹² Rather, it speaks to the ability of the PKI/SOBSI/affiliated union axis to identify more effectively with the mass of lower-level workers.

The development of worker militancy

At independence, wage earners were far from a *tabula rasa* untouched by their experience in the labour relationship. Djoko Utomo has argued that a “class consciousness” was alive amongst workers prior to the emergence of the nationalist movement, before ideas like nationalism, socialism, communism or Marxism had spread to the Dutch East Indies. He writes that the strikes which took place in 1873, 1879 and 1882 in plantations and factories owned by private Dutch operators “were connected with the process of de-feudalisation [as] workers began to leave behind the customary forms of protest”.¹³ On the other hand, Ingleson, in his work on the growth of labour unions and the rise of worker militancy during the 1910s and 1920s writes: “despite the importance of vertical divisions in colonial Indonesia [of ethnicity, kinship, patronage and religion] and the strong consciousness of race, it was the work experience that was the most important factor in shaping the consciousness of increasing numbers of urban Indonesians.”¹⁴ Low wages for their labour was part of this work experience. In 1938,

¹⁰ Daniel Lev, ‘Political Parties in Indonesia’, *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 3, 1 [March 1967], p.60.

¹¹ Jose Eliseo Rocamora, “Nationalism in Search of Ideology: The Indonesian National Party, 1945–1965” [Unpublished PhD thesis, Cornell University: Ithaca, 1974], p.136.

¹² See for instance the publications by the Protestant Workers Association: Badan Penerbit Kristen, *Mogok Kerdja: Alat Jang Terachiri* [Jakarta, 1954], and Ikatan Buruh Pantjasila [Catholic Workers Association] *Tuntunan Bagi Kader Buruh Pantjasila khusus untuk Para anggota*. nd, but post 1960 because of discussion of some legislation after that period. The SBII published *Penuntun* which discussed cadre courses, union organization and administration etc.

¹³ Djoko Utomo, “Pemogokan Tani di Yogyakarta Tahun 1882” [Skripsi Sarjana Sastra, Fakultas Sastra Universitas Indonesia 1981], pp.1–2.

¹⁴ John Ingleson, *In Search of Justice: Workers and Unions in Colonial Java, 1908–1926* [Oxford University Press: Singapore, 1986], pp.6–7. On workers and unions during the colonial era see also Ruth T. McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* [Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1965]; A.K. Pringgodigdo, *Sedjarah Pergerakan Rakjat Indonesia* [Pustaka Rakjat: Jakarta, 1964]; Sandra, *Sedjarah Pergerakan Buruh Indonesia* [Pustaka Rakjat: Jakarta, 1960].

unskilled factory labour in various parts of the Indies earned only 14–16 cents [\$US] for an eight hour working day, but this amount was higher than it had been in the middle 1930s when workers were still feeling the effects of the world depression.¹⁵ It may be said of Indonesian workers of the 1920s and 1930s that the intensity of the work experience may have varied amongst individuals, but workers, skilled, semi- or unskilled shared a wide range of problems and experiences.¹⁶

Recent work by Shigeru Sato on labour mobilization during the Japanese occupation has given new insight into the poor working conditions which affected both rural and urban people during this period. A worker was anyone mobilized to work for the Japanese war effort and labourers were considered to be *perajurit pekerja* [working soldiers].¹⁷ Wertheim, too, has commented on the coercive nature of labour control during the occupation: the lowering of wages, the lengthening of working days, and the direction of the labour force in line with Japanese war efforts so that even skilled workers were forced to change their craft.¹⁸ Unions were banned and all labour organizations put under the umbrella of the Japanese Military Police [the *Kenpeitai*]. Strikes were prohibited, and the regimentation of the population along communal, occupational, religious, sex and age group lines was undertaken.

In 1946, *The Voice of Free Indonesia* maintained that the Indonesian labour union movement had “died of anaemia” and led a “dormant existence” during the occupation.¹⁹ Although Hawkins' has argued that during the occupation as they operated covertly trade union leaders learnt “new techniques of organization”,²⁰ we can make no assumptions about the development of an overt working-class consciousness during this period. While it is true that industrial, railroad, and estate workers took part in sabotage activities organized by underground groups,²¹ in writing about this period John Legge has

¹⁵ ‘Labour in Indonesia’, in P.P. Pillai [ed.], *Labour in Southeast Asia: A Symposium* [Indian Council of World Affairs: New Delhi, 1947], p.163. The official exchange rate in 1938 was Rp.1.87/\$US.1.00. Central Bureau of Statistics Jakarta, *Statistical Pocket Book of Indonesia 1957*, p.177. The conversion of rupiah into dollar levels is sensitive to the exchange rate used. From 1938 on free market exchange rate quotations were considerably higher. For example, free market exchange rates “ranged in 1962 from 4 to 20 times, and in 1963 up to almost 27 times, the official rate”. United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Labor in Indonesia* [BLS Report 246 Washington, D.C. 1963], p.46. Where conversion rates are given elsewhere in this study this caution should be noted.

¹⁶ Michael Piva, *The Condition of the Working Class in Toronto, 1900-1921* [University of Ottawa: Ottawa, 1979], p.xii.

¹⁷ Shigeru Sato, *War, nationalism and peasants: Java under the Japanese occupation, 1942-1945* [Allen and Unwin: Sydney, 1994], p.167.

¹⁸ W.F. Wertheim, *Indonesian Society in Transition* [W. van Hoeve: The Hague, 1964], p.272.

¹⁹ ‘The Indonesia Trade Union’, *The Voice of Free Indonesia* 16 [11 May 1946], pp.3-4.

²⁰ Hawkins, ‘Indonesia’, p.92.

²¹ United States Department of the Army, *Area Handbook for Indonesia, Pamphlet No.550-39* [Washington, 1964].

concluded that such groups had limited effectiveness. He does however comment on Sukarno's ability during the occupation to create "a new electorate for the future."²² It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the repression and harsh conditions, coming as they did on top of colonial repression and the effects of the depression of the 1930s, could not but help 'set the stage' for the demands for greater justice. All of the women wage earners whose stories are listed in Appendix I spoke of the hardships and extreme difficulties they encountered during the occupation as they and their families struggled to survive.²³

After the announcement of independence there was as efflorescence of union formation as workers became part of the revolutionary vanguard. Nationalism, often with appeals to unity across race lines; economic penury; intimidation; tradition, were all factors in this successful mobilization of workers. On April 11, 1946, for example, an Indonesian language circular was spread among the Chinese workers at the *Tanjung Perak* [Surabaya harbour] which had a large Chinese labour force:

'Brother workers'
Up until now we have used our best powers to build up
Surabaya, but in vain.
We do not have enough food to enable us to carry out our daily
task. With the appearance of NICA money our salaries are placed
on a lower level and the cost of living has become dearer. It is
difficult to provide for our children.
We hope that through your participation in our struggle our
salaries will be increased.
We are as one on this issue and will take it up with AMACAB.
Friends, let us be united in our struggle so that our interests may
be protected.

Friends, unite
long live the workers!

[The Chinese Labour Association CLA]²⁴

A 1946 report on the Malang Residency stated that the "voices of the workers in the industrial workplaces; of the lower civil servants and workers in the major towns [are] for the most part focussed on the high price of rice. Everywhere people ask about rice distribution". It was noted at the same time that "the *Gaboengan Boeroeh Malang* [was]

²² J.D. Legge, *Sukarno: A Political Biography*, pp.177-179. See also Anton Lucas, *One Soul One Struggle: Region and Revolution in Indonesia* [Allen and Unwin: Australia, 1991], pp.55-57, where he comments that the various groups in East and Central Java "engaged in underground activities...where sporadic acts of sabotage were attempted".

²³ See *Spoken Lives*, Appendix I. See also the personal stories in *Di bawah Pendudukan Jepang: Kenangan Empat Puluh Dua Orang yang Mengalaminya*, Penerbitan Sejarah Lisan Nomor 4 [Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia: Jakarta, 1988] which deal with this period.

²⁴ NEFIS, Surabaya Ri, 18, *Procureur Generaal* 429. The port city of Surabaya in East Java was the site of a bitter battle between Indonesian nationalist fighters and British forces in November of 1945. The term NICA money refers to the currency notes issued by the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration in March 1946. The Republican rupiah was first issued in November of the same year. See Robert Cribb, *Historical Dictionary of Indonesia* [The Scarecrow Press, Inc: Metuchen, N.J., & London, 1992], p.111.

being successful in establishing a system of closed labour unions [with] Oei Hay Djoen, a communist, the driving force..."²⁵ The 'non-cooperative' stance taken by Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX was seen as a critical influence on his own civil servants and workers, and on the general run of *tukangs* and coolies. The Dutch would have liked to have been able to persuade the Sultan to support their cause. "His influence [wrote a KNIL officer] extends a long way beyond his principality. If he becomes cooperating [they] would all as one do the same".²⁶ Intimidation was used both to 'encourage' and 'discourage' unionization. In 1947, there were reports of unrest amongst Chinese labourers in Jakarta because of low pay, race discrimination and intimidation by their Dutch employers "to sign another contract or go to the front of the firing line".²⁷ In another incident the Dutch intelligence service recorded that a pamphlet written in pencil and aimed at the intimidation of workers had been found at the state printing works. The report further noted that workers claimed that there had been many such pamphlets but they had been too frightened to bring them to the notice of their employer.²⁸

In the early years of the revolution, before the events at Madiun²⁹ which saw the temporary eclipse of the PKI in the political and ideological struggle, there was an active partnership between members of Republican ministries and unions to develop worker consciousness. This arose because of the involvement of union leaders on the decision-making bodies and committees set up to inquire into the welfare of workers generally. The Committee formed by the General Conference of the Ministry of Social Affairs to discuss worker's pay, for instance, had Njono from the Jakarta *Barisan Buruh Indonesia*—BBI; Moenadi from the Central Board of the SBKA, Solo, and Soekardan from the *Pusat Gabungan Serikat Buruh Indonesia*—Central Body of Indonesian Unions, Yogyakarta, as members.³⁰ At a meeting with worker's representatives Hardjono,

²⁵ Verslag Malang 1946, *Procureur Generaal* 37. After the achievement of sovereignty the rice allowance for workers remained a focus for discontent and agitation. In 1959 in East Java, 500 sugar workers were prosecuted for 'crowding' the management when demanding their rice allowance. The 500 workers were all prosecuted at the same Saturday court session, and the sugar factories in Jombang were forced to close as all the workers left to rally in support of their fellow workers. National Council of SOBSI, News in Brief, Noel Butlin Archives of Business and Labour Australian National University [ANU]. *Seamen's Union of Australia [Hereafter SUA] File, E183/21/4*.

²⁶ KNIL, Chief Officer for Civil Affairs, Semarang 9 February 1949, *Procureur Generaal* 154.

²⁷ Central Committee of Indonesian Independence Information Service, Brisbane, Australia 21 February 1947, Noel Butlin Archives of Business and Labour ANU. C.H. Campbell Deposit, P81/45-46.

²⁸ NEFIS, R1 AA/5837/geheim 2 June 1948, *Procureur Generaal* 157.

²⁹ For discussion on the issues surrounding the Madiun conflict, see Ann Swift, *The Road to Madiun: The Indonesian Communist Uprising of 1948* [Modern Indonesia Project, Cornell University: Ithaca, 1989] and Anthony Reid, *The Indonesian National Revolution 1945–1950* [Longman: Australia, 1974], Chapter 7, pp.121–148.

³⁰ *Kereta Api* 26 [September 1946], p.16. Njono was later to become Secretary General of SOBSI and Soekardan was a member of the SBKA leadership body. On the participation of union leaders in early Republican committees cf. Tedjasukmana, "The Development of Labor Policy and Legislation in the Republic of Indonesia" [Unpublished PhD thesis, Cornell University: Ithaca, 1961], p.143.

representing the Ministry, announced that the aim was to “deepen the knowledge of workers about all measures which affect and concern labour such as laws and organizations...and to educate workers in labour affairs”.³¹ Later, a fifteen member ‘Provisional Central Committee for the Determination of Wages’ was set up comprising five members from unions, five from industry, and five from government . It held its first meeting in Yogyakarta on the 18 November 1946.³² Education for workers in labour affairs sprang from a genuine desire to see workers advance, and from the need to use them in the interests of the political struggle.³³ In a speech commemorating the first anniversary of the proclamation of independence, President Sukarno warned against workers acting as if they had the right to businesses and to their incomes immediately for there would be nobody to pay their wages: a worker, the President declared, “must eat so he can work [but] he works so he can eat.”³⁴ In 1947, in a speech at the Congress of Estate Labourers, Vice-President Hatta urged the reorganization of all Republican labour power in the interests of the struggle.³⁵ It was the working relationships between labour and government prior to Madiun which provided a critical impetus to trade union formation and to the development of a “substantial...trade union organization” during the revolution.³⁶ By March, 1951, 392 unions had been established nationally: 121 of these

³¹ *Kereta Api: Buku Peringatan 1 Tahun R.I.* [1946], p.21. The meeting took place on the 29 July 1946. In 1948 the Republic also undertook a drive against illiteracy with the setting up of ‘workshop classes’—in factory workplaces for instance—wherever a teacher was available. All workers in factories were compelled by law to attend day classes for one hour per day. According to the report on this measure compulsion was unnecessary as the workers’ enthusiasm was encouraging and showed that “the Indonesian worker, given the opportunity, is as keen to acquire knowledge as his fellow worker anywhere”. *Inside Indonesia* 2, 21 [1948]. “Increasing the efficiency of Indonesian workers and ending the burden of illiteracy” was one of four planks of Republican economic policy. Dr. A.K. Gani, ‘Economic Policy of the Republic’, *Inside Indonesia* 3, 3 [1948]. np.

³² DOBIN, 21/11/1946, NEFIS, -‘The Panitia Pusat Sementara untuk Penetapan Upah’. *Algemene Secretarie* 1e. 1–11–18–3.

³³ Cf. Colin Brown, ‘The Politics of Trade Union Formation in the Java Sugar Industry, 1945–1949’, pp. 97–98. On the strike in the *Algemene Landbouw Syndicaat* plantations in the Besuki residency, East Java, in 1950, Basuki Harijanto has asserted that ideology was not the most important factor because the strike concerned poor conditions and low pay. We may conclude, nonetheless, that nationalism was an important element as the strike included long-standing grievances over tax discrimination between Indonesian and Dutch workers. Basuki Harijanto, “Pemogokan Serikat Buruh Perkebunan Republik Indonesia di Jawa Timur, 1950” [Skripsi Sarjana Sastra, Fakultas Sastra Universitas Indonesia, 1989 [unpublished], pp. 128–134.

³⁴ ‘Pidato Presiden pada genap 1 taheen Hari Oelang Kemerdekaan Indonesia’, *Buku Peringatan*, p.6.

³⁵ *C.H. Campbell Deposit*, P81/45-46.

³⁶ George McT. Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution* [Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1952], p.474.

in Jakarta.³⁷ [By the end of 1958 there had been a rationalization in these numbers with a national figure recorded of 261].³⁸

In relation to worker militancy, Everett Hawkins has termed the period between 1945–49 the “fighting phase”. He argues that this period and the “economic pressure” period between 1950–58, were the only times when workers were in the vanguard.³⁹ The question of whether it was possible for workers and their unions to be a vanguard post 1958 given the constraints on their actions will be taken up in the case studies. It is clear, however, that in neither the fighting phase or the economic pressure period—to borrow Hawkins’ terminology—nor during Guided Democracy was the State impartial in labour affairs. In 1950, President Sukarno had declared that there should be “no obstacle laid in the way of the development of labour unions...employers should be made aware of their responsibilities...to allow labour organizations to grow”.⁴⁰ In 1961, in his *‘Tri Komando Rakjat’* order, he called on workers to become an instrument of the State—volunteer troops to ‘free’ Irian Barat. To smooth the enlisting of these worker troops all state and private national and foreign-owned businesses, were urged to give dispensation to workers; and to give full freedom, dispensation and aid to unions at workplaces in order that they might oversee the enlisting in line with the stipulation by the Government.⁴¹ With the internal internecine ideological warfare being played out through the political parties, and the external political drama on the world stage the State became, in fact, indistinguishable from its political leaders. Workers, through their unions and social organizations could not fail to be influenced. And it is this that has led to the concentration on the political function of unions.

The stronger federations and unions played an important role in securing economic gains for their members and, as will be evident from the case studies, there was also a welfare component to unions. While it was true many workers still had a “traditional outlook” to the labour relation,⁴² and that there was general inexperience

³⁷ Kementerian Perburuhan, *Situasi Perburuhan Dalam Negeri* [April 1951], pp.9–10. As of June 30, 1950, the Ministry of Information recorded 161 unions in Jakarta: government—47; private—95; and mixed—19. Clearly a rationalisation in union numbers may have already started by 1951. Kementerian Penerangan Republik Indonesia, *Kotapradja Djakarta Raya Tahun ke-VII, 17 Agustus 1945–17 Agustus 1952*, pp.130–131.

³⁸ *Tindjauan Masalah Perburuhan* 11/12 [March/April 1959], p.16. [Hereafter TMP].

³⁹ Hawkins, ‘Indonesia’, p.71. The role of the Indonesian army in business can be traced back through these two periods with 1957/58 as the watershed. In both of these periods when workers moved to take over Dutch-owned plants the Government stepped in and provided its own military and civilian supervision.

⁴⁰ Aneta, 15 February 1950.

⁴¹ *Sariwarta Industri* 296 [28 Desember 1961], pp.1, 7. On the meaning of *‘Tri Komando Rakjat’* see *Kamus Singkatan Akronim: Baru dan Lama*, Disusun oleh Ateng Winarno [Penerbit Kanisius, 1991].

⁴² E. Daya, ‘Freedom of Association and Industrial Relations in Asian Countries’, *International Labor Review* 71 [May 1955], p.368.

amongst the rank and file on union matters, the argument that workers were apathetic and too passive in the face of poor living and working conditions⁴³ is not borne out by reference to the newspapers, union journals or government reports of the day. It is true however, that within this worker militancy there were gender differences and the reasons for this will be discussed more fully in the case study of women workers.

At the beginning of the decade the work place situation in Indonesia was comparable with other Asian nations. Labour was national, employers in the large-scale modern sector of the economy very often were international.⁴⁴ The division of national labour and foreign capital/control over the means of production, which had its roots in Dutch colonial policy, had an influence on union and worker militancy after independence in that international control over the means of production, being resonant of colonial domination, added an extra dimension to workers' grievances.⁴⁵ E.P. Thompson has written that workers always have a legitimating cause for rebellious action "assessing grievances within a popular consensus" as to what was legitimate and what was illegitimate action.⁴⁶ For post-revolution workers, actions against foreign-owned businesses were legitimised by calls to both race and class. A strike at Kolff and Van Dorp in September 1952, for example, had 1,180 workers crossing vertical divisions of ethnicity, rank, age and gender waving the Red Flag [the flag of the Worker's Group] and protesting at the "capitalist bosses". Leaders from the *Serikat Buruh Persatuan Indonesia*—SBPI [The Indonesian Workers' Union]—and SOBSI spoke against the "squeezing" of a Rp.30,000,000 windfall profit from the workers' labour. Indonesian workers and their unions were distressed and angered over the poor living and working conditions that marked the gap between the promised freedom at the end of colonialism and the reality of their situation. Such distress is understandable when we note that of ten Asian and ten economically developed countries cited by the United Nations in 1949, Indonesia had the lowest income per head of population. [Table 1].

⁴³ A prime example of such a view is found in a cutting in the *LTIF*, 6 January 1958 which begins, "Javanese workers will not care..."

⁴⁴ Richard Deverall, 'The Problems of Asian Labor', *American Federationist* [March 1956], p.21. Deverall writes of the plight of Indian wage earners in the textile industry when the commodities produced through their labour for their international employer were subject to the fluctuations of world markets, and the conditions and manipulations of these markets. Workers' wages were kept low because of the employers' fears of outpricing themselves on world markets.

⁴⁵ Higgins has commented that with the exception of a "handful of Dutch intellectuals who supported the new regime, the Dutch who remained after the transfer of sovereignty, particularly those who joined the Civil Service, used their power and influence to support the Dutch sector of the economy, and in some cases to undermine the economic position of the struggling young Republic". B. Higgins, 'Jan Boeke and the Doctrine of the 'Little Push'', *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* XX, 3 [December 1984], p.65.

⁴⁶ E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth-Century', *Past and Present* 50 [1971], p.79.

**Table I. Income Per Head in Ten Asian Countries
and Ten Economically Developed Countries, 1949**
(United States dollars)¹

Asian Countries	Income	Other Selected Countries	Income
Burma	36	United States	1,453
Ceylon	67	Canada	870
China	27	New Zealand	856
India	57	Switzerland	849
Indonesia	25	Sweden	780
Japan	100	United Kingdom	773
Korea (South)	35	Denmark	689
Pakistan	51	Australia	679
Philippines	44	Norway	582
Thailand	36	Belgium	582

¹ The conversion of income in national currency into United States dollars of 1949 was made at the 1938 exchange rate adjusted for relative changes in cost of living between 1939 and 1949 in the United States and in the country in question.

Source: ILO, *Problems of Wage Policy in Asian Countries*, Studies and Reports: New Series 43 [1956].⁴⁷

It is therefore not surprising that at the beginning of the decade there occurred 'a wave of strikes' for, "caught as they [were] in the stretch between prices and wages, the workers [were] obliged to resort to action again and again"⁴⁸ as they sought to secure better conditions. In 1950, in Jakarta, for example, strikes took place across all industries, and for extended periods. In the Hotel des Indes; the Unie printing works where 600 workers went out on a twelve day strike during March; in the Electricity and Gas Company where both Indonesian and Chinese workers refused to work; in Garuda Airways where workers wanted a forty five hour week; and in the Bata shoe factory where 1,800 workers won a twenty three per cent increase in the base wage; a once weekly rice distribution at a reduced price and a free pair of shoes every three months, with the opportunity after *Lebaran* of buying two more pairs at a discount of twenty per cent. As well, the Bata factory had to pay each worker 58 per cent of their wages for the one month strike period. According to the workers they had not been on strike for political reasons, but to gain improved social and economic conditions.⁴⁹ In Jakarta, between January to May 1951, the disputes committee settled 93 disputes.⁵⁰ In July of the same year, in that month alone, there were 59 disputes involving work contracts,

⁴⁷ In compiling this table the ILO warns that "great caution needs to be exercised in comparing these figures: they are subject to a wide margin of error...nevertheless, even if allowances are made for the inadequacies in the methods of estimation, these figures still suggest a rough quantitative notion of the glaring disparities between the average standard of living in Asian countries and that in economically developed countries".

⁴⁸ Tjokro, 'Social Conflict in Indonesia', *Fourth International* [September/October 1952], p.152.

⁴⁹ See *Aneta*, February, March, April 1950.

⁵⁰ *TMP* 12/1/2 [April/May/June 1951], p.7.

wages, *Lebaran*, the 'attitude' of employers, mass dismissals and pregnancy leave. Eleven of the 59 disputes led to strike action.⁵¹

Legislation and labour

The early measures by the Republic to provide relief services to workers were limited by its available resources. Nonetheless, they were borne out of a keen sense of the injustices visited on workers during the colonial era. Some measures, such as the provision of medicine and nursing, applied to civil servants.⁵² Others, such as the provision of unemployment payments within specified conditions, applied both to government and private workers.⁵³ After the conclusion of the Round Table Conference the Employment Bureau, which had initially comprised the Yogyakarta Residency, expanded and branches were established wherever necessary. At the same time, credits were extended to enterprises which had been forced "to curtail their activities owing to a lack of capital, thereby rendering thousands of workers jobless".⁵⁴ A regulation in 1950 [No.7/1950], concerning unemployment subsidy and emergency work, set out a scale of payments for the major cities. [The subsidy was slightly lower outside the cities]. There was no discrimination by gender as the recipient, either the wife or husband, was nominated as the major breadwinner in the family.⁵⁵ But the desire of the Republic to set 'new' standards in labour relations is to be found in the three labour laws—the Labour Act; the Accident Act and the Labour Inspection Act. With the removal of the federal structure of the Republic of the United States of Indonesia in February 1950, and the re-instatement in August of the Unitary Republic of Indonesia the laws promulgated during the revolution for Republican territory only were enacted for the whole of Indonesia. At the end of the December 18 session of Parliament there was unanimous agreement to the three laws to cover the whole of Indonesia.⁵⁶

⁵¹ *TMP* 3 [July 1951], p.18. See *Pedoman*, May 1950 to December 1951, for the demands of workers and the range of strike actions taken.

⁵² Kementerian Kesehatan Bagian Keuangan, No.2793/Keu/III 9 July 1948 Jogjakarta, *Arsip Nasional: Arsip Kepolisian R.I.* No.326.

⁵³ Menteri Perburuahan dan Sosial, Jogjakarta 18 Djuli 1949, Peraturan Pengangguran Sementara. *Arsip Nasional: Inventaris Arsip Sekretariat Negara R.I. 1945–1949.* No.743.

⁵⁴ *TMP* 5 [September 1950], pp.17–19.

⁵⁵ *TMP* 10 [July 1950].

⁵⁶ Kementerian Perburuahan, *Situasi Perburuahan Dalam dan Luar Negeri* [January 1951], p.5. The UU *Kerdja* [Labour Act No.12/1948]; UU *Ketjelakaan* [Accident Act No.33/1947]; UU *Pengawasan Perburuahan* [Labour Inspection Act 1948]. Valid from the 6th January 1951, UU No.1/1951 put into effect the Labour Act; UU No.2/1951 the Accident Act; and Law 33/1951 the Labour Inspection Act. For a full discussion of the legislation see Tedjasukmana, "The Development of Labor Policy", *passim*. and Kementerian Perburuahan, *Peraturan Perburuahan dan Peraturan Administrasi Perburuahan* [Jakarta, 1953].

The 'human face' of the Ministry of Labour is revealed in the biography of S.K. Trimurti, the Minister of Labour in the Amir Syarifuddin cabinet responsible for the planning of the laws. Only the Accident Act was actually announced during the life of this cabinet, and this became the first piece of social legislation of the Republican Government.⁵⁷ The Labour Act was in the process of preparation but not completed by the time the cabinet was disbanded. According to Trimurti, the early arrangements of the Ministry were, "simple and enough according to the situation and conditions of the time". Officials were chosen for their commitment to the struggle of the nation: "people who are dedicated, resolute, and who can hold and take responsibility".⁵⁸

The Labour Law was not specifically designed to protect individuals only, but to be in accordance with societal values.⁵⁹ The legislation 'defined' a worker, and laid down policy on matters such as hours of work, rest periods, yearly leave, religious observance, special holidays and the cleanliness of employer provided workplaces and housing. All of these conditions were to be sanctioned by the law and officials or employers not complying could be gaoled or fined.⁶⁰ From 1951 on there were many decrees and recommendations from various Ministers of Labour concerning such matters as official holidays for workers; the registration of labour unions; the problem of mass workplace dismissals; *Lebaran* payments and permission for absence during election work.⁶¹ Not all measures concerned the lowest-level workers. For white-collar workers, not necessarily skilled, for example, the Natsir cabinet took up the problem of race discrimination in the workplace. In late December of 1951, the Minister of Labour sent a circular to foreign businessmen in Indonesia to the effect that all capable Indonesians should be placed in management and staff positions in their businesses. The desire was to change, what the Labour Ministry argued, was colonial policy where Indonesian workers had been considered *kurang cakap* [less capable], or *kurang matang* [less mature]. Tangentially, it

⁵⁷ S.K. Trimurti, *Hubungan Pergerakan Buruh Indonesia dengan Pergerakan Kemerdekaan Nasional* [Yayasan Idayu: Jakarta, 1980], p.13.

⁵⁸ Soebagijo, S.K. Trimurti: *Wanita Pengabdian Bangsa* [Gunung Agung: Jakarta, 1982], pp.147-149. It is remarkable to remember that Trimurti was only 35 years of age at this time and had not held ministerial office before.

⁵⁹ The gender implications of this are discussed in Chapter VI.

⁶⁰ Workers were classified into three categories: adults—male or female aged 18 years and over: youth—male or female aged over 14 years and below 18: children—male or female aged under 14 years. A 7 hour day and 40 hour week were stipulated with restrictions applying for work deemed to be dangerous. Government permission could be obtained for deviations from these times, but with the stipulation that no more than 54 hours per week be worked with overtime payment for the extra hours. *Situasi Perburuhan Dalam dan Luar Negeri* [January 1951], p.4. [The enforcement of Law No.1/1951 was determined in Law No.4/1951].

⁶¹ See, for example, *TMP* 7 [November 1954], pp.2-3, and *TMP* [December 1954], p.32. On the 1957/58 regulation on *Lebaran* bonuses see below. For the instructions on mass dismissals over the 1950s, see, R. Pratomo S.H. *The Indonesian Labour Legislation on the Termination of Employment in Private Enterprises* [Djakarta, 1971], pp.4-5.

may have felt the measure would have an effect on labour disputes.⁶² Other measures at the beginning of the decade included a parliamentary labour section committee visit to the Outer Islands [East and South Kalimantan, South Sulawesi, and Nusa Tenggara] and East Java to report on labour affairs: mass dismissals, minimum pay, and the validation of labour regulations in the various regions, and on the establishment of a trial Sickness Benefits Scheme in the printing industry. Over the decade, a plethora of research was commissioned from ILO experts on the problems of labour and ILO experts were seconded to governments for short periods.⁶³

Since the Accident Act was the legislation deemed to provide a form of social security it is worth mentioning here one of the major problems associated with its function. Many workers in businesses liable under the act to pay compensation, but working in their own home, fell outside the provisions because certain certified 'dangerous' goods were not being used in the workplace. Further, it was intended to establish a pooled fund to overcome the difficulties associated with compensation payouts, but as late as 1960 the ILO stated: "no information is available on the creation of the fund and payment by the government has been reported in a relatively few instances". Also, because there had been no changes in the statutory measures, the wage ceiling for compensation payment remained fixed at the 1947 limit. Given the inflationary changes in the economy over the next eighteen years the ceiling was far too low.⁶⁴

The prime reason behind the most contentious regulation—the Emergency Law on the Settlement of Labor Disputes which was announced in September of 1951—was the increasing militancy of labour.⁶⁵ The political and labour climate throughout 1951 had been one of bitter dissension and strikes, and the *razzias* carried out by the Sukiman Government [April 1951–January 1952] during the middle of August were a move to

⁶² Kementerian Perburuhan, *Situasi Perburuhan Dalam dan Luar Negeri* [January 1951], p.3. Law No.3/1958 on The Employment of Foreign Workers prescribed a written authority from the Minister of Labour before foreigners could be employed. The law was designed to give workers "a proper share in the various fields of employment". *Bank of Indonesia Report 1958-1959*.

⁶³ See 'Pandangan Perangkaan Fonds Sakit', Laporan: Penindjauan seksi Perburuhan dalam rapat Perwakilan Rakjat tanggal 14–6–51, diutjapkan K. Werdjojo, *TMP* 10/11/12 [February/March/April 1952], pp.13–15. ILO, *Report to the Government of Indonesia on Wage Policy and Industrial Relations* [ILO/TAP/Indonesia/R7, 1958]. and ILO, *Report to the Government of Indonesia on Social Security* [ILO/TAP/Indonesia/R10, 1958]. The ILO people seconded had expertise in vocational training, occupational classification, industrial hygiene and labour statistics. A Ministerial Decree [15/1957] set up a Voluntary Sickness Insurance Scheme. Employers were to insure [with their consent] workers whom they normally employed for 20 days or more per month. This was initially on a trial basis for certain selected enterprises in Jakarta only. It was later enacted as a regulation of the Minister of Manpower [3/1967]. For more on this scheme see Chapter VI.

⁶⁴ *ILO Review* 2 [July 1960], p.164, and ILO, *Report to the Government of Indonesia on Social Security*, p.23.

⁶⁵ First in the *Peraturan Kekuasaan Militer Pusat* No.1/1951 and then in *UU Darurat* No.16/1951 which changed the provisions of the Military Regulation. Sixteen private and state controlled enterprises were listed. *Berita Negara Republik Indonesia* 19 [6 March 1951].

stem the tide of this dissent by removing from national political life those thought to be central to the problem.⁶⁶ The list included many trade union leaders and sixteen members of parliament, none of whom were ever brought to trial, and who were subsequently released by the later Wilopo cabinet. Article 2 of the regulation prohibited strikes in vital enterprises; violators could be fined not more than 10,000 rupiahs and imprisoned for not more than one year. This section of the legislation became an area of conflict between the unions, both communist and non-communist, and successive governments.⁶⁷ This was especially so for the unions connected with 'vital' industries such as the railway and harbour unions.

During the decade of the 1950s two other laws: the Act on Collective Agreements [No.21/1954] and the Act on the Settlement of Labour Disputes [No.22/1957] were important in labour relations. The latter was designed to supersede the Emergency Law but the vital enterprise clause remained. A later decree in 1963 [No.7/1963] widened this again to include scheduled industries, projects and government departments: sanctions were one year imprisonment or a Rp.50,000 fine.⁶⁸ Under the 1957 Act the only conflicts which could be brought before the disputes committees were those between employers and trade unions: individual workers and groups outside the trade unions were excluded from bringing a case. The Central Disputes Resolution Committee [P4P] became the body of appeal against the binding decisions of the regional committees which had equal numbers of government [from the Ministries of Labour, Economic Affairs and Communications], employers and worker representatives but the Minister of Labour could annul or postpone P4P decisions if it was felt that state interests

⁶⁶ One of those arrested was the father of Aidit, the PKI leader. Tedjasukmana, "The Development of Labor Policy", p.225. By late October the Government estimated the number arrested as 15,000. M.C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia* [Macmillan: London, 1987], p.231.

⁶⁷ Cf. for example [amongst others] the letters from the Central Leadership of the *Serikat Buruh Rokok Indonesia*—SBRI [the Cigarette Worker's Union] dated 14/12/1953; the *Serikat Buruh Pegadaian* [Pawnshop Worker's Union] dated 1/5/1955 [both members of SOBSI]. And from *Serikat Buruh Islam Indonesia*—SBII [Islamic Worker's Union] aligned to the *Masjumi* party dated 7/2/1955. *Arsip Nasional: Koleksi Arsip Kabinet Presiden R.I. 1950–1959, No.1475*. Union leaders and workers were gaoled for violations of the procedures laid down for dispute resolution. *Harian Rakjat*, 6 January 1960.

⁶⁸ Hans Thoolen [ed.], *Indonesia and the Rule of Law* [Francis Pinter: London, 1987], p.129, 130–131. See the discussion on this law in the 'Introduction' of this study.

or public security were at risk.⁶⁹ In principle, a decision of the P4P only concerned those involved in the dispute. In practice, it had a broad influence.⁷⁰

The most important changes during the 1960s, apart that is from the decree on strikes and/or lockouts, were the regulation to establish worker/management councils in state enterprises, and the law to prevent dismissals in private enterprises without the consent of the authorities.⁷¹ In a speech to the Sixth Congress of the second largest union of railway workers, the PBKA, Ahem Erningpradja the then Minister of Labour and General Chairman of the labour federation the *Kesatuan Buruh Kerakjatan Indonesia*—KBKI, which was close to the National Party, declared the worker's councils to be both an instrument of social support and social control.⁷² Implementation of the councils was slow and SOBSI, which had initially expressed its approval, blamed the slowness in establishing the councils on the “capitalist bureaucrats...who did not like a body where unions were represented”.⁷³ A report by the United States Department of the Army in 1964 maintained that the councils, which were “ostensibly designed to strengthen the role of labor in labor-management relations [have] in effect limited it”.⁷⁴ Left-wing labour generally believed this to be so. SOBSI and its affiliated railway and harbour worker unions continued to demand implementation of the councils, but in line with the ‘spirit’ of the regulation.

The aim of ‘The Law on Termination of Employment in Private Enterprises’ was indeed commendable. Pratomo has written that the framers of the law realized that “the stomach cannot wait is far from an empty slogan”. For this reason the law sought to provide “stronger safeguards for the peace and security of work for the worker...[for

⁶⁹ P4P—*Penyelesaian Perselisihan Perburuhan Pusat*. The regional disputes resolution committees were known as P4D—*Penyelesaian Perselisihan Perburuhan Daerah*. The International Commission of Jurists commented in 1979 that the Indonesian Labour Law is rather ambiguous, and in the case of the limitation on the right to strike has a real weakness in that the Government resorts to prohibition to control worker unrest. Further, the protection offered under Act 21/1954 is extremely limited and does not satisfy the requirements of ILO Convention No. 98 on the right to organize and bargain collectively. Thoolen [ed.], *Indonesia and the Rule of Law*, p.125. See also E. Daya, ‘Freedom of Association’, and *Bank of Indonesia Report 1958-1959*. Cf. Hawkins, ‘Indonesia’, p.132.

⁷⁰ Professor M. Suhardi, *Putusan-Putusan P4 Pusat* [Djambatan: Djakarta, 1960], preface. Law No.18/1956 ratified ILO Convention No.98/1949 on the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining. Convention No.87/1948 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize was not ratified. The issue of whether commitment to the principle of international conventions necessarily equates with ratification is examined more fully in Chapter VI.

⁷¹ UU No.45/1960 and UU No.12/1964 respectively. For a full discussion on the establishment of the worker management councils see J. Panglaykim, ‘Worker Management Councils in Indonesia’, *World Politics* [January, 1965], pp.243–255.

⁷² *Pembina* [June 1963].

⁷³ Pendemokrasian Pembangunan Nasional, *Laporan Khusus Presidium tentang Pembangunan Kepada Sidang ke-11 D.N. SOBSI Djakarta, October 1961* [Diterbitkan Jajasan Karya Bakti: Djakarta, 1961], p.5.

⁷⁴ United States Department of the Army, *Area Handbook*, p.296.

termination of employment]...can bring along immense consequences in the life of the worker and his family since it always means a setback in his attempts to get a small place in the sun". On instruction of the Minister of Labour no permission was to be granted for termination of work if it was based on "matters connected with membership of a labour union or activities related to the labour movement outside working hours or with the employer's consent, during working hours". Article 12 of the law defined a worker as: "all workers concluding a labour agreement without regard of rank or status, provided they have been engaged for more than three consecutive months."⁷⁵ Given the casualized nature of the workforce this definition had important implications for a worker's 'place in the sun'.

We may question, as Chris Manning does for New Order labour relations, whether labour legislation, particularly that derived from "western country experience, is more important for employee welfare than improvements in squalid, cramped and unhealthy working conditions" which, in any event, "may be more enforceable".⁷⁶ Given the history of labour relations for Indonesian workers prior to independence, and the nature of the ideological struggle during the revolution, it was surely important that some measure of regulation or guideline was laid down. Nonetheless, it is true that while government were prepared to enforce the anti-strike regulations a similar commitment to implement the measures to improve worker welfare and working conditions was needed. The importance of this argument, especially in relation to women's work, is dealt with in Chapter VII. Just how much change was wrought in working and welfare conditions by regulation may be determined at the end of this study.

The economy

Dear Listeners! We never said that independence would, in the twinkling of an eye bring prosperity to our people. We have always said that independence is a requisite to achieve our people's prosperity...all of us, except those who like to fish in troubled waters, know how difficult it is to achieve improvement of conditions on short term.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ R. Pratomo S.H. *The Indonesian Labour Legislation*, p.6. Appendix 3, p.VIII. **Note:** Sayuti Hasibuan, "Political Unionism and Economic Development", p.242 has argued that Law No.12/1964 was not conducive to the collective bargaining process because of the limitation it placed on employers' actions. I do not dispute this as a general point, but the focus here is not on the collective bargaining process but rather with the 'spirit' of the law. In any event, the Law on Termination of Employment serves to support Hasibuan's [and my] contention of the essentially pro-labour policies of governments. Albeit I would argue—contra Hasibuan—that the laws during the 1950s did have a constraining effect on union actions.

⁷⁶ Chris Manning, 'Pockets of Privilege Amidst Mass Poverty: Wages and Working Conditions in Indonesian Industry', in Gavin Jones [ed.] *The Life of the Poor in Indonesian Cities* [Papers Given at the set of Annual Public Lectures on Indonesia, Australian Indonesian Association and Monash University: Clayton, 1988], p.29.

⁷⁷ 'Economic Conditions of the Nation' [Radio speech by Premier Hatta], *Aneta*, March 20 1950.

These were prophetic words by Mohammad Hatta. Early in the decade, one Islamic trade union leader commented that he considered the State to be “*budgetloos, planloos and hopeloos*”.⁷⁸ Throughout the 1950s the Nationalists’ policy for transformation of the economy from a colonial to a national one remained beset with difficulties, despite the generally favourable world economic conditions. Economic development was hampered by political instability to the extent that the Indonesian economy had become stagnated at a time “when almost every country in Southeast Asia had recorded substantial economic progress”.⁷⁹ In 1964, in a discussion with the then American Ambassador to Indonesia, Howard Jones, Hatta was frankly critical of the country’s economic situation, and of what he saw as Sukarno’s responsibility for the current difficulties.

You know Sukarno. He has his mind on only one thing, his immediate political objective, and he has no understanding of meaning of even simple facts of economic life.⁸⁰

In the rural areas, the existence of a substantial, and rising, landless class widened the economic cleavages in society and forced thousands of ‘economic migrants’ to seek employment in the cities such as Jakarta. Critically for the urban experience of these migrants, secondary industry faced similar problems to that of the estates. As a consequence, from 1953 until 1957, the rate of opening of new industrial plants and the closing of old ones was “roughly matched”.⁸¹ Nor was the closure of private industries matched by the opening of government enterprises. The necessary expansion of employment opportunities to ‘soak up’ new labour was therefore limited.⁸² However, the national bureaucracy continued to grow. History and the political environment militated against the painful measures needed to reduce its size.⁸³ A report by the ‘United States

⁷⁸ Speech by Abikusno Tjokrosujoso of PSII—*Persatuan Serikat Islam Indonesia*. The PSII had been concerned about the growing materialism in the nation. *Harian Rakjat* 4 September 1952.

⁷⁹ D.W. Fryer, ‘Economic Aspects of Indonesian Disunity’, *Pacific Affairs* 30 [1957], p.195.

⁸⁰ American Embassy Djakarta, Telegram to the Department of State March 30, 1964. *Asia and the Pacific National Security Files 1963–1969. Memos Vol.I. November 1963–April 1964*.

⁸¹ Fryer, ‘Economic Aspects’, pp.200–201.

⁸² The transmigration program was, of course, one attempt at solving the excess of labour. Workers were sometimes given basic training at centres to fit them for occupations such as barbers, bookmakers, washers of clothes and other tasks working with the hands. ‘Tuna Karya menudju Irian Barat’, *Djaja* 30 [March 1964].np. On the success of the transmigration program see The United States Economic Survey Team to Indonesia, *Indonesia: Perspective and Proposals for United States Economic Aid* [Yale University Southeast Asia Studies: New Haven, 1963].

⁸³ During the constitutional democracy period cabinets failed to make reductions in the size of the bureaucracy. Ricklefs writes that the Natsir cabinet which had the favourable economic circumstances of the Korean War boom in commodity prices could not “succeed in its hopes of reducing the size of the bureaucracy”. The Wilopo cabinet [February 1952–August 1953] also planned reductions in the size of the bureaucracy [and in the military] but its coalition partner PNI resisted. The first Ali Sastroamidjojo cabinet [August 1953–July 1955], on the other hand, expanded the bureaucracy “partly because control of the bureaucracy was expected to be crucial in the coming elections”. Ricklefs, *A History*, pp.230–235. See

Economic Survey Team to Indonesia' noted the low pay of the bureaucracy "which accentuated the need for supplementing incomes by one means or another...the temptations for corruption are great". The Government was also an employer in many other businesses. In March 1950, there were 420,000 [180,000 federal and 240,000 Republican] employees.⁸⁴ By 1963, around two million Indonesians were in government employment.⁸⁵ Consequently, the Government was, as one commentator has written, "ubiquitous in the field of labour relations".⁸⁶ From its position as a primary employer of labour it then tended to look at management problems more sympathetically.⁸⁷

Even so, the interest of labour in an improved standard of living was shared in varying degrees by many national elites who believed economic development was the key to modernization and industrialization, which in turn were the key to a better standard of living for Indonesians.⁸⁸ There was, however, always contention over the means of achievement of the objectives and it was this that sharpened the class divisions. Debate was constant over the desirability or not of foreign capital loans and the facilitation of foreign investment, and the pragmatism of the early governments. The willingness to "assist foreign investment" despite the unpopularity of such decisions led to bitter and often hostile debate.⁸⁹ There was also a sense of *lèse-majesté* about the debate. For instance, a chief technician of the Public Works Service who publicly insulted Hatta, Sjahrir and Natsir by calling them traitors and criminals because they wished to allow foreign capital to operate in Indonesia, and who objected to the nationalisation of the North Sumatran oil fields, was given a six months gaol term with a probation period of

also *The Bank of Indonesia Reports 1952-1953*, on the "dissipation of the windfall profits" which Indonesia had received because of the Korean conflict. After independence the bureaucracy was used for patronage to reward former guerillas and for political party support. Anthony Reid has written that the use of bureaucratic position for 'reward' had its roots in the colonial policy of the Dutch when the indigenous aristocracy was barred from holding land. A.J.S. Reid, 'The Origin of Poverty in Indonesia', James J. Fox, Ross Garnaut, et al. [eds.], *Indonesia: Australian Perspectives* [Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University: Canberra, 1980], VII, p.451.

⁸⁴ *Aneta*,¹ February 1950.

⁸⁵ The United States Economic Survey Team to Indonesia, *Indonesia*, p.30. In his discussion with the American Ambassador [see above] Hatta stated that "he would only join a government which was anti-communist, and would be reorganized to get rid of surplus officials". American Embassy Djakarta, Telegram to Department of State March 30, 1964.

⁸⁶ Hawkins, 'Labor', p.245. The United States Economic Survey Team to Indonesia, *Indonesia*, p.7. On the entry of the army into the field of labour relations through the *Badan Kerdja Sama Buruh Militer BKS Bumil* see Hawkins, 'Labor', and US Department of Army, *Area Handbook*, pp.288-296.

⁸⁷ US Department of Army, *Area Handbook*, p.295.

⁸⁸ Astri Suhrke, 'Indonesia', in Max Teichman [ed.], *Powers and Policies: Alignments and Realignments in the Indo-Pacific Region* [Cassell: Australia, 1970], p.150.

⁸⁹ J.D. Legge, *Sukarno*, p.246.

three years.⁹⁰ The repression of dissident opinion by bans on newspapers and gaoling of individuals for slander or ‘spreading rumours’ served to underscore the lack of commonality about the best way to achieve the freedoms that had been expected to flow from independence. Kerry Groves has written of the ‘flowering’ of the polemical debate in the press after the lifting of martial law in 1963. Groves contends that such a debate would not have taken place if ideological differences had not been widely and, we may add, acrimoniously, held.⁹¹

Certainly the debate over ‘entitlement’ for workers was bitter. From its inception SOBSI proposed that workers should share in the distribution of profits via their wages.⁹² And because there was no comprehensive wage legislation in place—wages were fixed under collective agreements, or P4D and P4P decisions—unions in general pressured constantly for minimum pay legislation and wage rises.⁹³ But, most particularly, they pressured for ‘extra’ conditions such as *Lebaran* bonuses because wage rises overall were not able to keep pace with the cost-of-living. In turn they were reminded constantly by national elites of the problems: the shortages of materials for factories, the low productivity of workers, the intransigence of worker representatives and, most importantly, of the ‘duty’ of workers. Workers were accused of thriftlessness and waste: the political and economic leadership of corruption. The Bank of Indonesia, for instance, expressed its concern that a higher standard of living “could kill the goose that lays the golden egg”; and that the large trade union federations such as the non-communist *Kongres Buruh Seluruh Indonesia*—KBSI, with their insistence that the equilibrium between wages and prices be restored, were placing too much pressure on government.⁹⁴

Nonetheless, many elites recognised that desires and needs were synonymous for workers in the prevailing economic conditions of the decade.⁹⁵ The need to raise the living standards of ordinary Indonesians, and to give workers a stake in the economic life

⁹⁰ PIA, December 1954. In fact, the Criminal Code allowed for *lèse-majesté* penalties slightly changed in wording, but derived from the colonial law. In 1961 two men in Sumatra were gaoled [for eight months] for slandering the President ; and one man in Surabaya for spreading [unspecified] rumours [for fifteen months]. *LTIF*, 20 November 1961.

⁹¹ Kerry Groves, “*Harian Rakjat: Daily Newspaper of the Communist Party of Indonesia—Its History and Role*” [Unpublished MA thesis, Australian National University, 1985].

⁹² *Soera SOBSI* 3 [April, 1948].

⁹³ Although, the Government in its capacity of employer set minimum wage rates for government workers in some provincial and local administrations. ILO, *Problems of Wage Policy in Asian Countries*, Studies and Reports: New Series 43 [1956], p.69. See also *ibid.*, pp.69–73 on the comparative conditions in other Asian countries.

⁹⁴ *Bank of Indonesia Report 1954–1955*, p.157.

⁹⁵ See, for example, *Bank of Indonesia Report 1956–1957*, p.183, and *1959–1960*, p.207.

of the country, was seen by many political and economic leaders, not only in Indonesia but throughout Asia, as a safeguard against tyranny. Of course, just what constituted tyranny [or democracy] was at the nub of the debate. The meaning was very different for those unions aligned with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions [ICFTU], such as the Muslim Worker's Union the *Serikat Buruh Islam Indonesia*—SBII which joined the ICFTU in 1957, and those unions linked through SOBSI with the communist backed World Federation of Trade Unions [WFTU]. In 1958 the ICFTU linked the failure to improve living standards in Asia with the probable development of totalitarianism in the region. The divide between is exemplified by the early, baseless, accusation of the WFTU that: “Soekarno and Hatta actively supported the fascist [Japanese] forced labour and are responsible for the death of nearly two million workers in these [Japanese] camps”.⁹⁶

Workers, unions and the city

It has been questioned whether we can, or indeed should, study the urban proletariat apart from the morphology of the city in which they are placed.⁹⁷ From a colonial administrative port city with a population of approximately 533,015 [1930 census] Jakarta grew rapidly in the years after 1945: from 1,300,000 in 1950 to 2,973,052 in 1961. Jakarta became, by far, “the most populous city in the whole of Southeast Asia”.⁹⁸ In many ways the physical history of Jakarta matched the political time-frame of the nation from revolution to Guided Democracy. In the first period [1945–49] there was considerable infrastructure damage in the city from the burning, sabotage looting, and guerilla warfare as the Republic struggled for its survival. This affected the work and social environment of workers and their families, and of the population at large.

In the second period Jakarta became the headquarters for government, political parties, trade union federations and individual trade unions, women’s organizations, and many other social organizations. By 1957, for instance, Jakarta was home to the Central Headquarters of twenty seven women’s organizations; the seven Central Labour Federations as well as the two Local Federations.⁹⁹ At the same time, the population

⁹⁶ WFTU, *Working Class in the Struggle for National Liberation* [Reports and Resolutions of the Trade Union Conference of Asia and Australasian Countries, November–December Peking, 1949 [Bombay, 1950]. np. On the role of nationalists such as Sukarno in the mobilization of labour during the occupation see, Anton Lucas, *One Soul One Struggle*, Chapter II. ‘The Japanese Experience: Self Sufficiency and Economic Distress’.

⁹⁷ Alfred W. McCoy, ‘The Iloilo General Strike: Defeat of the Proletariat in a Philippine Colonial City’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* XV, 2 [1984], pp.330–364. *

⁹⁸ D.W. Fryer, ‘The ‘Million City’ in Southeast Asia’, *The Geographical Review* XLIII, 4 [October 1953], p.492. The other ‘million cities’ were Manila, Bangkok and Singapore.

⁹⁹ Djawatan Penerangan Kotapradja Djakarta Raya, *Djakarta Dewasa Ini* [1957]. As a consequence

increased because people sought better opportunities in Jakarta, and the comparative safety of Jakarta from the guerilla warfare by the *Darul Islam* and other armed groups operating in the countryside.¹⁰⁰ The housing shortage was exacerbated. The announcement by the Ministry of Defence concerning the demobilization of youth groups¹⁰¹ had put large numbers of active, unemployed youth on to the streets of the city, thereby further increasing the number of new arrivals and intensifying the city's economic problems. In the third period the development of Jakarta was considered of national importance. Aid money from the United States, the Soviet Union and Japan went towards housing projects, road by-passes, sports grounds, hotels, to buildings to house enlarged Ministries and to the construction of monuments.¹⁰² This latter period of building drew thousands of labourers to the city and the physical environment of the city could not keep pace. The city authorities worried about these new arrivals "who were still green in the ways of a large city...and easy prey for robbers and marketeers" at the harbours and railways.¹⁰³

From the figures in Table 2 on comparative population densities for the five administrative regions of Java, we can glean some understanding of the pressure on the physical environment of Jakarta.

**Table 2. Density of the Population
(According to the Census October 1961*)**

Province	Number of the Population (x1000)	Sq.km.	Population per sq.km.
Djakarta Raya	2,973	577	5,152
West Java	17,615	46,300	380
Central Java	18,407	34,206	538
D.I. Jogjakarta	2,241	3,169	707
East Java	21,823	47,922	455
Java and Madura	63,059	132,174	477

* Preliminary data

Source: Biro Pusat Statistik, *Statistical Pocket Book of Indonesia* [1962].

international labour organizations held sessions in Jakarta. For instance, "The Trades Union International" [a department of the WFTU] in February, 1963, and the 'All Pacific Dockworkers Conference' in the same year.

¹⁰⁰ *Darul Islam* was a militant Islamic guerrilla group led by a Javanese mystic named Kartosuwirjo [1905-62]. For more on the founding and *raison d'être* of *Darul Islam* see M.C. Ricklefs, *A History*.

¹⁰¹ *Menteri Pertahanan* No.193/MP/50.

¹⁰² S. Djauhari, 'The Capital City 1942-1967', *Masalah Bangunan* 14, 1/2 [1969], p.9.

¹⁰³ *Pekan Gerakan Sosial* Maret 1957, p.29. *Arsip Jayakarta: Jakarta*. The department store, Sarinah, the National Planetarium, the Istiqlal Mosque and the Tugu Nasional were some of the larger monuments constructed in this period.

Fires in the city, and shortages in housing, sewage, transportation, medical and educational services became a fact-of-life for the general urban proletariat.¹⁰⁴ Their experience of urbanisation could not help but be affected by the condition of the city, not their working conditions by the milieu in which their employment was grounded. When the *Times of Indonesia* commented in 1953 that: “there is a shortage of tennis balls and the players are having to re-use old ones” we may be assured that this was not the ‘stuff’ of wage earners’ concerns. Theirs was the struggle to raise their standard of living and to achieve some measure of social justice.

Disaster relief was provided by the municipal Office of Social Affairs which had a ‘Natural Disaster’ section from which the distribution of food could be made. It also provided subsidies to other social bodies. Official relief organizations such as the *Palang Merah* [Red Cross] gave food and clothing, while political parties, women's organizations and community associations, such as the Chinese Association—*Sin Min Hui*, were ready with cash donations.¹⁰⁵ Wage earners in the city needed to and did help each other in times of natural disasters. Even though workers were struggling in their own lives for often they were made homeless by fires and floods, through their unions they sought to assist fellow Jakartans in times of stress. When, for example, the *Harian Rakjat* newspaper started an aid fund for the victims of a fire in Ps Baru, the Jakarta Branch of the Sugar Worker's Union gave Rp.115,000; various sections of the Harbour and Shipping Worker's Union Rp.32,050; and the Transport Worker's Union Rp.60,050.¹⁰⁶

The city was also not able to meet adequate housing requirements for the bulk of its inhabitants. In 1951, a joint project between the municipality, the Department of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Labour saw 2,000 of the unemployed homeless, and the lowest-level workers from many businesses and departments, including the harbour workers, housed in a newly constructed *asrama* [in this sense, barracks].¹⁰⁷ A new

¹⁰⁴ For the effect on urban social programs of heavy in-migration to urban centres see United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Report of the World Social Situation* [New York, 1963], p.109. For everyday examples of the financial and human costs of fires, see *Times of Indonesia*, 8 January 1953. *Aneta*, 11 May 1955, and *Indonesia Raya*, 5 January 1957. A comprehensive historical account of the difficulties and problems in the provision of services for Jakarta is to be found in the excellent study, Susan Abeyasekere, *Jakarta: A History* [Oxford University Press: Singapore, 1989]. For the period under discussion see especially Chapter 5: ‘Sukarno's Jakarta: 1950–1965’. On the life of the poor, and the political and social divisions in the Jakarta of the 1960s, see Mochtar Lubis' heart wrenching novel, *Twilight in Djakarta* [Oxford University Press: Singapore, 1989]. Third impression. Translated by Claire Holt.

¹⁰⁵ For a list of the efforts of the Jakarta Government in 1957 see *Pekan Gerakan Sosial* Maret 1957, p.29. *Arsip Jayakarta*. See also *The Indonesian Herald*, 31 January 1963, for an account of cash donations by the *Murba* Party and the *Chung Hua Chiao Thuan Tsung Hui* towards relief for the victims of Jakarta's floods.

¹⁰⁶ *Serikat Buruh Gula Indonesia*—SBGI; SBPP; *Serikat Buruh Kendaraan Bermotor*—SBKB. *Harian Rakjat*, 3 September 1952.

¹⁰⁷ Kementerian Perburuhan, *Situasi Perburuhan Dalam Negeri* [October/November 1951], p.63. See also, Kementerian Perburuhan, *Kotapradja Djakarta Raya Tahun ke-VII*, p.423.

housing development was built at *Kebayoran Baru*, but this was largely occupied by the bureaucracy. Large apartment blocks were erected to house government employees, but progress was slow and many people needed to be accommodated in schools and hotels. The number of illegal dwellings increased and this caused constant friction between the authorities and the people of the city.¹⁰⁸ People faced not only 'legal destruction' of their illegal dwellings but, as well, 'illegal eviction'. So widespread was the matter of illegal eviction that the then mayor, Sudiro, felt the need to caution the populace against imposters who, with the aim of expelling people from their houses in order to get other people in had been passing themselves off as housing inspectors. Nonetheless, quite obviously illegal housing in many ways acted as a safety valve for the municipality in that the number of applications for housing was exceeded by far by the construction of housing, or by the vacancies created by departing foreigners.¹⁰⁹ Workers, in fact, obtained housing wherever they could. One informant, a teacher, recalls taking over an empty house because others, believing it to be haunted, left it alone.¹¹⁰ In 1961, the City Government estimated it needed to provide 16,000 new dwellings for that year. Some 4,000 were provided.¹¹¹

In his 1953 study of several *kampungs* in Jakarta, Heeren found that a primary reason why migrants came to the city was because of the possibility of obtaining a better education for themselves and their families.¹¹² Certainly the campaign against illiteracy began in 1950 achieved some success in raising the national literacy rate.¹¹³ For Jakarta, a

¹⁰⁸ In the period of one year alone [1952–1953] there were 6,354 illegal houses [the area covered totalling approximately 3,500 hectares] built without permits. This number did not include houses built on private land. Of the 6,354 illegal dwellings: 4,900 were occupied by the owners, some 18,000 persons, and the remainder were rental, some 5,500 persons. During this period 1,000 illegal dwellings had been pulled down and the occupants moved to other areas, but such was the need, the construction of illegal houses by the people was always ahead of the destruction by the authorities. *Times of Indonesia*, 11 February 1953.

¹⁰⁹ *Aneta*, 11 January 1955. In 1954, steps were taken to regulate the method of housing application, both to speed up the process and to prevent the many violations, which included occupying houses or rooms without valid documents, and the transfer of accommodation illegally by the acceptance of 'key-money'.

¹¹⁰ Interview May 1996, Jakarta [See Appendix I].

¹¹¹ *The Indonesian Herald*, 4 December 1961. On the difficulties faced in implementing development see Pemerintah Daerah Khusus Ibukota, *Karya Jaya: Kenang Kenangan Lima Kepala Daerah Jakarta 1945–1966* [Jakarta, 1977].

¹¹² H.J. Heeren, 'The Urbanisation of Jakarta', *Ekonomi dan Keuangan Indonesia* 8, II [1955], pp.696–736.

¹¹³ The 1930 census had shown a literacy rate of 7.4 per cent—13.2 per cent of males and 2.3 per cent of females. Widjojo Nitisastro, *Population Trends in Indonesia* [Cornell University Press: New York, 1970], p.85. In a strong note of caution concerning the results of the 1930 Dutch census Maier argues "that figures and numbers are dangerous and poly-interpretable...[and] a more careful exploration of terms like literacy and illiteracy [is needed]". H.M.J. Maier in, 'From Heteroglossia to Polyglossia: The Creation of Malay and Dutch in the Indies', *Indonesia* 56 [October 1993], pp.37–65. By the 1961 census the overall literacy rate was 47 per cent—24 per cent of females aged ten and over having had at least some formal schooling. See Yulfitra Raharjo and Valerie Hull, 'Employment Patterns of Educated Women in Indonesian Cities', in G.W. Jones [ed.], *Women in the Urban and Industrial Workforce* [Development Studies Centre Monograph 33, Australian National University: Canberra, 1984], p.101.

sub-sample of family heads from a Ministry of Labour survey found 72.29 per cent were literate which was an essential improvement towards a more skilled workforce.¹¹⁴ But the inability to keep pace with housing construction, even with the plateau of population growth experienced in the middle of the decade, or to provide sufficient inexpensive piped water to the *kampungs*,¹¹⁵ the areas of highest population density, had a boomerang effect on workers lives affecting their own and their families' health, education and social relationships.

If the contributions of unions, workers, aid organizations, community associations and the like were illustrative of the humanity of the citizens of the city they also underscored the dangerous nature of the city itself. In times of natural disaster the city was prepared to help with emergency aid, but compensation was more difficult to obtain because of the financial constraints, and because of the large numbers of people involved. The result was heightened tensions between the people and the authorities.¹¹⁶ An examination of the magazine of the municipality—*Madjalah Kotapradja*—reveals just how many measures and programs were started, and social institutes established, to try to overcome some of the difficulties.¹¹⁷ Sometimes, a clear sense of exasperation with 'ordinary people', with those making the transition from rural to urban domicile, was evident in the statements of those in charge. While Chaerul Saleh, in his position as Minister of Basic Industries, spoke of the "thousand and one difficulties in carrying out development projects...in obtaining food and clothing..." and warned of more difficulties to come, the Governor of Jakarta, Soemarno, bemoaned the "lack of discipline and sense of responsibility amongst the people [of Jakarta]".¹¹⁸ For their part unions, in their efforts

¹¹⁴ That is, could read and write a language. ILO, *Report on Social Security*, p.13. On the efforts in developing schools—a threefold increase in the number by 1957—see Abeyasekere, *Jakarta*, p.179. On the abolition of fees for elementary schoolchildren to give them a greater opportunity to attend school, see *PIA*, January 1955.

¹¹⁵ Abeyasekere, *Jakarta*, p.180. By the early 1950's infant mortality nationally, and more particularly in Jakarta, had become a real cause for alarm. For every 100 children under 1 year 20-30 died, from 1-5 years not less than 20 per cent died. Thus in real terms almost half of the children under 5 years of age died. *Pikiran Rakyat*, 19 January 1953.

¹¹⁶ For example, a public meeting of the 'Committee of the Victims of the Fire at Bunder Kampung' was prohibited by the State Security Police [*Dinas Pengawas Keselamatan Negara-DPKN*]. Neither an open meeting at the site of the fire, nor a closed meeting at one of the *kampung* houses still standing was permitted. Apparently the proposed meeting was in relation to a letter sent by the committee to the Mayor of Jakarta requesting compensation for the houses destroyed and, furthermore, requesting compensation for those whose land had been used to build a new road into the *kampung* after the fire. No reply to the letter had been received by the committee. *Times of Indonesia*, 25 February 1953.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, *Madjalah Kotapradja* Nos. 10/11 [31 May 1957]. Nos. 12/13 [30 June 1957]. Nos. 6/7/8 [30 November–31 December 1957]. See also The Liang Gie, *Sedjarah pemerintahan kota Djakarta* [Kotapradja Djakarta Raya: Djakarta, 1958].

¹¹⁸ *The Indonesian Herald*, 4 December 1961. For more on Chaerul Saleh see Bruce Grant, *Indonesia* [Melbourne University Press: Melbourne, 1964], and Robert Cribb, *Gangsters and Revolutionaries*. A brief sketch of Chaerul Saleh is contained in Robert Cribb, *Historical Dictionary of Indonesia* [The Scarecrow Press, Inc: Metuchen, N.J., & London, 1992], pp.76-77. On Soemarno see *Karya Jaya: Kenang Kenangan Lima Kepala Daerah Jakarta 1945–1966*.

to aid workers in the city, also had financial constraints, and securing members against natural disasters was beyond their means. The insurance benefit fund of the largest union of railway workers in the city, the SBKA, would not pay out for illness or deaths caused by epidemics or natural disasters.¹¹⁹ In such events workers had to manage as best they could. To ease the load on workers the SBII and SOBSI each opened a polyclinic in Jakarta early in the decade—the SBII in 1951 and SOBSI in 1953. Both federations required a small payment for the services and both reported on the widespread need of workers for such services.¹²⁰

The 1961 census estimated the employed workforce, nationally, as approximately 33 million. The number of women wage earners comparative to male was smaller, with an approximate gender breakdown of the workforce of 24 million males and 9 million females.¹²¹ In order to overcome the critical shortage of skilled workers various programs were instituted. At the end of 1955 a Labour Training Service, providing short courses for the unemployed and ex-soldiers to upgrade their skills, was established in Jakarta and other areas. There were courses for iron workers, sheet workers and machinists, all of which were in short supply. Vocational training centres catered for a wide range of occupations: metal, automotive, radio-electrical, building and also for a special category of home economics for women.¹²² In 1957, there were thirty vocational centres for lower-level technical skills, and by 1960 the Ministry for Basic Education and Culture operated 1,300 small technical and vocational schools, not including teacher training.¹²³ However, a 1962 report on vocational training stated that the Vocational Training Centre run by the Ministry of Labour was not fully utilised and given inadequate support. The report concluded training was more in light of “social service for the unemployed to enable them to make some kind of living”.¹²⁴ Despite these efforts unemployment remained high. The emergency employment service for general work was discontinued in 1957. When it resumed at the end of 1958 it was available for ex-student combatants and invalids only, however, there were no funds to pay allowances for the

¹¹⁹ See Chapter III on the *Dana Hindromartono* fund.

¹²⁰ *Berita Masjumi* 109/11 [13 November 1951], p.2. The SBII polyclinic covered casual workers and workers not belonging to the SBII.

¹²¹ *Statistical Pocket Book of Indonesia* 1963, p.271. For the urban workforce the figures were 3,248,239 males and 1,054,485 females respectively. Note must be made of the restrictions of the census. The figures included those who had worked two months within the last six months of the census date—October, 1961. Biro Pusat Statistik, *Sensus Penduduk 1961 Republik Indonesia Angka-angka sementara hasil pengolahan 1% sample*.

¹²² United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Labor in Indonesia*, p.28.

¹²³ Iskandar Nugroho, *Indonesia Facts and Figures* [Pertjabaan: Djakarta, 1967], p.276.

¹²⁴ ILO, *Report to the Government of Indonesia on Vocational Training* [ILO/TAP/Indonesia/R18, 1962], p.2.

discontinued in 1957. When it resumed at the end of 1958 it was available for ex-student combatants and invalids only, however, there were no funds to pay allowances for the invalids for whom emergency work was found.¹²⁵ The general Employment Exchanges reached only a small percentage of the unemployed and those applying were without the necessary skills. In 1960, of 147,000 applicants only 30,000 were able to be placed.¹²⁶ We may applaud on the one hand the intent,¹²⁷ and despair, on the other, at the economic mismanagement which devalued such efforts.

As the cost-of-living rose over the decade and into the 1960s, and the nation exhibited "all the earmarks of a state in collapse, from inflation to hoarding to corruption to administrative chaos, and rice selling in the cities up to twenty times the official price",¹²⁸ a good proportion of a wage earner's income was spent on food. Research by the ILO in March, 1956, revealed that an average of 72 per cent of the monthly income of 83,000 wage earners surveyed at 2,500 enterprises was spent on food. The survey also found that wages were substantially higher in Sumatra than in Java: and "higher in Djakarta, which had a higher cost-of-living, than elsewhere in Java".¹²⁹ The reason for this was the large, underemployed pool of labour in the rural areas of Java. Although, the caveat to 'higher in Djakarta' was the lower wages among the casual workers in the city.¹³⁰ Wage earner families frequently supported themselves by subsidiary occupations, mutual help and credits from various sources.¹³¹ This was also the case for civil servants at the white-collar level, for in spite of their allowances for cost-of-living, marriage and children many had two jobs in order to live "on a decent standard".¹³² Pawnshops also played an important role in servicing the credit needs of wage earners. The size of the pledges gives some indication of the sharpness of the need. In 1957/58, for example, the average period of an 'A' pawn which were those valued at between Rp.0.50 and Rp.25 was 92 days.¹³³ A Ministry of Health survey of 180 *buruh kasar* [blue-collar] workers found

¹²⁵ *Bank of Indonesia Reports 1954-1955 and 1958-1959*.

¹²⁶ Nugroho, *Indonesia Facts and Figures*, p.270.

¹²⁷ The Ministry of Labour Training Centre was originally started in Bandung in 1949 in the premises of an old sugar mill.

¹²⁸ *The Economist*, 9 June 1962.

¹²⁹ ILO, *Report to the Government of Indonesia on Wage Policy and Industrial Relations*, p.124. The cost-of-living was higher in Sumatra than in Java.

¹³⁰ US Department of the Army, *Area Handbook*, p.279.

¹³¹ ILO, *Report to the Government of Indonesia on Wage Policy*, p.3.

¹³² US Department of Army, *Area Handbook*, p.279.

¹³³ *Bank of Indonesia Report 1958-1959*, p.124.

63.9 per cent had debts incurred for incidental expenses, household and clothing needs, and daily necessities.¹³⁴

To countless families such a situation had become a daily horror, seeing how day by day the same amount of money is buying less and less food and without knowing how to win this terrible race with money which is losing its buying power at quite a terrific speed, except to sell or pawn possessions so painfully collected throughout years of toil ¹³⁵

What could unions do?

Nationally, the largest single section of organized workers were on the rubber, sugar, coffee, tea, tobacco and palm oil plantations. Then, in order of size and importance came oil, transport and communication, white collar workers which included teachers, employees in government and export-import houses, and lastly the workers in the smaller printing, textiles, shoes, hotels and restaurants and motion picture industries. At the 'bottom of the ladder' of the organized workers were the unskilled.¹³⁶ Hawkins has estimated that nationally around twenty to twenty five per cent of those in wage and salary employment for government and industry were trade union members. The number of employed workers in Jakarta across six industry groupings in 1961 was 783,355 males and 205,158 females.¹³⁷ It is difficult to estimate trade union membership for individual workplaces in Jakarta, but the overall estimate for a one year period 1956/57 can be seen in Table 3. Registered trade union membership in Jakarta was the lowest of the five major areas.

¹³⁴ Kementerian Kesehatan, *Keadaan sosial-ekonomis, makanan dan kesehatan buruh-buruh di Djakarta 1957* [Djumadiaz dan Dradjat (eds.), Laporan Penyelidikan Lembaga Makanan Rakjat.

¹³⁵ *Times of Indonesia*, 17 March 1953.

¹³⁶ Harry Goldberg, 'Free Workers Fight Communists', *American Federationist* [August 1952], p.31.

¹³⁷ The industry groupings were [1] Agricultural, Forestry and Fishing, [2] Mining Manufacturing and Electricity, [3] Construction, [4] Trade, Banking, Insurance, [5] Transportation and Communications, [6] Services.

**Table 3. Number of Members in Registered Unions in Indonesia
Classified by Areas, June 30, 1956 and June 30, 1957**

Area	June 30, 1956	June 30, 1957
Medan	320,613	366,472
Padang	24,233	27,891
Palembang	47,119	68,955
Bandung	328,884	415,399
Semarang	273,536	335,358
Surabaya	570,054	650,326
Makasar	20,473	26,714
Bandjarmasin	21,914	26,161
Djakarta	96,241	126,403
Unclassified	406,043	406,043
Total	2,109,128	2,449,722

Source: Everett D. Hawkins, *Labor in Developing Economies*, p.107.

The higher wages for those in work and more opportunities to earn some extra income may have been factors in this lower union membership, as may the lack of a strong industrial base other than drawing from the docks at Tanjung Priok and the Manggarai railway yard, as Cribb has pointed out for the Jakarta of the 1920s.¹³⁸ In the 1950s and 1960s both these workplaces also had strong union representation, albeit with intense union rivalry amongst the respective workforces. In the opinion of the wife of a former middle-level railway worker at the Manggarai depot whose husband belonged to the PBKA, one of the reasons why lower-level workers did not join unions was because they “did not really understand about labour laws, only a few knew”. She also believed that “the level of salary was higher in Jakarta than in the villages or small towns, and this was the reason why most of the people there joined other unions”. [The informant was aware of the rivalry between the two large railway unions and here she was referring to the SBKA which was the largest union. She also commented on the intensity of propaganda of non-PBKA unions being higher in the villages than in the centre of the railways in Jakarta].¹³⁹ In another interview, a teacher alluded to the sheer difficulty of finding enough time in the daily struggle to survive to join a union, or attend union activities.¹⁴⁰ Rather than a single cause, there would appear to have been multifarious reasons for the lower unionization of the Jakarta workforce.

Within the wage force a great disparity existed between skilled and unskilled wage rates¹⁴¹ But there were also differential rates between workplaces. Generally this

¹³⁸ See Robert Cribb, *Gangsters and Revolutionaries*, p.30.

¹³⁹ Interview May 1996, Jakarta.[See Appendix I].

¹⁴⁰ Interview May 1996, Jakarta [See Appendix I].

¹⁴¹ Hawkins, ‘Indonesia’, pp.107, 109. The disparities between male and female wage rates are discussed in Chapter VI.

was to do with size of the enterprise and trade union influence. The ILO observed in 1955:

in many large establishments the management have learned to accept trade unions; the opposition comes generally from employers in small-scale or family enterprises and those who maintain sentimental or doctrinaire adherence to the traditional conception of the management function. However, because of low wages, workers cannot pay contributions in such amounts or even with such regularity as would make their organizations financially strong.¹⁴²

The financial difficulties of individual communist unions and the effects this had on the running of the national organization were reported on by SOBSI in 1956. It noted that the financial contributions of member unions was small [that is the percentage of registrations] compared to the number of members: only a few member unions could achieve over thirty per cent of paid members.¹⁴³

Trade unions “fiercely resisted dismissal of redundant workers” at the large enterprises, but accepted lower wages in small-scale industries which were generally handicraft concerns and employers of large numbers of workers, although usually on an individually small-scale basis.¹⁴⁴ There was a political component to this: an attempt as Tedjasukmana has argued to establish “mutually beneficial” labour relations with national employers.¹⁴⁵ But there was also a socio-economic component, for unemployment, exacerbated by the mass dismissals of workers, was a continuing problem.¹⁴⁶ National businesses covered a spectrum from small to large. The Chinese-owned enterprises were of considerable size, and the Western, Dutch, American or British, were often very large corporations. The largest sized, most modern, with the biggest output, best market conditions and best returns were those paying the highest wages. Generally, according to Tedjasukmana, these were oil-concerns, factories, agricultural operations, banking and commercial business firms. Wages and other working conditions and social provisions were “less favourable and often very bad indeed” in businesses run by indigenous

¹⁴² E. Daya, ‘Freedom of Association and Industrial Relations in Asian Countries: 1’, *International Labor Review* 71 [April 1955], p.368.

¹⁴³ SOBSI, *Mengatasi Keuangan Dalam Serikat Buruh* [Diterbitkan oleh Badan Penerbitan Dewan Nasional SOBSI: Djakarta, 1956]. More details on this issue are provided in Chapter II.

¹⁴⁴ ILO, *Report to the Government of Indonesia on Wages Policy*, p.31.

¹⁴⁵ Tedjasukmana, “The Development of Labor Policy”, pp.211–213.

¹⁴⁶ SOBSI, *Mempertahankan dan Memperluas Hak-Hak Kaum Buruh Dilapangan Politik, Ekonomi, Sosial dan Kebudayaan* [Diterbitkan oleh Badan Penerbitan Dewan Nasional SOBSI: Djakarta, 1959], pp.17–22. Cf. also *Bank of Indonesia Report 1960–1965*. Although the later Law on Dismissals made termination of employment more difficult it still continued.

Indonesians and the Chinese.¹⁴⁷ In a practical sense the problem of a segmented labour market with work place differences in wages and working conditions between employees in foreign/large firms and national undertakings led to difficulties in the everyday work of the labour inspectors and dispute adjusters, and class divisions between this latter group and workers sharpened as a result.¹⁴⁸

All of the above points could be made about the workplaces in Jakarta. There was a general shortage of skilled workers; disparity between skilled and unskilled wage rates and differential rates between workplaces, generally between the largest, foreign-capitalised and most modern and the small-scale, such as textiles, and an acceptance of trade unions in the larger firms. There were not only differentials between the unskilled and skilled within industries, but also across industries. In the construction industry skilled workers earned approximately three times the wage of unskilled labour with a similar differential in the manufacturing industry. In the textile industry, on the other hand the differentials based on skill were not so sharp: labourers earned Rp.5 and weavers Rp.8.50.¹⁴⁹

The Unilever factories in Jakarta manufacturing margarine and soap provide an example of the better labour conditions in the larger, foreign-capitalised industries. In 1949 the factories employed approximately 2000 male and female workers. All leadership positions at this time were in the hands of Europeans. Although they were not necessarily more skilled *mandors* [foremen] earned more than twice the daily wage of the lower workers. The conditions were regarded as good, "with the cleanliness of the workplace being cleaner, in fact, than the floors of many *kampung* dwellings". A polyclinic, to which a doctor came three times a week was provided; free medicine was dispensed and every worker was medically examined to check whether the calorie content of the company provided lunch was adequate. An eight hour day with one hour off for lunch was the norm; truck transport was given to those who came long distances; 400 to 450 grams of *beras* were also provided daily; a cake of soap and cooking oil weekly. These parts of the labour relation were acknowledged as "very good conditions". But, since they were only given on the "recommendation of the employer" their maintenance

¹⁴⁷ Tedjasukmana, "The Development of Labor Policy", pp.211–213.

¹⁴⁸ Oh Sien-hong, an Indonesian worker's delegate to the International Labour Office regional conference in Ceylon in 1950 told the conference: "our labour inspectors have been recruited from a class of people who have not the confidence of the workers". ILO, *Record of Proceedings Asian Regional Conference in Ceylon January 1950* [Geneva, 1951], p.78. Indonesia sent seven delegates: from the Department of Economic Affairs; Employment Service; Central Economic Board [an employers' delegate], the Chairman of the General Sugar Syndicate, Oh Sien-hong the worker's delegate, and two from the Department of Labour, one of whom was Mohammad Bondan.

¹⁴⁹ ILO, *Problems of Wage Policy in Asian Countries*, p.25. In Jakarta in 1957 most industry was still based on manual labour. There were 80,000 workers in plants using power machinery and there were 25,000 to 30,000 in factories employing more than 100 workers.

depended on the “good-will of the employer”.¹⁵⁰ For newly independent labour activists this was not good enough and the *Serbuni* [*Serikat Buruh Unilever Indonesia*] union was formed. Its leader, Werdjojo, was a member of the SOBSI executive and its parliamentary representative. Werdjojo had also headed the parliamentary committee inquiring into working conditions in the Outer Islands. We may assume that his ‘expertise’ played a vital role in trade union employee negotiations.

When the company reported to the President in January of 1951, the conditions had improved again and appeared to cover all aspects of the legislative recommendations on yearly leave, social security and so on, as well as extras such as *Lebaran* payments, work training courses, rice subsidy and productivity allowances. The company noted that its lowest paid workers [daily workers] received a wage of Rp.11.54 per day counting the extras such as *Lebaran*, rice, food etc., but not counting overtime or yearly bonuses. If they worked seven days a week for four weeks in each month these workers would earn Rp.323.12 before expenses, such as those for housing, were deducted.¹⁵¹ In 1951 this was not an insignificant amount, but it was not enough to keep pace with the inflationary pressures over the next fifteen years. This was the reason that unions such as *Serbuni* agitated unabatedly for wage increases.¹⁵² There were also many calls for changes to the *mandor* system which Unilever and a great many other workplaces used. On the one hand, it enabled workers to obtain work through ‘contacts’. On the other, however, it maintained ‘particularistic’ labour relations and, if the *mandor* was not himself unionized, made it harder for unions to mobilize amongst less educated, lower-level workers, who in some workplaces were often paid very low wages and received no services, but who were charged high rates for food, housing and advances. It was felt the system was open to abuse.¹⁵³ Although, this appears not to have been the case in the Unilever factories. In 1964 the Unilever Central Office and its soap, margarine and palm oil factories in Jakarta, were ‘taken over’ by workers because of the Malaysia dispute and control was then transferred to the Jakarta Regional Authority.¹⁵⁴

Better conditions were not solely the preserve of workers in foreign firms. Some workers in state-owned companies, such as those in the offices and businesses of the Jakarta based *Bank Negara*, had negotiated very good work agreements. It is

¹⁵⁰ *Mimbar Indonesia Nomor Kerdja* 18 [May 1948], pp.39–40.

¹⁵¹ See the Laporan Perusahaan Unilever Kepada Presiden R.I. mengenai Kondisi Buruh di Perusahaan Unilever di Djakarta, 9 Djanuari 1951. *Arsip Nasional: Koleksi Arsip Kabinet Presiden R.I. 1950–1959*. No.1473.

¹⁵² *Bank of Indonesia Report 1956–1957*, p.183.

¹⁵³ *Area Handbook of Indonesia In Country Report 1955–1956* [Southeast Asia Studies, Yale University: New Haven, Preliminary Edition, 1956], Vol.3, p.888.

¹⁵⁴ *Antara*, 18 January 1964.

apparent from the series of letters from the bank union to the regional and central disputes committees in Jakarta, that this 'mutually beneficial' labour relationship was used by the the SBBSI—*Serikat Buruh Bank Seluruh Indonesia* [The All Indonesia Bank Worker's Union], a major independent union, to pressure the private banks for a better work contract.¹⁵⁵ However, as we have seen not all workers were able to have such conditions, and although it was reported by the ILO that "it was not socially just that workers in particular industries should have a privileged position"¹⁵⁶ this was the reality. Manning has asserted that after 1957 there was a general decline in real wages, and a "probable decline" in the wage differentials, owing to the nationalisation of first the Dutch, and then other foreign enterprises, inflation, and economic stagnation.¹⁵⁷ Nonetheless, collective agreements were concluded between unions and employers which benefited workers. In 1962, for example, agreements in the private sector concerned conditions such as special conditions for women; uniforms and food rations. As well, dispensation with full pay was given for activities needed by the trade union, or in a case of "urgent private necessity". This latter condition was included in the agreement for the *Serikat Buruh Hotel dan Rumah-Makan dan Toko*—SBHRT [Hotel, Restaurants and Shopworkers Union].¹⁵⁸ Where foreign contractors were used race could play its part in workplace tensions with both workers and unions able to 'capitalise' on such tension. After complaints of incidents between American personnel and workers, the business manager of Morrison, Knudson and Bechtel, the contracting firm for the building of the Jakarta by-pass, reported to the union that several personnel had been fired for their high-handed attitude. In an agreement between management and union, workers were to be provided with work clothes and shoes, and uniforms depending on the type of work undertaken, a review of wages was promised and an amount of at least Rp.500 was set as a "holidays contribution" for workers.¹⁵⁹

Unions in the less 'privileged' industries had to use other measures to alleviate the load of their members. The printing industry, which in Jakarta alone had 123 workplaces, was one such example. The Jakarta branch of the SBPN—*Serikat Buruh Percetakan Negara* [State Printing Office Union], which belonged to the KBSI, prepared a *Lebaran* parcel to lighten the load of the commitments during the festival. The union

¹⁵⁵ Letters from the SBBSI to the P4D and P4P, Djakarta, in 1955. *Arsip Nasional: Koleksi Kabinet Presiden R.I. 1950–1959. No.1493.*

¹⁵⁶ ILO, *Report to the Government of Indonesia on Wages Policy*, p.4.

¹⁵⁷ Chris Manning, "Wage Differentials and Labour Market Segmentation in Indonesian Manufacturing" [Unpublished PhD thesis, Australian National University, Canberra, 1979].

¹⁵⁸ National Council of SOBSI International Department, Letters from SOBSI to Foreign Friends, Djakarta 15 February, 1962. *SUA File, N/38/304.*

¹⁵⁹ *The Indonesian Herald*, 14 February 1963.

reported that it had found workers paid too much for goods during the *Lebaran* period because of 'unscrupulous traders'. Also, because the union believed that necessity, that is the need to partake in the festivities through visiting families and through gift-giving, was stronger during the *Lebaran* it had a policy to allow some latitude in the payment for the parcel. It voted to extend payment for the parcel over a four month period.¹⁶⁰ When a *Lebaran* Regulation which took into account the financial strength of an enterprise was promulgated in 1957/58 the payment of the bonus was still a contentious issue. Private employers were dissatisfied with the fact that the Government as a large employer did not itself grant *Lebaran* bonuses but only advanced money.¹⁶¹ Workers had come to see *Lebaran* payments as a right and therefore any lessening of that right as provocative action. The refusal of a Dutch employer at the Molino shoe factory to make a *Lebaran* payment at the same level paid in the previous year was the cause of action taken by workers. After the employer was beaten by workers the factory was shut and police placed on guard. In this instance the workers led the union, their anger and sense of injustice over the difference in benefits leading to violence.¹⁶²

After 1957, when the push for payments-in-kind became greater to offset the decline in real wages, the mutual benefit arms of local unions also became more important still. Railways and harbour unions, teachers, pawnshop worker unions, and the Catholic Worker's Union—*Ikatan Buruh Pantjasila*, were amongst those running funeral funds for their members. Early in the decade many, such as the largest independent union the PGRI—*Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia* [Indonesian Teachers' Union], had established some form of credit cooperative which continued to provide back-up support for the most difficult times.¹⁶³ In the early days of union building some had worried that unions might become simply a question of "sugar and coffee".¹⁶⁴ But the welfare work of unions—the sugar and coffee—became vitally important for wage earners as they struggled to ameliorate the poor material conditions in the city.

¹⁶⁰ *Suara Percetakan Negara* 4 [1953], pp.5–7.

¹⁶¹ *Bank of Indonesia Report 1954-1955*.

¹⁶² *Harian Rakjat*, 25 April 1957. The union leadership in fact stated that they did not agree with the 'incident' but all members of the SOBSI affiliated union, the *Serikat Buruh Sepatu, Kulit dan Karet*—SBSKK were discharged nonetheless. It was only through meetings with the Military Police and the City Military Command that the dispute was resolved. *Harian Rakjat*, 29 April 1957.

¹⁶³ On the *Bank Kematian* [Funeral Fund], the *Bank Koperasi* and the textile cooperative see *Suara Guru* 11 [June 1952], p.10. *Suara Guru* 7 [February 1953], p.12, and Pengurus Besar Serikat Buruh Pegadaian Indonesia—PB SBPI, Siaran No.2. No.387/1/49. *Arsip Nasional: Inventaris Arsip Sekretariat Negara R.I. 1945–1949. No.1027*. See also *Ikatan Buruh Pantjasila, Tuntunan Bagi Kader Buruh Pantjasila khusus untuk Para anggaota*.

¹⁶⁴ *Kereta Api* 25 [August 1946], p.15.

Conclusion

In 1953, the Professor of Child Diseases at the University of Indonesia, Dr. Sudjono Poesponegoro, had reported that the health of Indonesian babies which was ten per cent worse than before the war due to malnutrition, irregular diet and bad care, was linked to the low income of Indonesian workers.¹⁶⁵ This message was confirmed again in 1963 by a United Nations survey which concluded that the poor infant and child health, and that of the adult population was a direct consequence of “nutritionally unsatisfactory diets” which, in turn, [was] a consequence of high and continually rising food prices and the inability of workers to cover these rising costs for themselves, and their families.¹⁶⁶ In Jakarta, there were human costs from the poor physical conditions of the city: and financial costs in lost manpower hours and low productivity to the city and nation. While it is true that these were general problems for developing nations, and general for the working people of Indonesia, our concern here is with the wage earners of Jakarta. Because of its pivotal role in national life Jakarta was at times the beneficiary of economic decisions at the national level and, at many times, the distinctly disadvantaged because of the turbulent nature of political life. Workers in the city suffered through both the benefits and the disadvantages. Yet, some were convinced that the fate of workers in the city was inherently better because

*Kaum buruh di kota-kota mempunyai Serikat Sekerdjanja masing-masing untuk memperjuangkan nasibnja, mempunyai djam bekerdja jang tetap jang hanya berdjumlah 7 djam nominaal sehari. Mereka karena itu mempunyai kesempatan beladjar dan membatja harian-harian, madjalah-madjalah dsb; tiap malam-minggu beristirahat sambil hiburan; mempunyai sendjata-mogok dsb. [Workers in cities have unions to struggle for them, they have a seven hour day. Because of that they have the opportunity to study and read newspapers and magazines and so on; every weekend they rest; they have the strike weapon...]*¹⁶⁷

Did this mean that workers in the city were advantaged? What happened for wage earners from the formation of their unions, to 1965, when the American Embassy could chillingly report: “on the streets of Jakarta the smaller fry are being systematically arrested and jailed, or executed”¹⁶⁸ is the subject of the case studies which follow in Part II of this study.

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¹⁶⁵ *Times of Indonesia*, 10 February 1953.

¹⁶⁶ United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization, *Third World Food Survey Freedom From Hunger Campaign* [FFHC] Basic Study, No 11, FAO, Rome, 1963, p.47.

¹⁶⁷ A. Danudimadja, ‘Perbandingan’, *Sikap* 24 [30 June 1951], p.2.

¹⁶⁸ American Embassy Djakarta, Telegram to the Department of State November 4 1965. *Asia and the Pacific National Security Files 1963–1969. 6001 Cables Vol. V October 1965–November 1965.*

Chapter II

Front-Line Troops

Introduction

The large private rail company, The *Nederlandsch Indische Spoorweg Maatschappij* [NIS], opened its first line—Jakarta to Bogor—in 1873. The Colonial Government opened its first line—Surabaya to Pasuruan with an accompanying side track between Bangil and Malang—in 1875. From this date there was a continued expansion of both private and government owned railway and tram lines on Java, Madura and Sumatra so that by the beginning of the century more than half of the operating track of the 1950s was in operation.¹ Whereas in 1867 there had been approximately twenty five kilometres in the whole of the Netherlands East Indies; in 1873 approximately 260 kms, by 1930 there was 7,425 kms of railway and tramway line.² In 1931 the *Staats Spoorwegen* [State Railways], the “biggest of the three major railway and tramway networks in colonial Java”,³ alone employed approximately 43,928 workers.⁴ The history of these workers was not a quiescent one: at least not until the Colonial Government exiled, or placed under internal detention, those it viewed as ringleaders in the worker unrest and strike actions during the 1920s. The struggles of the railway and tramway workers of colonial Indonesia to gain better working conditions and to improve the material conditions of their everyday lives has been well documented.⁵ It was their history which served as a ‘reference point’ for the post-independence railway unions and workers.⁶ There is great similarity to be found in the litany of railway workers grievances during both periods: long hours of work, high cost of housing, inadequate

¹ See R. Slamet van der Laaken, ‘De Spoorwegen’, in G.L. Tichelman, H. van Meurs [eds]. *Wordend Indonesië* [Haarlem, 1948], pp.207–221; Indonesian State Railways, *Statistical Report for the Years 1956-1960* [Head Office: Bandung], p.3.

² M.C. Ricklefs, *A History*, p.146.

³ John Ingleson, ‘Bound Hand and Foot’: Railway Workers and the 1923 Strike in Java’, *Indonesia* 31 [April 1981], p.53.

⁴ Van der Laaken, ‘De Spoorwegen’, p.217. Besides the State Railways, there were eleven private railway companies on Java and Sumatra. Perusahaan Negara Kereta Api, *Sekilas Lintas 25 Tahun Perkereta-Apian 1945-1970* [Balai Grafika: Bandung], p.13.

⁵ See especially, John Ingleson, *In Search of Justice*; and Ingleson, ‘Bound Hand and Foot’, pp.53–87; Semau, ‘An Early Account of the Independence Movement’, *Indonesia* 1 [April 1966], pp.46–75. [translated and commented on by R. T. McVey] and *TMP* 3 [10 July 1950], pp.3–4.

⁶ From hereon, for brevity, ‘railways’ includes tramway workers unless specifically differentiated.

wages and cost-of-living allowances, and the effects of high inflation. It will be argued that compared not only to the actions of their comrades during the 1920s, but also to their comrades in the post-independence waterfront unions, the struggle of railway workers to improve their conditions was qualitatively different.⁷ In a speech to railway workers in 1946 Sutomo, affectionately known as 'Bung Tomo', likened their struggle to that of the "front-line soldiers".⁸ This case study concerns those front-line soldiers, and seeks to give them and all their unions their place in Indonesian history.

The reference points

It is possible to trace some of the ideological tensions evident in the relationship between the two largest post-independence unions of railway workers, the SOBSI aligned SBKA and the KBSI aligned PBKA, to the beginnings of union formation in the colonial era. From its inception the VSTP [*Vereniging van Spoor en Tramweg Personeel*—The Union of Rail and Tramway Workers], which was established in 1908 by members of the private railway companies, accepted Indonesian railway workers, the majority of the workers, as members.⁹ As Semaun, the *Sarekat Islam* activist, PKI Head and driving force behind the union in colonial Indonesia has written:

the Railroad Workers Union acted from a very early date as a catalyst for the unionization of the Indonesian workers.¹⁰

Nonetheless, until 1914, Europeans formed a majority of the VSTP membership. Indonesians had full voting rights but there was no large recruitment of lower-level workers.¹¹ From 1914, under the guidance of the prominent Dutch socialist Henk Sneevliet, the union had a more active policy towards expanding its Indonesian membership base.¹² It is in this later period, which encompassed the radicalization of Indonesian workers, the rise to prominence of the PKI, the split of the *Sarekat Islam* into

⁷ See Chapters IV and V on the workers and unions of the waterfront.

⁸ *Kereta Api* 23 [August 1946], p.9. Sutomo [1920–1983] headed the *Badan Pemberontakan Republik Indonesia*—BPRI during the revolution. On the role of the BPRI and its armed groups in the 'Battle for Surabaya' see, William H. Frederick, *Visions and Heat: The Making of the Indonesian Revolution* [Ohio University Press: Athens, 1989].

⁹ See *TMP* 12 [April 1955], pp.19-20 and Semaun, 'An Early Account', p.59. The companies were the NIS; the SJS [Semarang-Joana Steamtram Company, and the SCS [Semarang-Cirebon Steamtram Company.

¹⁰ Semaun, 'An Early Account', p.60.

¹¹ Ingleson, 'Bound Hand and Foot', p.54.

¹² For discussion on Sneevliet's role in the radicalizing of workers, see A.K. Pringgodigdo, *Sedjarah Pergerakan Rakjat Indonesia* [Pustaka Rakjat: Djakarta, 1964, 5th edition], and Ingleson, 'Bound Hand and Foot', p.53.

two wings, the *sayap kiri* [left wing] and *sayap kanan* [right wing], and the blunting of union agitation by the colonial authorities until the advent of the war, where the seeds of the subsequent divisions between and across railway unions can be found.¹³

Nothing illustrates this point better than the almost total absence of reference to Semaun in the magazines, both communist and non-communist, of the post-independence railway unions. A young man at the time of his exile from Indonesia Semaun returned at age 57 from Russia and joined the small *Partai Murba* [Murba Party—Proletarian Party] which had been involved with the Hatta Government in crushing the PKI in the wake of Madiun. Neither is there reference to be found to Tan Malaka, whose role as a radical union activist in opposition to the Dutch was applauded by the VSTP, but whose followers founded the Murba Party.¹⁴ Under the influence of prominent leaders such as Adam Malik and Chaerul Saleh the party was a strong adversary of the PKI until the communists were successful in pressuring Sukarno to ban it in January 1965.¹⁵ The ‘Brief Chronological History of the PKI’, published in *Harian Rakjat* on May 23, 1965 to celebrate the forty fifth anniversary of the party, which made reference amongst others to the VSTP, Sneevliet, Aliarcham, Musso, Achmad Sumadi and Sjarifuddin was silent on both Semaun and Tan Malaka.¹⁶ Thus, the strongest reference point for the communist union—the strongest call to the past—was for the leaders who remained ‘true’. Many of the true had been members of the PPST—*Persatuan Pegawai Spoor dan Tram* [Union of Railway and Tram Workers]. Before 1937, the PPST had been called the *Perhimpunan Beambte Spoor dan Tram* which was the organization formed in July 1927 after the destruction of the VSTP. The name change was more than mere semantics for the word *pegawai* included high and middle-level workers, whereas *beambten* covered the lowest-level workers only. Moreover, the PPST also covered workers in the private railways and was thus, on all measures, a more inclusive organization.¹⁷

Many amongst the leadership of the SBKA union after independence had come through the ranks of the PPST. Young men during the efflorescence of union activity in

¹³ For accounts of the escalation and continuing bitterness arising from the disputes amongst organizations see Hardjono, ‘Gerakan Buruh dimasa Lampau’, *TMP* 3 [July 1950], pp.1-4. *TMP* 4 [August 1950], p.32. *TMP* 6 [October 1954], pp.12-13. See also Ingleson, *In Search of Justice*, passim; and Semaun, ‘An Early Account’, passim.

¹⁴ See Ingleson, *In Search of Justice*, p.259. n.84.

¹⁵ On the life of Tan Malaka see Tan Malaka, *Dari pendjara ke pendjara* [From Jail to Jail] translated, edited and introduced by Helen Jarvis [Ohio University Press: Ohio, 1991], and Benedict R. O’G. Java in *a Time of Revolution: Occupation and Resistance, 1944–1946* [Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1972]. Semaun was born in 1899 and died in Jakarta in 1971. As well as his involvement in the *Murba* Party he became personal adviser to First Minister Djuanda [1958–1962], a member of the State Apparatus, and of the National Planning Council.

¹⁶ The list was provided by the *Lembaga Sedjarah PKI*.

¹⁷ Pringgodigdo, *Sedjarah Pergerakan*, pp.86, 150.

the latter half of the 1920s, it was they who inherited the mantle of union leadership during the 1930s and early 1940s, albeit union activity was more truncated after the exile of many union activists. A photograph of participants at the PPST Congress held in the *Gedung Sobokarti*, Semarang, in 1941, shows them grouped under a banner reading:

Golongan Boeroeh Adalah Tiang Masjarakat Indonesia [Workers are the Backbone of the Indonesian Community]¹⁸

The photograph reveals names familiar in the leadership group of the next two decades. Singgih, later to become General Secretary of the Central Leadership of the union, and a member of the PKI leadership and of its fraction in parliament, Hadisumartono, later a member of the Central Plenary Council of the union and Asmodihardjo a member of the General Committee. All three had been railway workers: Singgih a station master, Hadisumartono a white collar worker in a *bengkel* [workshop], Asmodihardjo a conductor; and all three, by the standards of the time, were well educated.¹⁹ Asmodihardjo died in 1955 aged 59 years. He was much mourned by his comrades in the SBKA.²⁰ Many other members of the PPST went to high-level positions in the post-independence bureaucracy: for example, Samijono to the Ministry of Labour and M. Soedji to head the Traffic Department of the DKA. Still others, such as Abdullah who went to the Head Office of the DKA, remained active board members of the union. Not all PPST members were communists, but the shared travails of union activity under the last years of Dutch rule did provide a sense of common history. It is therefore not surprising that trade unionists from the SBKA often received a sympathetic hearing from high-ranking officials in government departments.

The origins of the PBKA are less easy to distinguish, although it appears to have had its roots in the *Partindo* party's efforts, before it was dissolved in 1936, to organize among drivers, waiters, shops, printers, waterfront, workshops, railway workers etc. in private industry. However this union, called the *Persatuan Buruh Kereta Api Indonesia*—PBKI [United Railway Workers of Indonesia]—also sought to cover government railway workers and, because of its connection to the PNI and *Partindo*, in October 1933 it became a prohibited union for government workers. A name change to the *Sarekat Sekerdja Umum*—SSO [General Union of Workers]—did not prevent the colonial authorities from again prohibiting membership for government workers. In their

¹⁸ *Suara SBKA* 30 [April 1955], pp.7–8.

¹⁹ Keputusan-keputusan Sidang Pusat Pleno ke 2 10-15 Agustus, 1954, *Laporan Umum DPP SBKA kepada Sidang Dewan Pusat Pleno ke 2* [SBKA: Djakarta, 1954], pp.94–95. On their membership in the PPST and educational qualifications see *Orang-Orang Indonesia Terkemoea di Djawa* [Gunseikanbu: Djakarta, 2603 [1943]; Singgih, p.463; Hadisumartono, p.450; Asmodihardjo, p.447.

²⁰ Asmodihardjo was the oldest member of the SBKA Board. He was also a member of the *Dana Hindromartono* Board. *Suara SBKA* [January 1955], p.3.

view the union had “revolutionary characteristics”.²¹ The consequence for the SSO was a weakened organization. Importantly, it meant that railway union activists in the PPST belonged to a much stronger one. On the formation of the *Gabungan Sarekat Sekerdja Partikular Indonesia* [GASPI] in 1941, for example, Hindromartono the founder of the PPST became Deputy Head.²² After 1950 when the SBKA founded its welfare body, the *Dana Hindromartono*, it was clear that the union was drawing on the history of railway workers’ struggles to claim legitimacy for its organization. There were many small associations for railway workers during this period. One such association published the *Siaran HALTOF/Siaran SBKA*. This was an ‘Association of Member’s Savings Fund’ for Indonesians only who, according to the association’s rules, had to have worked for the railways for more than ten years in a permanent position. Too few copies remain to follow any connection with the post-independence SBKA but some names appear which re-appear as letter writers to the post-independence magazines.²³

The formation of the SBKA and PBKA

During the period of the Japanese occupation railway unions came under the same blanket prohibition on assembly as did all other Indonesian unions. Under the administrative control system of the *Jawa Hokokai*, railway, public works, plantations workers etc. were grouped together.²⁴ From 1 March, 1942, the railways were directly under the supervision of the army. From the beginning of June of the same year they were known as the *Rikuyu Sokyoku* [*Djawatan Negeri*] then, later, the *Tetsudo Thai* [*Dinas Militer*]. After the proclamation of independence on the 17 August, 1945, they became the *Djawatan Kereta Api Republik Indonesia*—DKARI—and from January 1, 1950, the DKA.

In Central Java two days after the proclamation of independence two railway employees,²⁵ Soekamsi and Moenadi [who became the head of the Executive Board of the

²¹ Pringgogidgo, *Sedjarah Pergerakan*, pp.147–149.

²² For more on the career of Hindromartono see *Orang-Orang Indonesia*, p.10; Elly Touwen-Bouwsmas, ‘The Indonesian Nationalists and the Japanese ‘Liberation’ of Indonesia: Visions and Reactions’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 27, 1 [March 1996], p.14, and, especially, *Suara SBKA* 30 [April 1955], p.7. Hindromartono was killed in Yogyakarta on December 19, 1948 during the second Dutch ‘Police Action’ against the Republic.

²³ *Siaran/HALTOF* 17 [May 1939], p.19. For example, S.M. Gani.

²⁴ George S. Kanahale, ‘The Japanese Occupation of Indonesia: Prelude to Independence’ [Unpublished PhD thesis, Cornell University: Ithaca, 1967], chapter VII, page. *Jawa Hokokai* was a mass organization created by the Japanese in Java during the occupation. For an account of its role see Shigeru Sato, *War, nationalism and peasants*, pp.20–21.

²⁵ The term used in this source was *pegawai*. However, despite the modern translation of this word it was used throughout the magazines of both unions to denote all workers. Only rarely was *buruh* used separately.

SBKA when the union was founded on March 13, 1946] arranged a meeting of workers to form a committee, the *Puncak Pimpinan DKA, Jawa Tengah* [Central Java Senior Management Committee], to be headed by Soekardan who was to become the deputy head of SBKA. Moenadi and Soekardan were later part of the general committee on worker's wages established by the Republican Government in Yogyakarta. [See Chapter I]. On September 12, the *pemuda* grouped in the *Angkatan Muda Kereta Api* [AMKA] Semarang [Central Java] branch urged that the committee become a *Komite Perjuangan* [Struggle Committee] under the leadership of Parwitokoesoemo, and on September 26 this committee announced that all *pegawai* DKA were from henceforth *Pegawai Republik Indonesia*.²⁶

In Jakarta it was also a youth group, the *Angkatan Pemuda Indonesia* —API [The Indonesian Youth Generation], as part of another action committee “which agitated in Jakarta for a speedy takeover of power from the Japanese”:²⁷ in the first instance of railway installations and railway stations, then of the tramway system. Robert Cribb has concluded that the reason why... “the railways and tramways of the city were the first institutions to be seized by the API” [was because] “[t]ravel was the lifeblood of the city and the idiom of urban warfare in Jakarta was the idiom of controlling travel...”²⁸ And from Hadisutjipto's account of API actions in the city and elsewhere, we learn that railway workers were amongst the “various [other] groups whose contribution in the struggle to achieve a free Indonesia was by no means small”. “For example [he writes] the Railway Workers Group with people such as Legiman Harjono, Asmodihardjo, Tjokropuspito, Suharjono, Zulkifli and others. They were in contact with Mr. Hendromartono[sic], Mr. Samjono and other former union leaders in the colonial period.”²⁹ Hindromartono became adviser to the Tram Worker's Aid Society in Jakarta on August 31, 1945, which was just three days before the railway workers at the Manggarai centre declared the railway system to be ‘*Milik Negara Republik Indonesia*’. A similar declaration was made of the *Perusahaan Tram Kota Jakarta* [Jakarta Municipal

²⁶ *Buku Peringatan*, p.19. Women at the railway offices in Puwokerto founded a section of AMKA on July 7, 1946. Initially federated with *Pesindo—Pemuda Sosialis Indonesia*—it then left that organisation and grouped with the SBKA. *Kereta Api* 21 [July 1946], p.8. Committees such as this supported the more radical nationalist policy of *perjuangan* (struggle). Cf. Cribb, *Gangsters and Revolutionaries*, p.72.

²⁷ Nugroho Notosusanto, *The Japanese Occupation and Indonesian Independence* [Department of Defence and Security Centre for Armed Forces History, 1975], p.36.

²⁸ Robert Cribb, *Gangsters and Revolutionaries*, p.64. This is an account of events concerning railway workers only. More detailed and compelling studies of *pemuda* generally during the revolution are to be found in Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution*. For Jakarta, particularly, see Robert Cribb, *Gangsters and Revolutionaries*. passim.

²⁹ S.J. Hadisutjipto, *Bara dan Njala Revolusi Fisik di Djakarta* [Dinas Museum dan Sedjarah D.C.I. Djakarta: Djakarta, 1971], p.21.

Street Railways].³⁰ On October 5, the Japanese were told that they could not enter offices, stations, workshops or other places of employment connected to the railways.

In Yogyakarta, this announcement met with less resistance from the Japanese than in Semarang, where the young workers of the railways joined with police and the general populace in the ensuing fighting. Among the many victims of the fighting were those defending the Semarang head office. The office reopened on October 20, but with the arrival of the allied army of occupation it was relocated: first to Kedungjati in West Java, then in January of the following year [1946] to Solo [formerly Surakarta] in Central Java. Even at this early and difficult stage of its existence, however, the Republic managed to bring back into service some lines.³¹ The centrality of the railways to the independence struggle, both in the arena of communications and in the ‘hearts and minds’ of the people, was attested to by the large gathering of representatives of all organizations who attended the opening of the Kutarjo—Purworejo line on September 1, 1946.³² It was attested to again when the Central Office of the DKA ordered that in celebration of one year of independence all stations, at 10am, would raise the *Merah Putih* and the Head of each SBKA and AMKA would give a speech. At the same time all trains were to stop for one minute, passengers could not alight, and they and all *pegawai* were to sing ‘Indonesia Raya’.³³ *Kereta Api* reported in November of that year that despite the fighting and “suspicion between workers with opposing views on the struggle”, in the Manggarai and other *gudang* [warehouses] in central Jakarta, and in the Kranji, Depok, Kebayoran, Tangerang and Tanjung Priok centres, the *Merah Putih* was still flying.³⁴

For the PBKA there was a similar pathway of revolutionary involvement, the essential difference being that the union, unlike the SBKA, was formed in Dutch controlled areas. In an article written in 1955 for the PBKA magazine *Obor*, Zulkifli, the founder of the SSKA—*Serikat Sekerja Kereta Api*—the forerunner to the PBKA, outlined the early beginnings of the union.³⁵ At the time of the proclamation of

³⁰ John O Sutter, *Indonesianisasi: Politics in a Changing Economy, 1940-1955* [Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University: Ithaca, 1959], 4 vols. p.293.

³¹ The Gundih—Purwodadi on February 17, 1946 and the Gembongan—Boyolali line on June 17 of the same year. *Buku Peringatan*, p.20. On the rehabilitation of stations and lines during the period of the revolution see Departemen Penerangan, *Kereta Api Indonesia*, ny.

³² From the Minister of Communications, the Bupati, TRI [*Tentara Republik Indonesia*], the PB SBKA [*Pengurus Besar SBKA*—Executive Board], *Perwari*, the PKI, Gasbi [*Gabungan Serikat Serikat Buruh Indonesia*], and from the BPRI. *Buku Peringatan*, p.20. See Iskandar Tedjasukmana, *The Political Character*, pp.18-24 for a discussion of the early formation of workers groups during the period 1945–1950.

³³ *Antara*, 10 September 1946.

³⁴ *Kereta Api* 32 [25 November 1946], p.6.

³⁵ Zulkifli, ‘Apa sebabnja saya mendirikan Serikat Sekerja Kereta Api [SSKA] jang kemudian menjelma jadi Persatuan Buruh Kereta Api’, *Obor: Nomor Kongres PBKA ke IV 24/10-29/10 1955*, pp.4–5.

independence Zulkifli worked for the railways [see Hadisutjipto's naming of Zulkifli above] and his role and that of his comrades was to arrange a 'front' in the *Rikuyu Sokyoku*. As with their SBKA compatriots they were to seize power from the Japanese: at the same time they were to form an AMKA in their region of Purwakarta in West Java. According to Zulkifli this was not a "satisfactory struggle" so they formed an armed forces unit, called TRICA [*Tentara Republik Indonesia Kereta Api*], within the sphere of the DKA.³⁶

At this time Zulkifli was still employed by the DKA. When he received an ultimatum in 1947 to return to work, or be dismissed, he had to choose "whether to continue the struggle in the armed forces or in the field of labour". He chose labour. He writes that he, together with his family, other comrades in the DKA, and people in the general community were imprisoned by the Dutch and threatened that if they did not return to work they would suffer the consequences. They returned to work and were subsequently moved to Bandung after the Dutch army took over the line between Purwakarta and Bandung. In Bandung, Zulkifli and his comrades in the railways in meetings at Zulkifli's house discussed the formation of a worker's organization, similar to that in operation during colonial times, to protect workers.

The first office bearers of the SSKA included Asep Ardi [Head], Paiman, Bunjaimin, Iksan and Yap Yang Tjiang. Amongst those present at the meetings were many of the leadership of the PBKA over the next two decades: B.K.J. Tamboenan, Tarja, Asep Ardi, Soehirman Wiriodinoto, and Eddy Kartasoebarna. Zulkifli was a *treindienstleider*, a worker in the train service section;³⁷ Soehirman, educated at a *Hollandsch Inlandsche School*³⁸ started as a clerk and then progressed to the position of station master. The initial idea was to name the union SBKA but Zulkifli believed "that this would arouse suspicion amongst the Dutch so with the government's permission the SSKA was formed". The SSKA was officially established on May 30, 1948, at a meeting in the *Gedung Concordia*, Bandung. Various guests attended, including Laurens the Railways Administrative Head; Van Vliet who spoke of the founding of unions in Holland and Europe; and representatives from other Indonesian unions such as the PGRI, the *Ikatan Serikat Buruh Indonesia Purwakarta*, and Griët from the Pension Fund. R.H. Koesna Poeradiredja in his capacity as Head of the Provisional Executive Board of the union welcomed the members and guests.³⁹ The union's objective was to be "a *serikat*

³⁶ Zulkifli refers to three 'prominent' *pemuda*—Djohar Noer, Hasan Gajo and Sidik Kertapati—as his comrades. It is most likely that he is referring to the relationship within the broader *pemuda* fight during the revolution as distinct from his personal involvement in the railways through his occupation.

³⁷ Later the position was re-titled Ppka [*Pegawai perusahaan kereta api*]

³⁸ HIS—Dutch medium primary school for the indigenous elite. See *Orang-Orang Indonesia*, p.217.

³⁹ Full name Raden Halley Koesna. PBKA, *Laporan Kerdja 3 Tahun, Nopember 1955 sampai akhir 1958 untuk Kongres ke V* [Vorkink: Bandung], p.1.

sekerja working in particular in the social economic field” and it appears that the Dutch authorities considered it a social economic association rather than a trade union in the commonly accepted sense.⁴⁰ However, as support for the revolution grew, the Dutch clearly considered some of the unionists too active in the political field. In what may be seen as a replay of history they exiled activists away from the Bandung station to other areas under their control: Tamboenan, for example, was sent to Padang in West Sumatra; Moh. Thaher to Cianjur and Tarja to the Inspectorate office. Soetija and Zulkifli remained in Bandung.⁴¹ Anton Lucas has commented on the sending of a unionist from Bandung to Pekalongan in 1945 to help establish a local Railway Workers Union [*Sarekat Sekerja Kereta Api*]. It is likely that this was one of the unions which fused with the SSKA, founded by Zulkifli and his friends, to form the later PBKA [see below].⁴²

Working for the railways

The destruction of railway lines by the Dutch prior to the Japanese occupation, the dismantling and shipping out of lines⁴³ and other materials—to Burma, Thailand and to Japan itself—by the occupation army, and the further destruction of materials during the revolution was a legacy which affected the operation of the railways after the proclamation of independence. In a speech to the SBKA in 1946 the former head of the DKA in Republican-held territory during the revolution, Ir. Djuanda, reminded his audience just what difficult times they were for the operation of the railways. Djuanda spoke of the “flood of passengers” when road travel became too dangerous because of the fighting, and of the lack of trains to accommodate these passengers. He also alluded to the added consequence of the short-supply of high-level Indonesian personnel. For, only after the outbreak of the war in Europe did the Dutch give Indonesians the opportunity to move up and gain greater expertise. And, in spite of the fact that during the Japanese occupation several employees were given the title of ‘Head’ the leadership, except at the lowest-level, remained in Japanese hands.⁴⁴ The short-sighted policies of both the Dutch and Japanese administration towards their Indonesian workers left the Republic without enough trained employees. Figures from the 1955–1959 National Planning Policy show

⁴⁰ *Obor: Nomor Kongres*, p.6.

⁴¹ Zulkifli, ‘Apa sebabnja’, pp.4–5.

⁴² Anton Lucas, *One Soul One Struggle*, pp.200, 264.

⁴³ For example; the lines in Central Java between Kudus—Pecangan, Gembongan—Boyolali, Gundih—Purwodadi, Kutoarjo—Purworejo, and Pekalongan—Wonopringgo. *Buku Peringatan*, p.18.

⁴⁴ Ir. Djuanda, ‘Pidato: Pembangoenan Djawatan Kereta Api’, *Buku Peringatan*, pp.13–15. Djuanda [1911–1963] had a distinguished career as a Cabinet Minister and served after 1959 as First Minister to Sukarno.

the severe shortcomings in the number of sufficiently trained and experienced railway employees at the four upper-levels of the civil service pay scale—the PGPN [*Peraturan Gaji Pegawai Negeri*].⁴⁵ In an attempt to overcome this the Head of the DKA issued a provisional regulation concerning extra cash subsidies based on level of education for skilled workers.⁴⁶

Railway work encompassed both skilled and unskilled positions: from administrative tasks undertaken in offices ranging from central to minor branch ones; skilled and unskilled tasks in the printery; in *inklaring* [banking clearance], as train service attendants in a myriad of jobs, line checkers, telegraph and signals, station masters or station clerks, *mandors* and labourers in the road gangs, or skilled and unskilled jobs in any of the large workshops which were maintained by the railways: at Manggarai, in Jakarta, and in Semarang, Tegal, Yogyakarta, Madiun, Surabaya, Lahat, Padang or Sigli. From 1950 until 1966, the number of permanent workers increased from 49,748 to 82,000. The figures for the intervening years are illuminating.[See Table 4] The substantial increase in employees from 1951 to 1953 clearly represents a ‘pay-back’ to Indonesian workers for their struggles and sacrifices during the revolution. Many of these workers would have moved into low-level positions in the various branch offices of the railways thereby contributing to the ‘bloated bureaucracy’ referred to in Chapter I.

Table 4. Number of Railway Workers

1951	1952	1953	1954	1955	1956	1957	1958
73,839	76,185	76,972	79,052	79,058	78,524	77,779	78,001
1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	
76,515	81,111	82,359	83,088	96,000	83,000	84,000	

Source: Indonesian State Railways, *Statistical Reports for the years 1950–1956: 1956–1960: 1961–1962: 1962–1966.*

Nevertheless, the relationship between the State and railway workers throughout the next two decades was often uneasy. The State had to struggle, first for some control over railway communications, then to rebuild, expand, and at the same time to contain the attendant costs. In this milieu railway workers had to struggle to earn their living and improve their conditions. Workers and unions would not be denied. The part they had played during the revolution was oft cited, and while it was at once a call to unity, and a

⁴⁵ At level VI requiring academic qualifications there were positions for another 182 employees; level V for those with technical school qualifications, or senior high, with practical experience for 480; technical qualifications but no experience 2,044; and graduates of junior high 3,067. R. Soepadmo [Kepala Bagian Traksi Inspeksi 3 DKA], ‘Pidato’, *SBKA Dokumentasi Kongres ke-VI*, 24–31 January 1957, pp.43–48.

⁴⁶ Group IV to receive Rp.100 extra per month; Group V Rp.150; Group VI Rp.300. KDKA [Keputusan DKA] Circulation for Employees No.36/1954. cited in *Laporan Umum SBKA* [1954], p.73.

test of strength, it was nonetheless a genuine call. For both the SBKA and PBKA the business of 'serving' members was made more difficult by the actual work domain in which they operated. The lack of depth of expertise at the top and middle-levels was compounded by the shortage of equipment, widespread fare-evasion by the travelling public, the "hoodlum intimidation of personnel", and allegations of "large-scale withholding of receipts by workers from the company".⁴⁷ There were constant accusations of corruption levelled by all sides against each other. It is little wonder then, that the relationship between the railways and its workers was often fraught with tensions, and that each sought an advantage, or advantages, to ease their loads. To add to these tensions, between 1950 and 1965, the railways underwent several 'reconstructions' influenced in major part by political events at the particular time.

After October 1945, only on the two major islands [Java and Madura] were the gas, electricity and railway enterprises operated by government departments. During the revolution, when the Dutch administration was in control "over most of the coastal and urban areas of Java and Sumatra, the private railways continued to be operated under a state enterprise".⁴⁸ The DKA resumed joint operations in 1950 and those workers who had been employees of the private companies were made temporary employees of the DKA bringing them within the scope of the civil service regulations. Because of the number of companies which had operated railway and tram enterprises the DKA inherited a complex administrative legacy. All of the companies had their own regulations re traffic, finance, pensions, employment or discharge of personnel and other staff matters, as well as engineering and equipment provisions, which required adaptation.⁴⁹

In an attempt to solve some of the administrative difficulties a government regulation of 1953 [PP No.31/1953] made workers from the private railway companies eligible for government pension rights backdated from the beginning of 1950. The regulation, however, did not ensure that from that date workers became civil servants with the attendant benefits.⁵⁰ Thus, implementation of this regulation on pension rights, as well as the 'lifting' of workers to civil service status remained a working condition which both unions agitated for throughout the decade. The other two important reconstructions of the railway operations were the nationalisation of the privately-owned Dutch railway operation, the *Deli Spoorweg Mij* [DSM] of Sumatra, in 1957: and the

⁴⁷ Sutter, *Indonesianisasi*, p.905.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.867.

⁴⁹ Indonesian State Railways, *Statistical Report 1956-1960*, p.3. After 1963, the former DSM region became the North Sumatra Region with its office in Medan, the former North Sumatra Region the Aceh Region with its office in Banda Aceh. There were five other administrative regions: East, Central, West, South Sumatra and North Sumatra.

⁵⁰ Sutter, *Indonesianisasi*, p.903.

functional change to State Enterprise—the *Perusahaan Negara Kereta Api* [PNKA] in 1963. In this year the railways were reported to be “still in a serious state of disrepair.”⁵¹

The DSM was one of two private railway companies handed back to their owners after the Dutch military action of July/August 1947. The other was the *Bataviasche Verkeers Mij. N.V.* operating the tram and bus services in Jakarta. But it was the DSM which was the focus of the most adverse sentiment from the unions, in particular from the SBKA. It appears however that initially, at least on the part of the PKI and its labour arm the SOBSI, there was “relatively little sentiment to nationalize the DSM”.⁵² When, in 1951, a *Masjumi* member of the parliament recommended that the company be either taken over or brought under the control of government Djokosoedjono, the then chairman of SOBSI, PKI member, and President of the SBKA, rejected the proposal on the grounds of the company's abidance with the requirements of the 1948 Labour Law. Soedjono asserted that the DKA, on the other hand, allowed longer working hours than those contained in the Labour Law provisions and, furthermore, its workers did not demand their proper entitlements. “Was it wrong [Soedjono asked rhetorically] if DSM workers...no longer demand the nationalization of the DSM because [we feel] our fortunes would then grow worse”.⁵³

This early SOBSI attitude to the DSM was no doubt influenced by the ideological differences with the *Masjumi*, but it can also be seen as SOBSI seeking to pressure the DKA at this time. For during the 1950s as the railway unions became stronger, a different sentiment towards the DSM emerged. Throughout the publications of the SBKA the company came under constant criticism and was the subject of union strike actions. If at times the DKA suggested costs were too high for it to agree to such worker demands as the addition of more employees to the budget line; higher wages; or the free supply of official uniforms, unions urged the take-over of the DSM and a revoking of the agreement to pay annual compensation to the former owners of the Java lines. For the SBKA the relationship between it and the DKA was, in a very real sense, ‘a trial of strength’.

As early as 1947, the union had attempted to draw a line between its domain and that of the DKA. In a comment on the difficulties being experienced by the general populace with government regulations the SBKA warned; “government [is] only the executive body not the body to make the regulations...in the same way the union must

⁵¹ United States Economic Survey Team to Indonesia, *Indonesia*, p.5.

⁵² Sutter, *Indonesianisasi*, p.904.

⁵³ Djokosoedjono, quoted in Sutter, *Indonesianisasi*, p.905. Soedjono had been an active trade union leader, teacher at a nationalist school and member of *Partindo* during Dutch rule. see Harry A. Poeze, “The PKI-Muda 1936–1942”, *Kabar Seberang* 13/14 [1984], p.162. After the general elections of 1955 he became a member of the PKI faction in parliament and remained a member of the SBKA Governing Board.

become the body which makes the regulations and the DKA the executive body [for only in this way] will the DKA not increase the difficulties of the railway workers and [consequently] will not be opposed".⁵⁴ The union complained times were no different than under the Dutch when unions were considered *noodzakelijk kwaad* [a necessary evil] and given only the information the Dutch considered they needed.⁵⁵

The Structure and growth of the unions—the SBKA

After the achievement of sovereignty the SBKA based its central headquarters in Jakarta and, later, operated out of its own building. The latter was testament to both the energy and commitment of the union. It was also a consequence of post-independence government aid to establish trade unions even though there were many measures throughout these early years, and later, to control that activity; or rather to channel that activity to means which governments thought more appropriate. The early establishment of the SBKA, its SOBSI connection and its own work appear to have given the union a primacy, certainly in membership numbers, which it never lost. Even under extremely difficult conditions during the revolution the union put out publications for its members. A good example was the *Pelita Kereta Api* published by the information section of the Jakarta branch. Unfortunately there are few remaining copies of the magazine, but from those that are left we are able to gather insight into union/worker concerns. *Pelita Kereta Api* was but one of a number of publications for railway workers during the revolutionary years. Outside of Jakarta various regions had their own publications. The *Madjalah AMKA* [*Angkatan Muda Kereta Api*—Young Railway Workers' Branch] in Solo, and the *Pelita Rakjat* in Tegal, for example. Foremost amongst the magazines of this period was *Kereta Api*, the publication of the Central Leadership. After experiencing initial difficulties the magazine was printed three times per month at a subscription cost of Rp.1 per month.⁵⁶ It is from such publications that we learn of the struggles and aspirations of the union and its members.

The desire of the early leadership [Soekardana, often referred to as Kardan was the Head of the SBKA Board and Hadisoemartono, Secretary] to set up proper financial arrangements and membership structure for the union can be found in the request to all branches in 1947 to send to the executive full details of their memberships including name; age; position; base pay; place of work; whether a casual or permanent worker and the number in the worker's family.⁵⁷ The early financial statements of the union reveal

⁵⁴ *Kereta Api* 42/43 [March 1947], p.4.

⁵⁵ *Kereta Api* 26 [August 1946], p.22.

⁵⁶ *Kereta Api* 32 [November 1946].

⁵⁷ *Pelita Kereta Api* 2 [March 1947], p.2.

that the group of branches in the surroundings of Jakarta, around 7,000 members, had a fund balance as of February 2, 1947 of Rp.2,061.37 which included cash and postal savings. By March 15, additional cash reserves increased this balance to Rp.3,643.09.⁵⁸ Income came from member subscriptions; joining fees; borrowings from the DKA for the union's cooperative [Rp.15,000]. Outgoings were to postal savings account; the cooperative; paper for the magazine; travelling money for speakers; stamps; and meeting needs etc. The union also established a provisional *Fonds Kematian* [Death Benefit Fund] through its welfare arm⁵⁹ for the Jakarta branches. This was an attempt to help workers before enough financial funds became available to give cash support. In February, 288 metres of *kain putih* [white cloth] and 300 litres of rice were distributed to the families of 60 members and/or their dependents who had died. Such measures enabled the families to comply with religious burial requirements and with cultural practice demands after the burial.⁶⁰

Unity and the need for workers to be given information about ideology were stressed by the letter writers to *Pelita Kereta Api*. A correspondent from the Manggarai station emphasized the need for every worker to understand how important was their responsibility in the struggle of the Indonesian worker against, not only Dutch imperialism, but also against international capitalism.⁶¹ Yet another bemoaned the “spiritual sickness raging in Indonesia” and warned, “it is only unity, and [once again] unity, which can make the union powerful”.⁶² There were articles also on sport, seen as a “source of noble endeavour” for the worker, and on the difficulties between the young and older workers of the railways. Disputes and misunderstandings over objectives and methods were common between the two,⁶³ not least because union leadership was usually in older hands, although ‘older’ was a relative term given that many within the leadership were men in their late 30s and early 40s. It is evident that there was tension for an article in *Kereta Api* concerning the congress in March, 1947, commented that “the atmosphere was ‘hot’...questions were asked in anger and clearly the members were not

⁵⁸ *Ibid. The Statistical Pocket Book of Indonesia 1957*, p.177, gives an official exchange rate in 1948 (no figures are available for the years 1941–1947) of Rp.2.66/\$US.1.00.

⁵⁹ *Badan Sosial SBKA*, Djakarta Raya. Branches were located at Jatinegara, Depot Jatinegara Pasar, Manggarai Stockroom, City Trams, Gambir, Pasar Senen, Tanah Abang, Jakarta City, Tanjung Priok, Manggarai and the Manggarai Workshop. At this point the Head of the DKA was Soewahjo Soemodilogo, and his Deputy Ir. Mohammad Effendi Saleh.

⁶⁰ *Pelita Kereta Api* 2 [March 1947], p.3.

⁶¹ Toemin, ‘Perjoeangan Buruh’, *Pelita Kereta Api* 2 [March 1947], pp.4–5.

⁶² Letter from Bachtiar of the Jakarta station, *Pelita Kereta Api* 2 [March 1947], p.15.

⁶³ A ‘sore point’ had been the failure of the SBKA to organize a *Lasykar Buruh Kereta Api* [LBKA] with the young workers. See *Kereta Api* 25 [August 1946], p.14 for an explanation by the leadership.

satisfied...the leadership felt insulted...but it is a free country and all must be able to say what is in their hearts".⁶⁴

The need for workers to understand that a quicker and higher level of organizational work could only be achieved through united mass action by all workers, young and old, men and women, was a consistent exhortation of the union until 1965.⁶⁵ In the pages of *Kereta Api* members were reminded that the AMKA was for women as well as men and the SBKA was urged to make efforts to support unity between the two, because "*bersatoe berdiri bertjerai djatoeh*".⁶⁶

Structural financial and membership arrangements, a social economic role and publications to educate and reach the membership were all attempts to build a trade union in the manner of a model more readily recognised in the West; or for that matter the communist bloc from where, on the part of the communist unions, much early inspiration was drawn. From its headquarters out of a railway workshop in Yogyakarta [Lempuyangan] the Board of the SBKA⁶⁷ made constant calls for branches to keep proper records; to confirm membership numbers, and that branch and sub-branch boards not forget the struggle of the workers. Many union and non-union railway workers were killed during these years, either while going about their work or in fighting the Dutch. A special announcement in the union magazine of August 1946 in remembrance of eleven workers killed in battle in the Bandung area stated simply: "Hopefully God will give them their rightful place in the hereafter."⁶⁸

During the revolution the union made tangible efforts to keep the lines of communication between union and workers open and to provide workers with some day-to-day material relief from the pressure. A correspondent to *Kereta Api* stressed the poor conditions in Jakarta at the time.

⁶⁴ *Kereta Api* 42/43 [15–25 March 1947], pp.9–10.

⁶⁵ See speech by the then Head of the SBKA Board, Moenadi, *Kereta Api* 25 [August 1946], p.14. From its establishment the SBKA was intended as a socialist organization. Cf. *Buku Peringatan*, p.24.

⁶⁶ *Buku Peringatan*, pp.16–17. AMKA was affiliated to the 'struggle organization'—Badan Kongres Pemuda Indonesia which had been established on 11 November, 1945. One of the prominent figures in the BKPRI was Supardi. It is unclear whether this was the same Soepardi who was to become a Second General Secretary of the SBKA. On Supardi in the BKPRI, see Ministry of Information, *Political Parties, Armed Groups, Labour Unions and Youth Organizations in Indonesia* [Djakarta, 1950].

⁶⁷ Moenadi [Head], Kardan [Deputy], Hadisoemartono [Secretary], Moedjakir [Second Sec.], Soebardjo [Treasurer], Pamoedji [Second Tres.]. Members: Abdullah, Asmodihardjo, Soekiman, Djadiman, Hardjosoebroto and one regional representative each from the *Balai Besar*, West Java, Central Java and East Java. *Kereta Api* 22 [August 1946], p.4.

⁶⁸ *Kereta Api* 26 [August 1946], pp.22, 25.

'The Struggle of Workers in Jakarta'

Its true many times this information has been given but it isn't a mistake for the general public outside of the city to hear once again about the suffering of their comrades in the 'international city'. [There are] three kinds of suffering; kidnappings or abductions; looting; economic stress. [I] want to emphasise the last because it's getting worse. Workers are defending their department. If there are some who enrich themselves, do not use this as a reason to blame all in general.⁶⁹

At a meeting at Manggarai on October 4, it was decided to begin a food distribution to workers. A new seven member Board was formed to oversee the *Badan Sosial* [Social Body] which was already in operation in Manggarai. In order to "guarantee the orderly working of the new Board" a five member supervisory council was formed.⁷⁰ On the surface this appears to have been an overly bureaucratic structure but it is easy to forget, or to undervalue, the substantial difficulties which were associated with setting up any welfare distribution during the revolution, let alone the actual obtaining of food and clothing. Because the resources of the Board were stretched, and were in any event fairly minimal, cooperation was sought from the DKA to act as a distribution body to the workers. Such was the need and the calls on the union that the Board had to remind members that in the matters of borrowing money to buy food, the obtaining of permission to travel and carry that food, and in the issuing of a free [official] card for those members looking for food to buy, the branches needed to go through the DKA Inspectorate in their area and not through the Board.⁷¹ In the 1950s, and 1960s, when the union had greater resources it displayed more ambivalence to the distribution role of the DKA. This issue, which involved the relationship between the SBKA, DKA and the PBKA, will be examined more fully in the following chapter.

Nevertheless, despite the frustrations and problems experienced by the leadership their perseverance brought success. Railway workers continued to join up and by the end of November, 1946, there were 137 branches or sub-organizations of the SBKA: many of them very small affairs, others with quite substantial memberships. They ranged from the Karanganyar [Central Java] branch with 45 members; Gombong [Central Java] 156; Saketi with 542 and Banten [West Java] 556. It is obvious that the central union had to deal with many branches and sub-branches involved in a 'learning curve' on trade union management. Despite the instructions on how to list [see above] when the centre did receive membership lists some came with the number of members

⁶⁹ *Kereta Api* 25 [August 1946], p.16

⁷⁰ *Kereta Api* 30, 31 [October 1946], p.41. Other branches, for example the Locomotive Depot Branch in Solo, also had provisions for welfare sections within their board structures. This depended on the size of the branch. *Kereta Api* 27, 28, 29 [September 1946], p.27.

⁷¹ *Kereta Api* 27, 28, 29 [September 1946]. np.

only, others only with the names of branch board members.⁷² By mid-March 1947 the union had 172 branches—108 of which had returned their membership lists. The total membership for the branches was 26,846.⁷³ Outside Jakarta, the Madiun workshop with 2,780 members and Jember [East Java] with 1,234 members were amongst the largest branches registered. Within Jakarta, the Manggarai workshop was the largest with 1,800 members, and the numbers in the other Jakarta branches were not insignificant given the struggle and tension in this city. Branch numbers ranged from 566 at the Tanah Abang station, 562 at Jatinegara Depot, 418 at City Trams, 138 at Manggarai stockroom, and 145 at Pasar Senen station.⁷⁴

Example of Branch Structure

Branch Board

Education and Information

Social Board

Margo Saroyo, Culture, Economic Distribution, Sport, Welfare⁷⁵

Branches could be established where 100 or more members could be enrolled. In this way administrative areas of the railways which encompassed large workshops and many stations such as Yogyakarta, for instance, could establish separate branches for different locations. In smaller areas, depots, workshops etc., could be grouped together to make a branch.⁷⁶ The SBKA was an autonomous body in that branches of the union did not pay dues either to the Central or Regional SOBSI branches. Through its Executive Board, however, it was a due-paying member of SOBSI. According to the union the connection was based on friendship and amicable relations which were not necessarily binding. The central organization allowed the branches to offer support to

⁷² *Kereta Api* 32 [November 1946], p.1. *Kereta Api* 30, 31 [October 1946], np. *Kereta Api* 37 [January 1947], p.1.

⁷³ *Kereta Api* 41 [March 1947], p.12. The somewhat imprecise nature of the figures because of the non-return of membership lists, illustrates the difficulty of the actual determination of member numbers. This has been a point often raised in the historiography, particularly by American labour commentators such as Arthur Goldberg. Goldberg has observed that the SBII knew [membership numbers] because it had registered membership. Even in the early days of its formation so to did the SBKA but the obstacles to proper recording were many. See Arthur Goldberg, 'Membership Status of Indonesian Unions', *Free Trade Union News* 6 [June, 1952], p.6. On the difficulties associated with the counting of union members for the plantation unions in Sumatra, see Ann Laura Stoler, *Capitalism and Confrontation*.

⁷⁴ *Kereta Api* 39 [February 1947], p.1. *Kereta Api* 41 [March 1947], p.12.

⁷⁵ *Kereta Api* 37 [January 1947], p.2. 'Margo Saroyo' is a Javanese term meaning the *Bagian Dana Bantuan*—the Funding Department of the Organization. I am indebted to Dr. Rochayah Machali for this information. In this instance the *Margo Saroyo* was the forerunner to the *Dana Hindromartono*. [see Chapter IV].

⁷⁶ *Kereta Api* 42, 43 [March 1947], np.

SOBSI, according to their financial position, if they viewed the matter as important. Such support was generally forthcoming if there was a call to work together as in the distribution of necessities via cooperatives. The amount of financial support to be given to SOBSI regional branches for such efforts was to be undetermined. Members of the union branches could also sit on the local SOBSI boards, but in their own name only. "Under no circumstance was it to be under the name of SBKA or for the SBKA".⁷⁷ In this way, for example, a member of the General Committee of the Union could also be a SOBSI member without appearing to compromise SBKA 'autonomy'.⁷⁸

Although many at the leadership level were communist this did not necessarily mean that the mass of union members were also communist. Therefore, since ideology alone was not the mobilising factor for so many railway workers, in the turbulent politics of the time with the increasing agitation on the part of the communist party it was no doubt wise, if somewhat disingenuous, to seek to demark the SOBSI and the SBKA. Even in the early days of union building the links were firm between the leaderships. At a meeting attended by approximately 2,000 people at the Madiun workshop Alimin, the then leader of the PKI, and Djokosoedjono of the SBKA both spoke. Djokosoedjono reminded the workers that as well as demanding improvements in their own lives they must also think of the interests of the Republic.⁷⁹ The ultimate goal may have been the survival of the Republic, but this did not stop the union pressuring the Republican Government to maintain its earlier economic program and to centralise all production and distribution into one body. This demand, along with others such as the urging of Australian workers to continue the boycott of Dutch ships, and the request to SOBSI to send delegates to the forthcoming International Congress of Young Workers to be held in Warsaw, paralleled the wishes of the SOBSI and PKI. The demands reflected decisions taken at the union's congress in Solo in July 1948,⁸⁰ which was just two months prior to the Madiun conflict, and during the period of the *Front Demokrasi Rakjat* when the Hatta Government was coming under strong criticism from the left.⁸¹

The link between SOBSI and the SBKA became clearer and firmer still when the 1957 Constitution required that twenty cents from each member's subscription was to be

⁷⁷ *Kereta Api* 44 [May 1947], p.1.

⁷⁸ As with Djokosoedjono, Singgih Tirtosoediro was elected in 1956 to the Central Bureau of the SOBSI and also held a parliamentary seat as a communist fraction member. Runturambi was "well known as a close associate of the PKI" and was elected to Parliament in 1955 on the PKI ticket. Tedjasukmana, *The Political Character*, p.101. *Laporan Umum SBKA* [1954], p.94.

⁷⁹ DOBI: 356, 14/6/47, *Rapportage Indonesie* 131.

⁸⁰ DOBI: 675, 3/7/48, *Rapportage Indonesie* 144.

⁸¹ See Olle Tornquist, *Dilemmas of Third World Communism: Destruction of the PKI in Indonesia* [Zed Books: London, 1984], pp.59-67.

'earmarked' for SOBSI.⁸² The SBKA and SOBSI were organizationally linked through the payment of dues. The Constitution was perfectly explicit on the issue: "A member of the SBKA through the organizational basis of membership is a member of SOBSI".⁸³ Even the 'outside' affiliations, as was evident from the more general discussion in Chapter I, illumined the left-wing connection. The TUI at its 1955 Vienna administrative meeting recorded that "we are in frequent correspondence with railway workers, dockers and seamen's unions [in Indonesia] and links have improved greatly".⁸⁴ While we may conclude that many of the less educated railway workers did not fully comprehend the left-wing links,⁸⁵ what we cannot do is be dismissive of the union's work because of these links.

The 1957 Constitution of the SBKA declared that the union was non-party, and would struggle and defend the rights of all railway workers who joined the union voluntarily, without there being a difference for men and women, ethnicity, religion or political belief. In 1956, six women held positions within the union's various councils and branches. Three women were office bearers in the Jakarta Manggarai workshop, one in the East Java Regional Council, two in the South Sumatra Regional Council and one in the Treasury section of the West Java Regional Council.⁸⁶ The union had a four group flat rate subscription system based on a percentage of a worker's wage. Joining Fees [*Uang Pangkal*] and membership subscriptions varied according to a worker's direct link with the departments and businesses of the railways, or whether they worked for the DSM. If workers were not directly paid by a department or railway business they paid a flat fee rather than a percentage of their wage.

For example, Group I members, defined as all workers with a position in the departments or businesses of the railways who were either permanent, temporary,

⁸² SBKA *Peraturan Dasar* 1957.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ TUI, Administrative Committee Meeting 9–11 March Vienna, 1955. *SUA File, 183/21/8*. Tuk Subianto, the head of the SBPP, was also the TUI Administrative Committee member for Indonesia. The report of the 1954 SBKA congress noted that the relationship with the TUI needed to be developed and more efforts were to be made to this end. After consideration the DPP decided to contribute to the cost of Subianto's work for the TUI. *Laporan Umum SBKA* [1954], p.24.

⁸⁵ Interviews conducted by Dennis Cohen in the early 1970s with workers in a PNKA *asrama* in Jakarta confirm this point. see Dennis Cohen, "Poverty and Development in Jakarta" [Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin: Madison, 1975], Chapter 3.

⁸⁶ In Manggarai: Nj. Dasmi, Nj. Hadidjah, Nj. Samiten. In East Java: Nj. Sutirah. South Sumatra: Nj. Amijati. West Java: Nj. Sutrisno Djuwarijah. For a broader discussion of women in Indonesian trade unions see the case study on women workers. Tedjasukmana has pointed out [that] although the constitutions of the largest affiliated unions including the SBKA; Sarbupri [*Sarikat Buruh Perkebunan Republik Indonesia*—Union of Plantation Workers], SBG, SBPP, PERBUM, SBIM and most of the others "guarantee[d] that the SOBSI and its affiliates [were] independent" they were not non-party. He writes [that] "communists were...the driving forces in the formation and/or reorganization of the unions affiliated with [the SOBSI]". Tedjasukmana, *The Political Character*, pp.96–97, 94.

monthly, or casual, subscribed one per cent from their base wage and paid the joining fee once only.⁸⁷ In the first few years of the decade the difference in wording between the 'subscriptions' of the SBKA and the 'deductions' of the PBKA was more than mere semantics. The fact that the DKA automatically deducted dues via the pay-roll for the PBKA was a constant source of irritation and another reason for the bitter, and often intemperate, criticism levelled at the union by the SBKA. Later, the SBKA availed itself of this more certain method of dues payment but underwent a lot of 'soul-searching' over the matter. In its 1954 Report the union concluded:

In principle it would be better if members dues were to be paid directly by the member without interference of another person especially from an employer. However, at this moment the organizational apparatus is not able to abide by that principle so the DPP believes for all its defects [the system] still needs to be used.⁸⁸

The union continued to avail itself of the opportunity, however, remarking that pay-roll deductions were a victory from the struggles of the union and not a 'gift' from the DKA. It continually emphasized the difference between the voluntary nature of SBKA deductions via the pay-roll and the automatic deductions made by the DKA on behalf of the PBKA.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, thanks to the facility available through the DKA for the taking of membership payments, the SBKA was able to achieve a 75 per cent registration of members. In 1956, SOBSI reported that the SBKA was one of the few unions in its federation which could achieve more than thirty per cent of paid-up members, as opposed to nominal members.⁹⁰

—the PBKA

Eight years on from its modest beginnings in the house of Zulkifli—a four by four metre space—the PBKA, like the SBKA, had progressed to ownership of its own headquarters. The formation of the union was no less difficult nor less illustrious [if somewhat later] than that of the SBKA. The PBKA was formed from the fusion of the SSKA and a number of railway and tram workers unions in Central and East Java on March 17, 1949.⁹¹ The SBKA in South Sumatra then fused with the PBKA in the

⁸⁷ *SBKA Peraturan Dasar 1957*.

⁸⁸ *Laporan Umum SBKA [1954]*, p.38.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.38–39.

⁹⁰ SOBSI, *Mengatasi Keuangan Dalam Serikat Buruh* [Diterbitkan oleh Badan Penerbitan Dewan Nasional SOBSI: Djakarta, 1956], p.10.

⁹¹ *PBKA Anggaran Dasar 1952: Mukaddimah*. There does appear to be some dispute about this date in the literature. *TMP* 12 [April 1955], pp.19–20 gives a broad date of 1947 while elsewhere May 8, 1948 is given.

following November, and in 1952, the PBKA/Deli union was incorporated into the main union.⁹² The actual number of unions which fused is unclear, as are the early ideological leanings of some, for all expressed objectives of improving the fate of railway workers and of unity for a more prosperous future for the nation. Others, such as the PBST [*Persatuan Buruh Spoor dan Tram*], while affirming “united we stand divided we fall...our aim is to work together [without] difference between nationality, position, rank or language”, affirmed at the same time their opposition to political or communist involvement in their union.⁹³ The Surabaya based PBST was the largest union to amalgamate with the SSKA. It was headed by Drs. I. Iskandar and after the formation of the PBKA, Iskandar and his staff at the PBST became the East Java Consulate of the PBKA.⁹⁴

From the beginning the PBKA placed an emphasis on unity, and on a democratic, non-sectarian, non-political base for membership. In 1949, the WFTU in support of SOBSI and the SBKA made clear its displeasure about the formation of the new union. In a resolution from the 1949 Trade Union Conference in Beijing, it pronounced itself “...against the attempts to set up a yellow trade union movement under the leadership of Husuma Paradiredja [sic] who is a Hatta-puppet”.⁹⁵ In 1950, in spite of such criticism the PBKA and the SBKA appeared to have reached an agreement on the fusion of the two unions. This was announced in *Pedoman* in April, and again in June by Djokosoedjono to the SBKA conference in Semarang.⁹⁶ By the end of December *Pedoman* reported on “upheaval” in the proposed amalgamation. The root of this upheaval was the refusal by some of the PBKA leadership to join with the SBKA because that meant alignment with SOBSI.⁹⁷

Discussions over the proposed amalgamation began at least a year before the announcement of the failure to reach agreement. During this time there had evidently been a leadership crisis within the PBKA. Although the actual nature of the allegations is

⁹² *PBKA Anggaran Dasar 1952: Mukaddimah.*

⁹³ See ‘Notulen dari rapat anggota PBST tanggal 25/5/48 di Gedung Stadtuin in Surabaya, *De Werker* 24 [June 1948], p.7. The list of office bearers of this union confirms its aims. The head of the union was Darmokoesoemo and other office bearers were Soetedjo, Kamaludin, Soetomo, JG Simon, Ong Hong Hien, JW Helusela and Hoenggar. PJ Van Houyduk was designated ‘adviser’.

⁹⁴ In the absence of other candidates, Sumitro Reksodiputro and A. Zaenal Abidin were asked to be provisional joint Deputy Heads of the newly constituted union. PBKA, *Laporan Kerdja 3 Tahun*, p.5.

⁹⁵ WFTU, *Working Class in the Struggle for National Liberation. Reports and Resolutions of Trade Union Conference of Asia and Australasian Countries, November–December Peking 1949* [Bombay, 1950], p.103.

⁹⁶ *Pedoman* [28 April 1950]. *Pedoman* [28 June 1950].

⁹⁷ *Pedoman* [26 December 1951].

unclear, they centred on an accusation by the newspaper, *de Waarheid*, concerning Poeradiredja's role in the NICA. After the PBKA took two sessions to discuss the allegations Poeradiredja decided to test a motion of support for himself. The Board of the union announced that it could not find any substantiation of the accusation, which remained unspecified, but could only find proof that Poeradiredja was dismissed from his position as a NICA official on February 1, 1946. Therefore, he was to stay as union head. For its part the BPSS [*Badan Pusat Serikat Sekerja*—Central Body for Unions] which was also headed by Poeradiredja, announced that after two sessions it had not yet made a firm decision on the matter. Six days later, on February 14, the PBKA announced that Mr. Koesna Poeradiredja was at the moment “non-active” and would return when his duties as Head of the Ministry of Justice for Pasundan were finished. It was expected that this would be in approximately four months.⁹⁸ Poeradiredja subsequently returned to his position with the PBKA and it was then that he became part of the three man ‘directorate’ charged with taking part in the amalgamation discussions with the SBKA, on the condition that if fusion was achieved, the new union would not enter a federation.⁹⁹ It was this that effectively blocked the creation of a single union for railway workers.

The BPSS was the forerunner to the KBSI. Poeradiredja and Yap Tjwan Bing in their capacity as SSKA board members were involved in the founding of the BPSS in Bandung.¹⁰⁰ The BPSS was then one of the organizations to come together with the intention of establishing a “counter organization” to the SOBSI, which was said to have been infiltrated by “hierarchical imperialists” through the involvement of Setiadjit and Harjono.¹⁰¹ Initially the BPSS had taken on the role of an independent union: to demand wage increases, lunch provisions and free cooperative distribution. In 1948, its role

⁹⁸ *Pedoman* [14 February 1950].

⁹⁹ *Pedoman* [26 December 1951].

¹⁰⁰ Drs. Yap Tjwan Bing was a member of the PPKI [*Panitia Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia*]. He was also a Vice President of the *Persatuan Tionghoa* which had been founded May 23, 1943. For the work of this committee see Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution*, pp.62–64. Poeradiredja was a “leading personality” in the *Partai Kebangsaan Indonesia* [Parki], the post-war incarnation of *Pagujuban Pasundan* [Pasundan Association], established in 1914 under the leadership of R. Otto Kusumah Subrata. See Ministry of Information, *Political Parties, Armed Groups, Labour Unions and Youth Organizations in Indonesia*.

¹⁰¹ See Maklumat Gasbri [*Gabungan Sarekat Buruh Revolusioner Indonesia*] Solo 1 Mei 1948. [The signature on the announcement is unclear, possibly Soetedjo? The announcement gave the reasons for the re-establishing of GASBI [*Gabungan Serikat Buruh Indonesia*] with the name of Gasbri. *Arsip Kementerian Penerangan 1945–1949 Buku II, No.418*. SOBSI had been formed on 29 November, 1946, from the fusion of GASBI and GSBV [*Gabungan Serikat Vertikal Indonesia*] under Alimin and Harjono. Accounts of the break-up and reformation of the groups, and the role of Sjamsu Harja Udaja—the Executive Leader of Gasbri—in the ‘difficulties’ are to be found in Colin Brown, ‘The Politics of Trade Union Formation’, and S.K. Trimurti, *Hubungan Pergerakan Buruh*. Sjamsu Harja Udaja was a member of Surabaya’s *Putera* staff and a representative of the BBI in that city. See William H. Frederick, *Visions and Heat*, p.172. fn.12. p.269. fn.32.

changed to that of a federation [group] and from then on it became a contact body working to give advice and to offer directions if needed. In 1949, the same year as the formation of the PBKA, Poeradiredja and Yap Tjwan Bing formed the PSOSBI [*Pusat Sementara Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia*—Provisional Central Organization for All Indonesian Workers] with membership coming from the BPSS, GABSU, Menado, Makassar and several unions in Jakarta.¹⁰²

In 1951, in a surprise announcement but one revealing of the conflict and tensions between individual members, the PBKA said it was withdrawing from the BPSS because of differences in policy. At this time PBKA decisions were being taken by the 'directoriate', Poeradiredja, A. Muchtar and Hiram Wiriodinoto. *Sikap* reported that because the decision was not taken at a PBKA congress the withdrawal was "not proper", and it hoped that this would not carry "dire consequences" for the union and mean its destruction. Possibly [it asked] they [unnamed] wish the third federation to fail? Such comment was redolent of a question often heard in Indonesia at the time, and one often used by the SBKA: *ada udang dibalik batu* [Isn't there something behind it?]. The KBSI, the federation which *Sikap* was referring to, was finally established on 12 May 1953—with Koesnan of the PNI and Poeradiredja as General and First Head respectively.¹⁰³ Given the conflict and tensions amongst individuals in the founding groups, it was not surprising that there was a split in the ranks of the KBSI in less than a year.

Therefore, we can safely assume that through its membership in the KBSI, it was, in fact, the "core of the federation",¹⁰⁴ the PBKA was not clear of party political influences. After unions aligned with the PNI split from the federation in 1953/54 members of the PSI became more influential and had greater freedom of action in the KBSI. Tedjasukmana gives an account of the split in the KBSI and he argues that socialists "needed to be careful of some KBSI member's resentment against the intrigues of political parties in their federation".¹⁰⁵ It is important to remember [as has been noted in Chapter I] that Tedjasukmana was himself head of the *Partai Buruh* and therefore part of the 'intrigues' within and across unions and their federations. In 1952, when Tedjasukmana was Minister of Labour, Poeradiredja held a position as his Adviser and

¹⁰² *TMP* 10 [February 1954], p.15.

¹⁰³ See *Sikap* 27 [21 July 1951] pp.1–2 and *Sikap* 19 [18 May 1953] p.4, and Tedjasukmana, *The Political Character*, p.94. '*ada udang dibalik batu*' literally translated means "There is a shrimp behind the stone", i.e., something hidden.

¹⁰⁴ US Department of Labor, *Directory of Labor Organisations 1958*, Chapter. 17, p.2.

¹⁰⁵ Tedjasukmana, *The Political Character*, p.94. Goldberg has argued that the *Partai Buruh* [under Tedjasukmana] "consciously exploited its control of the strategic Labor Ministry to gather as many organizations under its aegis as possible". Arthur Goldberg, "Tasks Ahead for Free Trade Unions in Indonesia", *Free Trade Union News* 2 [July 1952], p.2.

travelled to the United States in that capacity.¹⁰⁶ As Poeradiredja was not a member of the PSI, and given the association between himself and Tedjasukmana, the reference to “member’s resentment” was most possibly to him. Educated in Holland and a lawyer by profession, he was a young man of 37 when he returned to Indonesia after the finish of the war. It was during this time he began his union involvement. But his position as the head of the PBKA, his involvement in the Pasundan administration, his connection with Tedjasukmana, and from 1956 his leadership of the KBSI, made him an prime target of the SBKA. For this he was often, and dismissively, the focus of the ire of the SBKA. “Koesna Poeradiredja or, Dr. Koesna, returned from Holland”, and ‘Emir Poeradiredja’,¹⁰⁷ were throwaway lines in the speeches of the SBKA leadership and in the pages of the union's major publication, the *Suara SBKA*.

The wording of the 1952 Constitution of the PBKA was undoubtedly influenced by the events surrounding the failure of the fusion, and the tension this caused between the two unions and amongst its own members. The introduction was explicit: “only unity can help workers improve their fate and raise their standard of living. Religion, gender and/or political affiliation are not to be a hindrance to that unity...[nor can] religion, gender and/or political affiliation be used as a condition for unity”.¹⁰⁸ In an explanation of the initial PBKA involvement with the SBKA, Poeradiredja, in a speech to the 1955 congress said:

[It] was with feelings of responsibility and a pure heart that the PBKA took the decision to unite with the SBKA at that time...however it then become clear that the attitudes and means of the SBKA to organize was not in line with the spirit of our comrades in the PBKA. [Nonetheless we] took the decision to struggle for the sake of all railway workers and to make efforts to unite all railway workers under the banner of the PBKA...to struggle for ourselves, for workers, for society in general [and] develop feelings of social responsibility to ourselves, our comrades, for the homeland.¹⁰⁹

According to Poeradiredja, the philosophy behind his union was one which could be accepted by all groups, all aliran, all religions except [my emphasis] by groups and aliran which rejected religion.¹¹⁰ At the leadership level this was the dividing line

¹⁰⁶ See PBKA, *Laporan Kerdja 3 Tahun*.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Emir’ was an Arabic word used to denote an Arabic trader. Here the connotation was someone with a sense of himself as a *majikan*, or *Tuan Besar* —meaning ‘bossman’. This title was constantly used in the column ‘*Ming Bihun*’ [meaning the lower-level people; the little people in society]. The use of *Emir* for Poeradiredja can be seen as a deliberate and sarcastic means to contrast the little people and their needs.

¹⁰⁸ PBKA *Anggaran Dasar 1952: Mukaddimah*.

¹⁰⁹ *Obor: Nomor Kongres*, p.6.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*.

between the two unions. At the ordinary, less educated member level, as an interview with an informant [see below] makes clear, this line was less finely drawn. In the minds of the PBKA leadership, however, to identify those who “rejected religion” was to identify the SBKA. The consequence of this ideological split between the two leadership bodies was continuing and bitter rivalry for the expansion of their membership bases from amongst the railway workers.¹¹¹ Writing in 1952, the American labour commentator, Arthur Goldberg, called Poeradiredja one of the “outstanding leaders of the independent single unions” in Indonesia.¹¹² He added that amongst the leaders of the independent trade unions “too many on the non-SOBSI side have been recruited from the political parties, or from the ranks of middle-class professionals such as lawyers”.¹¹³

Tedjasukmana has also written in praise of Poeradiredja:

[Poadiredja] is a devout trade-unionist who has done everything to keep his federation out of party politics [he] watches with dismay the balkanization of the Indonesian trade union movement by political parties [but despite Poeradiredja's attempts] his success has been somewhat checked by the activities of the PSI elements in the [KBSI] and in many of the affiliated unions.¹¹⁴

The counter-claim of the SBKA against accusations of communist connections was always to point to the PSI influences in both the KBSI/PBKA and to the ‘distance’, meaning the non-railway worker credentials of some of the leadership, especially Poeradiredja, between the leadership and the workers.

There would appear to have been truth on both sides. The Poeradiredja led PBKA was, as some commentators have asserted, an important union and the efforts of both unions in the ‘social service department’ will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. What maybe disputed is whether the PBKA was, as Arthur Goldberg has claimed, the most important of the two railway workers’ unions.¹¹⁵ Such a

¹¹¹ There was also a SOBRI affiliated union, the *Ikatan Buruh Kereta Api*—IBKA, under the leadership of Sjamsu Harja Udaja who was at the same time the General Secretary of SOBRI. [The SOBRI labour federation had been founded in 1951 under the Partai Murba]. However, the IBKA had a small membership base [around 3,000] and minor influence comparative to the larger unions. On December 16, 1956 another union, the *Kesatuan Buruh Kereta Api*—KBKA, was formed. Its membership was also small.

¹¹² Goldberg, ‘Tasks Ahead’, p.2. Goldberg also cites the role of Jans and Sukardjo of the Seamen's Union. For more on this union see chapters IV and V on the seamen and waterfront unions. At this time Goldberg was in Indonesia as the representative for the Committee of American Federation of Free Trade Unions. The Free Trade Union News was a publication of the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations]. Goldberg was later to become the Secretary of the Bureau of International Affairs in the United States Department of Labor.

¹¹³ Goldberg, ‘Tasks Ahead’, p.8.

¹¹⁴ Tedjasukmana, *The Political Character*, p.103.

¹¹⁵ Goldberg, ‘Membership Status’, p.6.

judgement is not meant to detract from the work of the PBKA. As early as May, 1949, it had formed an insurance fund, the *Jajasan Fonds Ketjelakaan Pegawai Kereta Api—JFKPKA*—for its members. As the union expanded there was increasing commitment to serving the social economic needs of its members through the operation of a loan fund, housing aid, a cooperative for the distribution of food and clothing, and a sickness and death benefit insurance fund for members.¹¹⁶ Rather, it is meant to highlight the ideological influences behind Goldberg's viewpoint. His assessment of the work of the PBKA was correct. However, Goldberg's concern over the future of trade unionism in Indonesia, and his desire to see those forces opposing communism triumphant, led him to a concentration on the very good work of the PBKA, but not on spotlighting the similar work of the SBKA.

The PBKA was a national union, with a somewhat analogous bureaucratic structure to that of the SBKA, but without as many members, or as many branches. Nonetheless, by all measures it was a successful union, for like the SBKA it had a number of paid union workers.¹¹⁷ Based in Bandung at Jalan Wastukentjana, in 1955 it had 80 branches with a total membership of approximately 18,000.¹¹⁸ Amongst the Executive Board and office bearers of 1958 there were many who had been associated with the establishment of the union. Poeradiredja [Chairman]; Asep Ardi [General Secretary]; Udiono [Secretary Economic Affairs]; Omon [Secretary Employee Affairs]; Tarja [Secretary of Finance]; Sudarsono [Educational Affairs]; Rd. Santoso [Secretary Information], and B.J.K. Tamboenan [Organizational Secretary] and Zulkifli and Paiman. Asep Ardi, Tarja, Santoso, Sudarsono and Tamboenan were all members of the PSI: Poeradiredja, Asep Ardi and Dalimi were members of the KBSI.¹¹⁹ By 1963, a deeper bureaucratic structure was in place: ten Executive Board members; three Consuls for each of the administrative regions in Java; two for Sumatra one for Greater Jakarta, and ten Plenary Board members.¹²⁰

The PBKA identified itself as a “democratic socialist” union. Article 4 [2,3,4,] of its constitution, for instance, affirmed that every worker who undertook the same work had the right to the same treatment and working conditions: to just wages, just conditions,

¹¹⁶ See PBKA, *Laporan Kerdja 3 Tahun*.

¹¹⁷ Hawkins has pointed out that the non-communist unions generally had “one or possibly two paid union workers” in comparison to the SOBSI aligned unions. The PBKA was an exception to this because of its ability to have member contribution deducted via the DKA pay roll. See Hawkins, ‘Indonesia’, p.99.

¹¹⁸ *TMP* 6 [October 1955], p.47.

¹¹⁹ See US Department of Labor, *Directory of Labor Organizations 1958*, and Tedjasukmana, *The Political Character*, p.104.

¹²⁰ *Pembina* [June 1963], p.29.

and the right to choose their work. In relation to social security for old-age, widowhood, the care of orphans, and to the stopping of unemployment, an interesting change in wording appeared in the 1955 constitution. Whereas the 1952 constitution had referred to the *Penguasa* as the responsible authority, in other words the employer, the 1955 rules used, instead, the word *Pemerintah*.¹²¹ The change in wording was a recognition that the DKA and government were one and the same; the employer. It may be argued that the SBKA had more difficulty coming to terms with this fact of life.

Membership in the PBKA was divided into three categories: *anggota biasa* [ordinary membership] open to railway workers who were citizens of Indonesia with no regard to religion, gender, rank and political affiliation: *anggota penderma* [donors] who were not included as ordinary members but who supported the union morally and materially: *anggota terhormat* [honorary] members who were determined by the Union Congress.¹²² Poeradiredja, as a non-railway worker, had the status of *anggota terhormat*. [In 1963, in recognition of his fifteen years service for the union he was made *anggota biasa*].¹²³ Branches of the union were to have twenty five or more members with the following scale of dues: ordinary members one and a half per cent from their base wage—the lowest payment being Rp.1.75 and the highest Rp.15.00. The joining fee, to be paid once only for ordinary members [as with the SBKA], was Rp.1. As well, a percentage of the wage was deducted for the *perjuangan* [fighting] and development funds. Such deductions represented a flat dues structure where the lowest and highest paid workers subscribed the same percentage of their wage or salary. Donors paid no less than Rp.60 per annum thereby providing both an extra source of funds, and of membership numbers. In 1955 pensioned railway workers were added to the list of those eligible for membership.¹²⁴

The general report of the SBKA congress in 1954 had commented on the growth achieved by that union because pensioned, daily, and *pachter* workers had been permitted to join as ordinary members.¹²⁵ A more broad definition of just who constituted a railway worker through flexible membership categories clearly enabled both unions to widen their membership bases.¹²⁶

¹²¹ *PBKA Anggaran Dasar 1952. PBKA Anggaran Rumah Tangga 1955.*

¹²² *PBKA Anggaran Dasar dan Anggaran Rumah Tangga 1952.*

¹²³ *Pembina* [June 1963].

¹²⁴ *PBKA Anggaran Dasar dan Anggaran Rumah Tangga 1955.*

¹²⁵ *Laporan Umum SBKA* [1954], p.19. *Pachter* is a Dutch word meaning rent or hire. Its use in the report had the sense of workers who were not permanent but who were hired through a contract basis.

¹²⁶ Cf. Hasibuan, "Political Unionism", p.93.

The PBKA had similar concerns to those of the SBKA about the functioning of its branches. The Fourth Congress in 1955 was critical of their lack of branch solidarity, and also expressed doubts about their long-term viability.¹²⁷ Therefore, like the SBKA the PBKA also attempted to reach its membership through publications, albeit through a less variable number. In 1961 the print run of *Pembina*, the PBKA magazine, was approximately 25,000: a substantial run for the size of the union. Perusal of the contents of the available copies: English lessons, cultural essays and preparation exams for promotion, for instance, points to a readership in the skilled worker category. Articles on trade union membership and the duties of union members, and crossword puzzles with questions on the SBKA reminded workers just where their loyalties lay.¹²⁸

Through its attempts to educate members in the function of trade unions the PBKA was working towards the development of a greater mass membership. To be a truly viable democratic organization, it argued, “a union must have the support of members and a broad base...it is not for a few but for all”.¹²⁹ In a series of article in *Pembina* it sought to encourage its own cadre to attend meetings by suggesting that “comradeship” would flow from attendance, because others [other than family, friends or neighbours] would listen to problems and offer advice. New ways could thus be found to solve a problem. Members were exhorted to be of “noble character”, conscious of their own position as a worker and as a citizen of Indonesia,¹³⁰ and to remember that trade union responsibility was two-way: trade union to its members and members to their trade union and other members.¹³¹

There were obvious parallels between the magazines of the two unions. The SBKA, through the pages of *Suara SBKA*, also exhorted its members to be ‘responsible’; to pay their dues and their action fund money; to read, be involved in, and broaden the circulation of SBKA and SOBSI publications. It also published short stories designed to show that women could be instrumental in getting their fathers/husbands to join the ‘right’ union.¹³² To further publicise its work the union decided in 1954 to send

¹²⁷ Laporan Singkat Pengurus Besar pada Kongres ke IV 1955, *Obor: Nomor Kongres*, p.15.

¹²⁸ *Pembina* 1/2 [1961].

¹²⁹ ‘Pendidikan dan Pengetahuan Dasar dalam Serikat Buruh’ [Education and Basic Knowledge in Trade Unions], *Pembina* 1/2 [1961], p.13.

¹³⁰ *Pembina* 5/6 [1961], pp.28–29.

¹³¹ *Pembina* 1/2 [1961], p.13.

¹³² See the short story ‘*Kapok*’ [To Learn One’s Lesson] *Suara SBKA* [December 1954], pp.31–33. ‘*Kapok*’ tells the story of Rani, whose boyfriend works for the labour activists against the DSM. Rani’s father, on the other hand, is one of the workers who condemns the activists and sides with the company in return for promotion and money. The brutality and selfishness of Rani’s father, who does not believe in supporting other railway workers, causes Rani and her mother suffering.

free copies of the *Suara SBKA* to regional branches where there were railway workers who had not yet joined the union for:

press and propaganda are tools to mobilize, organize, and educate the mass of the labour movement. They are crucial in getting results...and needed in countries where oppression of labour's rights and democracy are still used by the Government as in Indonesia.¹³³

Another parallel was that both were used for affirmation and/or criticism of various government regulations and policies. And both unions, especially during the years of Guided Democracy, used their 'affirmations' as an opportunity to warn both explicitly and implicitly against the other. For instance, a 1961 issue of *Pembina* declared that

the Guidelines for Development are correct for a just and prosperous society [however] workers have a special responsibility for state development, they cannot become instruments for one political stream either inside or outside the country.¹³⁴

Through such announcements, and by other means, the two unions worked constantly to undermine each other. After its fifth congress the PBKA announced its agreement with the formation of OPPI [*Organisasi Persatuan Pekeraja Indonesia*], a proposal put forward by the Minister of Labour, Asem Erningpradja.¹³⁵ The SBKA saw this as yet another attempt to counter its power and draw workers away from the communist union. For its part, the SBKA continued to press the accusation of the anti-unity actions of the leaders of the PBKA. The union stressed constantly that there were two types of unity of action required for successful trade union activity: that emanating from the mass and that involving other unions. "Never [it complained] has Koesna supported the demands of SBKA for better conditions of railway workers, in fact, [he] has acted as a saboteur".¹³⁶ Nonetheless, the SBKA was always careful to separate criticism of leaders whom it contended "had influence only in some top groups already with a good social position", from support for PBKA workers, who were "not fully under the influence [of the leaders] and who choose to participate in meetings and actions arranged by the [SBKA]".¹³⁷ Rarely did the SBKA miss an opportunity, either through

¹³³ *Laporan Umum SBKA* [1954], p.35.

¹³⁴ *Pembina* 1/2 [1961], p.4.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* The Fifth Congress was held in Bandung in 1959. On the formation of OPPI and the PKI's rejection of the proposal, see David Reeve, *Golkar of Indonesia: An Alternative to the Party System* [Oxford University Press: Singapore, 1985], pp.170-171.

¹³⁶ *Suara SBKA* [February 1955], pp.33-34.

¹³⁷ *Laporan Umum SBKA* [1954], p.24.

broadcasts, publications, speeches and meetings to warn its own members, and those of the PBKA, of the 'non-voluntary' nature of PBKA membership and/or of the 'terror' of the KWKA/BSP, the social support bodies of the PBKA.¹³⁸

Even in the heyday of member mobilisation trade union building remained a difficult task. There was a porousness of membership. To a large extent, in the early years of the trade unions, this porousness was a consequence of the fighting and difficulties in communications during the revolution. Later, regional rebellions also interfered with communication with branches and workers. But there were other factors—multiple union membership and doubts expressed by workers about the value of joining trade unions—which were additional problems to overcome. It appears that these last mentioned factors were sometimes linked to the level of skill of a worker, and to their level of satisfaction with their work.

A former train cleaner on the railways recalls overlapping membership amongst the workers he knew. In 1958, his wage as a cleaner was Rp.75 per month with an additional Rp.1.65 per hour for overtime work, and he never had "time or money for entertainment". He also recalls that he and his fellow workers used to buy and then on-sell rice to the restaurant sections on the trains in order to earn additional income for he and his family to survive. He knew that this was both an illegal and dangerous act, for if he was caught he would spend time in a cell in Cirebon or Purwokerto. Conversely, another informant, who was a graduate of STM—*Sekolah Teknik Menengah* [Technical Middle School]—started as a junior clerk in the diesel department and rose to become an *ahli diesel* [diesel expert]. By the 1960s, he earned Rp.297 per month and received housing and other benefits. He did not join a union although he recalls many workers did.¹³⁹

Conclusion

The success of the SBKA as a mass organization was rooted in a strong bureaucratic structure. In 1957, Singgih reported to the Sixth Congress that the union had 556 sub-branches, 129 branches and six regional organizations with approximately 67,000 members.¹⁴⁰ It had worked from the base up to draw members into the union, and it is fair judgement that the union had conquered many of the structural problems

¹³⁸ See, for example, *ibid*, pp.21, 24, 25. This issue will be discussed more fully in Chapter III.

¹³⁹ Interview August 1995, Jakarta. The official exchange rate in 1958 was approximately Rp.11.47/\$US1.00.

¹⁴⁰ SBKA, *Dokumentasi Kongres ke-VI Serikat Buruh Kereta Api [SBKA], Bandung 24-31 Djanuari 1957*, pp.11-15. In 1957, the Executive Board of the union, the DPP, had 43 members and the Central Leadership Board 9 members: Singgih, Soepardi, Mansjur Lubis, Achadijat, Subakir HS, Moh. Rawi, Utojo, Wakidjan and Rono Sudarmo. *SBKA Peraturan Dasar 1957*.

mentioned in its 1954 Report,¹⁴¹ and become better organized, disciplined and responsive to worker's problems. Those same qualities were discernible in the PBKA at the leadership level. During the 1960s, however, the support of the Army and DKA was instrumental in that union's efforts to increase membership.¹⁴² The wife of a PBKA member, a former station master, recalls that the "DKA was always *menakut-nakuti* [frightening] the workers not to join unions beyond the PBKA".¹⁴³ That aside, it appears that the general difference between communist and non-communist unions, was the ability of the former to secure leaders from the ranks of the workers. Therefore, the communist unions were "more able to represent the manual worker...more completely than did the non-communist unions, many of whose leaders were often white collar...or professional workers".¹⁴⁴

Just such stratification was present in the membership bases of the railroad workers' unions. The primary publication of the SBKA, for example, had a print run of 24,000 copies. Although the union professed itself "reasonably pleased" with this number because it reached approximately one in three members,¹⁴⁵ the run was slightly less than that of *Pembina* which serviced a much smaller union. It may be concluded that the SBKA represented as had the VSTP in the colonial era the "lower paid majority who lived on the margins of existence".¹⁴⁶ Seemingly, this group should have provided fertile ground for mobilisation to demand redress of their grievances through mass strike action. They did not. Why this was so, and the alternative actions and methods both unions used to alleviate the burdens of their members, and try for improvement in their working conditions is the subject of the following chapter.

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¹⁴¹ See *Laporan Umum SBKA* [1954], especially pp.16–21.

¹⁴² After the banning of the PSI and the KBSI in 1960, army support became critically important for the PBKA.

¹⁴³ Interview May 1996, Jakarta.

¹⁴⁴ Hawkins, 'Indonesia', p.99.

¹⁴⁵ *Laporan Umum SBKA* [1954] p.34.

¹⁴⁶ Ingleson, 'Bound Hand and Foot', p.63.

Chapter III

A Light In The Darkness

Introduction

In 1947 the SBKA itself had expressed its desire to

*menjadi Pelita dalam kegelapan, jang masih meliputi sebagian
besar buruh kereta api* [become a light in the darkness which still
envelops the majority of railway workers]¹

In 1953, in an essay on the role of strikes in railway workers lives printed in its magazine, the communist union proudly proclaimed that “since its founding the SBKA had not arranged a significant strike”.² This was in direct contrast to the history of their comrades in the VSTP during the 1920s yet, as we have observed in the previous chapter, the list of grievances of railway workers was long. There were reasons why the ‘strike weapon’ was, if not the least important, not the primary means for workers or their unions to pressure, or force negotiations from their employer to ease that ‘darkness’ in their lives. In order to understand these reasons, the intent of this chapter is to look first to the strike actions then, secondly, to the other cumulative actions of workers and unions: the meetings with the DKA and/or government representatives, the broadcasts and announcements of issues and concerns and, above all, to the social-economic [*sosek*] work of the unions and the workers' response to this work. The periods of ‘rupture’—as evidenced by strikes—were important, but, so too were the faults, the achievements and successes of everyday union work. To find a more complete history of railway workers and their unions we must look to them both.

In 1954, an article in the Ministry of Labour Journal, *Tindjauan Masalah Perburuhan*, contended that railway workers' conditions had not become a principal dispute between the unions, or with the DKA leadership, because they were determined by regulation—in the PGPN. The exception, it was remarked, was the DSM where, as of October 1954, there was no workplace agreement binding the two sides—management and workers.³ The disputes with the DSM and the extent to which the provisions of the PGPN satisfied the aspirations of workers will be explored more fully in the sections entitled the ‘strike weapon’ and ‘everyday work’. It may be noted here, however, that the

¹ *Pelita Kereta Api* 2 [March 1947], p.1.

² *Suara SBKA* 60 [February 1953], p.3.

³ *TMP* 6 [October 1954], pp.12–13.

Ministry of Labour journal presented a fairly sanguine view of the relationships between the SBKA, the PBKA and the DKA.

Railway workers and the 'strike-weapon'

The first strike by railway workers over their material conditions took place in 1948. On April 26, 700 workers at Gundih went on strike because they had not received a rice ration. Testament to the importance of the railways to the struggle was the 48 tons of rice sent to get them back to work.⁴ Most other strikes during the revolution remained small affairs, often, but not always, local issues with local solutions. Three strike actions in 1948 provide good examples of this contention. Workers in Kudus and Purwosari went on strike because a worker, "while carrying out his official duties had been hit by an Army member"; in the Yogya workshop there was a strike over clothing demands;⁵ and workers at the Blitar station went on strike demanding that 'measures' be taken against the military which had dismissed a *pegawai* in the warehouse.⁶ There is no evidence to be found of the outcome of this demand; however, the dismissed worker appears to have had a reasonably high position in the warehouse. Whether his dismissal involved allegations of corruption we cannot say, although it remains a strong possibility.

After sovereignty was achieved the most widespread strikes took place in the workplaces of the DSM. In March of 1950, for instance, all rail traffic on the East Coast of Sumatra was stopped as 3,000 workers went out on strike in support of higher wages and better conditions. The supply of food, oil and other vital products ceased. The military Governor of East Sumatra refused to intervene, as did officials from the Ministry of Labour who had been visiting the area on a fact-finding mission. The Governor stated that he "hoped a solution could be found through mutual cooperation".⁷ The strike was finally settled on April 14, through the mediation of the Minister of Labour. Workers won increased wages and concessions on conditions. There was certainly a political element in the strikes against the DSM, but there was also an economic component as workers struggled to improve their conditions.

In the early years of independence railway workers and their unions were as active in their demands as were other workers. In January 1950, the PBKA demanded that key positions in the railways in Sumatra be given to Indonesians. The union complained that in South Sumatra there was not one Indonesian occupying an important

⁴ DOBI, 629, 7 May 1948, *Rapportage Indonesie* 142. Cf. *Suara SBKA* 41 [March 1956], p.6.

⁵ *Suara SBKA* 41 [March 1956], p.6.

⁶ DOBI, 643, 25 May 1948, *Rapportage Indonesie* 142.

⁷ *British Broadcasting Corporation Information Service [Far East]*, [March/April 1950] [Hereafter BBC].

position.⁸ For its part the SBKA pressured for a reduction in working hours—a seven hour day or a forty hour week. The union demanded these hours especially for workshop, locomotive, depot and track workers as these were the hardest and dirtiest jobs on the railways. Technical workers were not forgotten, as the union demanded that the DKA arrange training courses for this group. These demands were discussed in a meeting in February, 1951, between the SBKA—represented by Djokosoedjono, Singgih and Soepardi, and the DKA—represented by Ir. Kosasih, Sugondo and Ingsun. They were carried, with a threat to take strike action if no satisfactory resolution of the demands was forthcoming. In April the demands were rejected and the DKA sought a new compromise but the SBKA announced it was ‘firm’ and re-submitted the demands. A new offer was made by the Minister of Labour, at that time Tedjasukmana, but it too was rejected on the grounds that it was ‘deceitful’. We need to see these demands within the wider context of the strikes and actions taking place in Jakarta at the time. Bus workers, ice factory and printery workers, BPM workers at Tanjung Priok were but some of the workers demonstrating and striking for improved conditions.⁹ There is also a need to see the SBKA’s acceptance of a compromise [short of the demands yet without the threatened strike action taken] as union and workers operating within the constraints of their ‘vital’ industry status. Railway workers were already affected by a decision on February 15, 1951 prohibiting strikes in their industry. They might rail against it and protest the limiting and violation of their rights but they, in the main, acted within its confines.¹⁰

That is the reason why, with the exception of the strikes against the DSM indirect actions or local level strikes remained the preferred method of the unions over the next fifteen years. For the communist union such indirect actions included the refusal in 1950 to transport goods to and from the plantations where Sarbupri, a fellow SOBSI member, was on strike, and the refusal to unload goods when the SBRI went on strike over their demands to the B.A.T.¹¹ An instance of a local level strike was the four hour ‘sit-down’ action taken by seventy six SBKA workers from Tanjung Priok over the decision of a railway engineer to cut the pay of a daily worker. The workers believed that the engineer had done so to benefit himself and they threatened continuous action if he was not dismissed. The threat was successful for after a meeting between management

⁸ *Pedoman*, 20 January 1950.

⁹ See Chapter I.

¹⁰ On the meeting, demands, rejection and subsequent compromise see issues of *Pedoman*, 15 January 1951–18 December 1951.

¹¹ The B.A.T. had been formed in 1917. *TMP* 6 [October 1954], pp.12–13. At the local level, workers supported strikers from other unions. For example, as in the collection of rice [*beras* and *nasi*], money, bananas, cigarettes etc. by the Cianjur locomotive depot branch for Tan Luxe workers during a five day strike. These workers belonged to the SBKB [*Serikat Buruh Kendaraan Bermotor*] another SOBSI affiliate. *Suara SBKA* [June 1956], p.15.

and workers the engineer was discharged.¹² Other actions which the union chose to label “not a strike” could be a rejection of an order,¹³ while others, such as the refusal, in 1951, of workers in the DKA workshops to work more than a seven hour day in support of their demand for a seven hour day, were more inclusive but were organized by the branches involved.¹⁴ Even so, with the ever-present threat of penalties under the law they remained but brief ruptures. They were usually ‘resolved’ at a meeting between unions and the DKA.

From 1950 until 1965, personnel safety, corruption in the DKA, the DSM, and the transfer of the *Pusat Bengkel Motor*—PBM [the Central Repair Workshop in Bandung] from the authority of the DKA to the *Jajasan Motor*, were the issues particular to railway workers over which there was a more general ‘downing of tools’. In larger strikes, other than those opposing the DSM, unions were quick to point to the discipline of the accompanying demonstration and to also stress that these actions were not ‘mass’ in the sense of ‘everyone out’. An example of the latter action was the strike by approximately 4,000 workers in 1953 demanding that the government provide some measure of guarantee of safety from the armed gangs which were threatening worker safety: switchmen and signallers remained at their posts so that trains to and from Jakarta could depart as usual. The strike, and the subsequent call to the government not to be bored by such complaints, despite their frequency, because they were genuine and affected the State and society was an indication of the extent of the problems. The government was entreated to use the instruments of the State to “come down heavily on the savagery and viciousness of the armed groups”¹⁵ [who were] “pulling up trains and tram lines and attacking workers and passengers”.¹⁶

Hawkins has argued that strike action by the communist unions and demands for larger wage increases usually happened “when a government unfriendly to the communist party was in office”. He further observes that in applying this principle, communist unions also stressed the right to strike as a basic right.¹⁷ Certainly the SBKA always stressed that, despite their vital industry status, railway workers had the right to strike even though this could have an adverse economic effect on the nation. And certainly also political considerations were influential in the raising of the rhetoric about justification of

¹² *Pedoman*, 26 April 1950.

¹³ Such actions come under those described by James C. Scott as everyday forms of resistance in *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* [Yale University Press: New Haven, 1976].

¹⁴ *Suara SBKA* 41 [March 1956], p.6.

¹⁵ *Pemuda* 7 [July 1953], p.149.

¹⁶ *Suara SBKA* [September 1954], p.13. [No issue number].

¹⁷ Hawkins, ‘Indonesia’, p.95.

their demands and in the level of 'the threat' to strike. It is apparent that the leadership was well aware of the charges of hypocrisy which could be levelled at the union if and when it chose to strike. In a speech to commemorate the ninth anniversary of the union, Soepardi, the Second Secretary General, spoke of the 'wicked tongues' which criticised the SBKA for its demands and actions at the time of the Natsir and Sukiman cabinets. In a satirical play on the words *hotel prodeo* [prison] Soepardi reminded his audience that many union members at that time had *menghadiahi istirahat di hotel prodeo* [been given a gift of a free holiday in prison]. It is therefore strange now, he observed, that the same tongues now criticise, not because of too many demands, but because there are not enough.¹⁸ Soepardi's speech was made during the period of the first Ali Sastroamidjojo cabinet, which was seen as more sympathetic to the demands of the PKI.

Politics was clearly important, but the SBKA stressed the basic right to strike, without striking, under governments not seen as particularly sympathetic. It was during the period of the Wilopo Cabinet that the SBKA spoke proudly of its non-strike record. In reality the union used threats, rather than direct action, to pressure governments. When the Wilopo government was in power, for example, the union observed that there were now emerging "particular reasons": the non-implementation of agreements between workers and the DKA, and bureaucratic stalling, especially within the Department of Civil Service Affairs over the issue of promotion, which were "considerations in any future strike action".¹⁹ But it remained a threat only: there was no strike action. Contra Hawkins' argument, however, there was action taken during the time of the first Ali Cabinet.

In his commemoration speech Soepardi asked, rhetorically, "if the SBKA says it supports the government why does it lead a strike?" He answered: "the impetus for the strike came from the workers themselves [so] even if the workers supported the government that did not mean they could not acknowledge the government has made a mistake".²⁰ The issue involved here was the transfer of the PBM which, over the objections of the SBKA, and despite the committee formed to find ways of solving the issue satisfactorily, had become a reality on 1 March, 1955. There were 419 workers at the PBM and the delegations, meetings and strikes over the transfer were because of concerns over the maintenance of their working conditions under the *Jajasan Motor*.

¹⁸ Soepardi, 'Tradisi buruh kereta api, garis perjuangan dan beberapa sikap SBKA', *Suara SBKA* 29 [March 1955], pp.3-7. The announcement of the Emergency Law took place during the time of the Natsir Cabinet [September 1950-March 1951]. The events known as the 'Razzia Agustus' took place during the period of the Sukiman Cabinet [April 1951-January 1952]. For a definition of 'Razzia Agustus', see Chapter I of this study.

¹⁹ *Suara SBKA* 60 [February 1953], p.3. The Wilopo Cabinet February 1952-August 1953. The Ali Cabinets August 1953-July 1955 and March 1956-March 1957.

²⁰ Soepardi, 'Tradisi buruh kereta api', pp.3-7.

Although the *Jajasan* was state-owned and capitalised, the unions were concerned it would no longer be under the direct control of the parliament leading, they argued, to more chances for corruption and, if the transferred workers were to remain under the PGPN regulations, this would set up discrimination between those paid under the PGPN and those under private regulations. On the other hand, if all workers were to be under private regulations the *pegawai negeri* status of workers including their permanency, chance of promotion and pension entitlements would be lost.²¹ Even so, the strike actions taken over the PBM were orderly. Extant photos show striking workers, both male and female, arranged according to section, office, train-building section, stockroom and so on, listening to representatives speak, or waiting while worker delegations were speaking to those in charge at the workplace.²²

Initially, there was a unity of concern between the PBKA and the SBKA over the PBM transfer. It was short lived. A committee, with representatives from the two unions and the Ministry of Communications, was set up to give the PBM a six month “fair chance” breathing space to enable it to reduce some of its debts before the transfer was to take place. After the committee's interim report was handed down the PBKA withdrew over what it considered to be a political formulation in the report which stated that “the PBM belongs to the people”. It is also clear that there was a difference of opinion between the PBKA leadership and its members over this issue. The PBKA leadership objected to the way in which the transfer was carried out, not to the transfer itself as it saw this as the province of the Minister of Communication. It was at the urging of the Board of the Central Office Branch of the union that it had attended discussions and sat on the committee. To ‘head off’ any suggestions that it might not be in sympathy with workers on this matter, the leadership argued that PBKA workers had rejected the transfer, not out of disapproval, but because they had not received enough information.²³ For its part, the SBKA claimed that the united actions it had taken with PBKA members over the transfer meant that it was “flooded” with request for membership, many from former PBKA members. The SBKA saw such requests [as well they might have been] as a justification of its policies and methods to condemn the transfer and defend the *pegawai negeri* status of the PBM workers.²⁴

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Suara SBKA* [February 1955]. no issue number, np.

²³ *Laporan Singkat* [1955], pp.26–27. The members of the committee were: Soemantri and van Gemert from the [PBKA]; Moh. Rawi, Soepardi [SBKA]; two from the DKA; and Ir. Thaher Taijb. The PBKA objected to Taijb's formulation.

²⁴ From the second plenary session on October 1–4 1954, to February 1955, 2,038 requests for membership were received. *Suara SBKA* [February 1955], pp.6–7.

The one day strike called by the PBKA/KBSI on May 7, 1955 to protest the rising prices further entrenched PBKA/SBKA distrust and dislike. In a letter to the President on May 9, Soepardi, on behalf of the SBKA, accused the PBKA of actions, through the use of *tukang pukul* [minders]; the aid of “high-level” members in the DKA to stop trains from Bogor and Jakarta; the bringing in of agitators from outside the city and the attempted evictions of SBKA members from their workplaces, causing both concern and disturbance in Jakarta. Since no demands had been put forward by the PBKA, the SBKA insisted that the strike was a political action of agitators whose aim was to replace the Ali government, not a demand for better conditions for railway workers.²⁵

Not surprisingly, an announcement on May 8 by D.N. Aidit, the Secretary General of the Communist Party, had levelled the same accusations.²⁶ In support of the SBKA, Aidit called on those railway workers who were displaying some uncertainty about “discouraging” the strike to recognise it for what it was—a *pemogokan politik* [political strike].²⁷ When the SBKA began preparations for a general strike at the beginning of 1956 during the term of the Burhanuddin Harahap Cabinet²⁸ it defended its action, somewhat disingenuously, by juxtaposing its aims against the alleged aims of the PBKA the previous May. “What is the difference?” the union asked, “we defend worker's rights, whereas the PBKA demanded nothing other than to strike”.²⁹ The lead up to the general strike threat had been a series of local strikes in the Jakarta, Madiun, Kertosono and Sidotopo workshop depots over holiday provisions. The union was also demanding the payment of overtime according to a December 1951 agreement between workers and the DKA. Apparently, there had been a great number of meetings between the DKA and the union over this issue, and over a demand for free distribution of clothing material: a demand which the union had reduced to “distribution at government price and to be paid back by the worker”.³⁰ In its announcement of strike preparations the SBKA was pointed, and very clever, in that it dealt one by one with the issues, such as passenger safety, over which it had condemned the PBKA. The reply of the PBKA Board was also pointed: the call for a strike was not in line with the law and norms of the

²⁵ DPP SBKA No.1801/XXXVII/Um/55. *Arsip Nasional R.I. Koleksi Arsip Kabinet Presiden R.I. 1950–1959. No.1485.*

²⁶ D.N. Aidit [1923–65]. Secretary General of the Communist Party from 1952 until his death in 1965.

²⁷ ‘Pemogokan Reaksioner Harus Dikalahkan!’ Keterangan Sekretaris Djendral CCPKI, D.N. Aidit Tentang Pemogokan KBSI, *Arsip Nasional: Koleksi Arsip Kabinet Presiden R.I. 1950–1959. No.1476.*

²⁸ August 1955–March 1956. *Masjumi/PNI/NU.*

²⁹ *Suara SBKA* 41 [March 1956], pp.6–7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

time. The SBKA treated this announcement with scorn by reference to the “law and norms of guaranteeing Dutch capital”.³¹

The strike never eventuated. Meetings between the Head of the DKA and the SBKA on March 12 and 13, reached agreement on some issues: the DKA agreed on condition it could itself get permission from the Minister of Communications, to the demand over clothing material. On others, there was merely an agreement to set up a committee for further discussions. For instance, in the matter of overtime the DKA refused to acknowledge that it had infringed an earlier agreement, committing itself only to the arrangement of a draft regulation on overtime as a replacement regulation on the enterprise allowance. As with many of the agreements on railway worker conditions the ‘wins’ were either less than the magnitude demanded, or no win at all. Yet, unions, even without concrete results were ready to meet again with the DKA.³² The SBKA told its members, for example, that in its view “there isn’t a problem which cannot be solved through discussions”.³³

This proved a rather optimistic assessment of the situation, for it was the failure of the Minister of Communication to agree to the clothing demands and a shortcoming in the enterprise allowance agreement coupled with anger over the dismissal of Soetedjo, General Secretary of the Situbondo branch, which led to ‘muted’ strike action in Jakarta on July 29. The term muted is fitting because the action took place between 9pm on July 29 and 3am the following morning, at a time when passenger inconvenience would be lessened and only the transport of goods affected. Presumably to blunt criticism that this would hurt national economic life the union, in a convoluted piece of logic argued, that since most of the goods were Dutch-owned and they had just received a tax reduction, only Dutch capital would be affected. Whilst calling the Minister “recalcitrant” for his attitude, the union thanked both SBKA and PBKA members for taking part in a disciplined protest.³⁴

The strike had lasted six hours only, yet, the initial proposal was for a three day action beginning July 27 and ending July 30. The correspondence in *Suara SBKA* over the proposed strike is revealing of just what difficulties any large strike would have caused the workers and union. The leadership sent letters to the Minister on May 8 and

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.8. [The PBKA reply was noted in this issue of the *Suara SBKA*].

³² Komando Aksi SBKA, Menginstruksikan Penundaan Pemogokan–pemogokan Gelombang ke 1–ke 2. *Suara SBKA* 41 [March 1956], pp.10–11.

³³ *Suara SBKA* 37 [November 1955], p.12.

³⁴ The shortcoming concerned a proposed payment for ten months instead of the demanded 47 months which, according to the union, had been in the 1951 agreement. Singgih, ‘Aksi mogok–protes SBKA berjalan dengan penuh disiplin’, *Suara SBKA* 46–47 [July–August 1956], pp.3–4. [The SBKA strike and protest actions are carried out with full discipline]. Soetedjo had led a strike on March 17. *Suara SBKA* 45 [July 1956], p.15.

29, and June 2 and 22; delegations on May 15, 16 and 17, and again on 2 June; and further delegations from 16 branches on 2, 4, 6 and 9 July.³⁵ With no commitment from, or meeting with the Minister, the union's claim that all could be solved through discussions was looking somewhat hollow. It still maintained a cautious approach. Delegations were sent to the Governor of West Java; the Head of Police; the Army Commander [TT—III];³⁶ and also to canvass the opinion of representatives from other political party such as the PSII, *Masjumi*, PNI and the NU.³⁷

We have noted above both unions' objections to the Emergency Law and this appears to have been the continuing major reason for the caution exhibited by railway workers and unions to any widespread action. There were many instances of workers being detained, or having criminal charges brought against them for their activity.³⁸ Criminal charges had been brought against the workers who had led the 1954 strike against the DSM for wage rises, and in 1956 union leaders in the DSM were detained by police. As well, at the branch level the DKA used regulations PP8/1952 and PP11/1952 to punish or dismiss workers. The first regulation concerned the suspension and removal from position of a worker until a decision was made on the case. The second concerned punishment for the alleged offence.³⁹ Soetedjo, for example, had been dismissed under these regulations:⁴⁰ Djumadi, the leader of a strike in the Madiun locomotive sheds in 1955 suffered a reduction in wages for a period of three months as punishment for his 'misdeeds'.⁴¹

There were recurring calls from both the PBKA and the SBKA for a review of these regulations: both referred to the worker/s concerned suffering the *hukuman djabatan* [punishment] of the DKA. The PBKA asserted that the greatest concern for the mass of its members were the two regulations. The union's 1955 Report stated: "research has shown [that] neither the mass of workers, nor the leadership of the DKA, has much knowledge about the regulations. [It is for this reason] that the PBKA requests that a

³⁵ *Suara SBKA* 46/47 [July–August 1956], pp.5–6.

³⁶ TT—*Teritorium Tentara*, the military administrative unit at provincial level. A term in usage at this time.

³⁷ *Suara SBKA* 46/47 [July–August 1956], p.31. NU—*Nahdatul Ulama*.

³⁸ See, for instance, *Laporan Umum* [1954], p.51, and *Suara SBKA* 41 [March 1956], pp.12–13. This was despite the P4P decision in the 1951 dispute which stated that the employer could not make a reprisal against a worker because of union action. *TMP* 8/9 [December/January 1951/52], pp.54–56.

³⁹ On the wording of these regulations see, *Sekilas Lintas 25 Tahun Perkereta–Apian*, p.80.

⁴⁰ A *sokongan setiakawan* [solidarity support] collection was taken up by members for Soetedjo. *Suara SBKA* 45 [July 1956], p.15.

⁴¹ *Suara SBKA* [January 1955], p.4.

manual be issued to show how the PP11 should be used". In relation to the legal rights of defence and opposition of a worker the Report noted that:

nowhere in PP8 was there a clause where a worker could, even a little, put forward a defence to a case, or matter, as was the right of every individual...[instead the regulation gives]...absolute rights to the authority to decide on the wrongdoing or otherwise of the worker...the law falls unevenly on workers, for mistakes of the same type there is almost a bargaining process like small traders to a buyer.⁴²

The history of railway workers' strikes may seem to be 'top-heavy' with threats, pressure and actions by the communist union for the only PBKA instigated strike appears to have been that of May 1955. It may be recalled, however, that both PBKA and SBKA members joined together in actions against the transfer of the PBM, and that some clearly came together in the smaller, workplace actions over local issues. What is interesting is that the communist union, despite its numbers, sought to take action within the guidelines, however much it threatened and railed against those guidelines.

One conclusion from this is that large strikes, or complete 'shut-downs' in the railways—as opposed to the waterfront—could physically and visibly affect ordinary Indonesians and thus be counterproductive. Strikes covering a broad area happened only in the DSM.⁴³ Despite this, we may assume that the claim by the SBKA that all of the strikes it had taken part had not met with disapproval by the general community was somewhat extravagant.⁴⁴ In the 1960s when, as Justus van der Kroef has observed, there was a "new aggressiveness" on the part of the SOBSI, the SBKA undertook "a series of brief unofficial strikes in July and early August of 1961 against the [now] nationalised DSM...but union officials remained in the background [preferring] to appeal directly to Sukarno to bring about price stability [and to] confiscate all foreign enterprises in which the Dutch still had foreign capital".⁴⁵ A further inhibitor on strike action may have been, as the Ministry of Labour contended, that it was thought "not proper" for *pegawai negeri* to strike.⁴⁶ Proper, or not, it needs to be remembered that such views were buttressed by the Emergency Law restricting strikes in vital industries which the unions argued was, in reality, a "no-strike" measure for railway workers. Even when the new regulations on

⁴² *Laporan Singkat* [1955], pp.24–25.

⁴³ Demands were over wages, hours of work, the distribution and level of rations. See *TMP* 12/1/2 [April/May/June], pp.7/14. *TMP* 8,9 [December/January 1951/52], pp.54–56. *Suara SBKA* [September 1954], p.20.

⁴⁴ *Suara SBKA* 60 [February 1953], p.3.

⁴⁵ Justus van der Kroef, *The Communist Party of Indonesia* [University of British Columbia Press: Vancouver, 1965], pp.244–246.

⁴⁶ *TMP* 6 [October 1954], pp.12–13.

union activity came into force in 1957⁴⁷ the “vital industry” clause remained. Consequently, the new regulations were still considered inimical to worker's rights.⁴⁸

It may be concluded then that the SBKA did not fit the pattern for communist unions asserted by Hawkins of literally “all out” strikes against governments it deemed unfriendly to its demands. Prior to the period of Guided Democracy, it walked a fine line between threat and blame towards ‘unfriendly’ governments, and threat and ‘understanding of the economic difficulties of the nation’ when more ‘friendly’ government were in power. Politics may have been influential in the non-strike decisions of the SBKA, but it seems a little remarked fact that the PBKA, with Poeradiredja in his dual role of Head of the second largest railway workers union and of the KBSI, would also have found political considerations a useful way to assess its actions. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that before either union took strike action a complex range of nationalist, economic and social issues had to be considered. While strikes by railway workers themselves were more spontaneous affairs, for both unions and workers they remained but ‘brief ruptures’ in their everyday work and lives.

Negotiating change

The periods of high inflation in the Indonesian economy during the 1950s and 1960s had an adverse effect on all wage earners: workers on fixed incomes, as were railway workers because of their *pegawai negeri* status, were particularly hard hit.⁴⁹ Their wages and salaries were fixed under complex provisions. Between 1950 and 1959 there were a succession of regulations to bring some uniformity into wage provisions. The most notable were the PGPN/1955, then PGPN/1961, and after the change from DKA to PNKA from 1 January, 1964 new regulations were validated.⁵⁰ The group wage range was: *pekerja lepas* [casual workers] and A, B, BB, C, CC, D, E and F. Within each group wages and salaries were based on level of education, period of work and rank [position]: the lowest level, for example, being A2/II, the highest FVIII. The three lowest level groups, that is including the casual workforce, represented approximately 75.3 percent of the railway workforce: 6.6, 49.8 and 18.9 percent respectively.⁵¹

⁴⁷ See Chapter I.

⁴⁸ In his work on unionism in North Sumatra Hasibuan has observed [that]: “in 1963, when railway workers [in North Sumatra] staged SBKA sponsored strikes...the Army routed the leaders and jailed them”. Hasibuan, *Political Unionism*, p.314. In an interview with Olle Tornquist, a former trade union leader sent to Sumatra in the early 1960s to help in a strike over higher wages and bonuses told of the dismissal of 1,000 workers. Olle Tornquist, *Dilemmas of Third World Communism*, p.148. fn.40, 41.

⁴⁹ For a comprehensive account on the effects of inflation see, J.A.C. Mackie, *Problems of the Indonesian Inflation* [Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University: Ithaca, 1967].

⁵⁰ Under PNKA—GAPPENKA 1964 which was determined by the Minister for Land Communications, Post, Telephone and Tourism. Departemen Penerangan R.I. *Kereta Api Indonesia*. nd.

⁵¹ For a fuller account of wage and salary levels, see Djawatan Kereta Api di Indonesia, *Ichisar Statistik*

Given the conditions nationally and in Jakarta, that railway workers were on fixed incomes and conditions decided by regulation, and that strikes seemed not to have won any large concessions from the Government, we may ask “of what use were unions to railway workers?” To find the answer we must look to the substance of their everyday work. For a start, fixed wages meant extra material benefits, over and above those offered by the Government, and improvement in conditions such as overtime, hours of work etc. were crucial to worker's lives.⁵² While this was true for the middle- to higher-level wage earners, the lowest-level wage group [the A2/II group] and the *pekerja lepas* were particularly vulnerable. *Pekerja lepas* received daily pay based either on the PGP/1955, or according to a regulation at their place of work.⁵³ They did not have ‘group status’ under the PGP which was based only on monthly remuneration. For example, the new conditions concerning hours of work, rest days and overtime which were set in 1956 did not apply to daily paid workers and the unions made continuous efforts to have these applied to this group.⁵⁴ An added difficulty was that “place of work” conditions for daily paid workers often had to be negotiated on an individual basis.⁵⁵

Wage levels were not the only cause of anxiety amongst workers. They turned to their unions for help on a myriad of other problems: over concerns for the clarification of workers' rights in the regulations on nursing and medicines, money for overnight stays whilst working, and travelling expenses. The special subsidies which were applicable to locomotive and train personnel—both skilled and unskilled—who spent long periods away from home carrying out their duties had not kept pace with economic conditions during the 1950s, and the workers were suffering accordingly. Improvements in the regional cost-of-living allowances, subsidies for dangerous regions, an increase in the daily wage for those workers under regulations pertaining to their place of work, a practical and sensitive call that a cash advance to be paid to the widow of a worker, an appeal to the DKA to remember the fate of those workers who since March 1, 1942, had never been promoted, and regulation in, and implementation of, pension entitlements, were all on the list of demands of the PBKA. So too was the demand that those *pegawai*

Tahunan Mengenai Tahun 1960, pp.150–153; *Bank of Indonesia Reports 1959–1960*, pp.207–212; R.H. de Haas–Engel, ‘Peraturan Gadji Baru dalam Perusahaan–Perusahaan Bekas Belanda’, *Keuangan Negara* 8 [1960], pp.3–10.

⁵² Cf. Cohen, “Poverty and Development”, p.146.

⁵³ SEK [Surat Edaran Kepegawaian] No.39/1955.

⁵⁴ SEK No.14/1956. In this determination railway workers were divided into three groups—A, B and C. A, included stockrooms, workshops, construction etc. B, banking clearance, administration and workshop branch offices; C, guards, drivers, gatekeepers etc., each with differing conditions. *Suara SBKA* [June 1956], pp.5–13.

⁵⁵ See *Suara SBKA* 46/47 [July/August 1956], p.29, where the SBKA negotiated a wage rise—from Rp.5.75 to Rp.8 for an engine cleaner.

needing it be given a cash advance so that their children could enter elementary and secondary school.⁵⁶ Schooling assistance was never mentioned by the SBKA. With this exception, there were great similarities to be found in the claims of the unions. We may perhaps consider that its presence on the PBKA's list and absence from the SBKA's may have signified the core of the groups to which each union was appealing—workers in the upper levels of the DKA for the former, the reverse for the latter. In its Report to the Fourth Congress the PBKA gave an honest assessment of its ability to help those at the bottom. “For the lower groups in the PGP, Groups I and II, the majority, we are not yet able to find a way to improve their position through promotion or other means”.⁵⁷

There is little doubt that the Government had to work through a complex formulation on pensions. A ‘bloated’ workforce meant workers had to be discharged, but under the regulations many were not eligible for the maximum pension. By setting out a range of pensionable age limits and making some provision for those workers who were still to be pensioned off, but who were without entitlement to the maximum pension, the new guidelines issued in late 1954 sought to deal with some degree of fairness and sensitivity with railway workers.⁵⁸ For their part, the unions worried that discharges “should not take on the characteristics of mass dismissals”. And, also, that those workers originally with private railways would only receive an *onderstand* [maintenance payment] according to the regulations of a particular business. The SBKA argued that, although in “informal discussions” a Department of Communications official, Subari, had indicated private railway workers had been considered *pegawai negeri* since January 1, 1950, the hardship for these workers was not lessened. Because their ‘pension period’ was only to be taken from that date, they had only a notional two years on which to base their period of work for pension entitlement.⁵⁹

The promise of securing pensions was a strong inducement for workers to join a union. Lack of education and a cultural proclivity not to question those in authority were barriers not easily overcome but lower-level workers did join and their reasons were identical to their colonial union comrades of the 1910s and 1920s.⁶⁰ One former Jakartan railway worker recalls that the reason workers he knew joined a union was the promise of reduced working time, increased wages, and the guarantee of pensions and medical support. [The informant was the train cleaner previously mentioned in Chapter II who

⁵⁶ *Laporan Singkat* [1955], pp.15–16.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.34.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.31. A 1970 publication lists seventeen regulations which it says were but some of those issued between 1950 and 1954, concerning railway workers. See *Sekilas Lintas 25 Tahun Perkereta-Apian*, pp.80–81.

⁵⁹ *Laporan Umum* [1954], p.62.

⁶⁰ I am grateful to Professor John Ingleson for this information on colonial railway workers.

had recalled overlapping membership in the trade unions]. In addition to his wage, this worker received one fifth of his base wage per month for his wife and children; *lebaran* subsidy per year of one quarter of his base wage, but no housing or food allowance. “These”, he said, “were only for the middle to top groups”. For him “the principle at work was to obey those above”. He said he did not join a union because he was too busy and he believed the Government would guarantee his pension and health support money.⁶¹ It was workers such as the train cleaner that the SBKA sought to mobilize.

In propaganda to encourage workers to join the union the focus was often on pension rights. For example, in one edition the *Suara SBKA* published a cartoon showing the SBKA cutting free private railway workers while their state comrades waited to welcome them. At the top was a benevolent SOBSI pouring money into the pension fund.⁶² This was clever propaganda as the pension issue was extremely important for workers. In a country without social security *pegawai negeri* status was a means to securing some form of old-age protection. This was the reason why both unions pushed the cause of railway workers who had worked for the DKA for ten or more years, but who had not achieved permanent status and, thus, were not eligible for pension rights.⁶³ This group of workers had remained at ‘provisional’ status. It was for this reason also that the PBKA demanded that opportunities for daily work be limited to those in a provisional position.⁶⁴

In 1955 the Board of the PBKA had indicated its “longing to bring into reality new civil service regulations in line with the times and conditions”. The desire for a properly regulated set of guidelines no doubt reflected Poeradiredja's legal training, but the Board had correctly pinpointed one of the major problems for railway workers—the ad hoc application of existing regulations.⁶⁵ An additional difficulty was that some groups of railway workers—such as those working for *N.V. Perbudi* and the DSM—were dealt with under the arbitration system—the P4P.⁶⁶ The PBKA called for the formation of a permanent arbitration body which would deal only with workers of the

⁶¹ Interview 30 August 1995, Jakarta. For a discussion on the ‘acceptance’ of the order of things, the Javanese value of *nerimo*, see Cohen, “Poverty and Development”, Chapter 5. See the mention made of *nerimo* in the interviews with women wage earners in Appendix I of this study.

⁶² *Suara SBKA* 60 [February 1953], pp.3–5. See the photograph in Appendix II.

⁶³ This was also the case for daily workers in municipality and public works.

⁶⁴ *Laporan Singkat* [1955], p.26.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.36.

⁶⁶ *Perbudi* was a national company employing restaurant workers, including those in the train food service area. See the P4P decision—P4/11/55–3938: P4/12/55–16406 on the work contract between the two sides—railway workers and *Perbudi*. *Suara SBKA* [December 1955], p.6. and *TMP* 8/9 [December/January 1951/52], pp.54–56, for the P4P Decision SBKA [Jakarta] versus N.V. DSM [Medan].

Government and Government agencies.⁶⁷ It pointed to the bonus payments for shipping workers, which were higher even though the work had the same “characteristics”.⁶⁸ Evidently the union believed that arbitration through the P4P would force quicker implementation of wage rises and other benefits.

It was only in March, 1959, for example, that railway workers received the increase in basic wages and salaries which had been promised in the PGPN/1955: the lowest basic wage of Government workers [the A2/II group] was increased from Rp.85 to Rp.135, and the highest basic salary [the F/VIII] group] was increased from Rp.1,620 to Rp.2,700.⁶⁹ This was a worker's wage without cost-of-living allowances and child support. Such wage levels were difficult to quantify because of the variations, but in 1957 the SBKA estimated the lowest wage for workers in Group A2/II, including the aforementioned allowances, as Rp.218.45. This was well below the level which, according to the Central Office of Statistics was necessary for survival. The daily wage for casual or contract workers was worse than either [permanent] DKA or DSM workers, with an average wage of only Rp.5 per day. *Pekerja plat* [train service attendants], received a percentage only from passenger tips.⁷⁰

It is instructive to note here some other regulations which affected railway workers. After the new monetary measures of August 1959, Decrees were issued on the freezing of part of the salaries of employees of Government enterprises. They only affected workers at the middle- and upper-end of the scale, but for the middle-group the freeze clearly presented a problem, which was taken up by the unions, for the level below which employees could receive their full salary was very quickly adjusted upwards by another Decree. In another regulation the wages and salaries of workers in Dutch enterprises taken over by the Government were adjusted to the PGPN. Also, “to stimulate the zest for working of the workers of such enterprises, supplementary rulings, such as: family allowance, general allowance, expense account allowance, etc. were instituted, which were more attractive when compared to the rulings applicable to Government workers”.⁷¹ Given that prior to 1959 when the new regulations came into force, the unions had lobbied constantly for validation of the regulation relating to the

⁶⁷ *Laporan Singkat* [1955], p.15.

⁶⁸ *Pembina* 3/4 [1961], p.28.

⁶⁹ *Bank of Indonesia Reports 1959–1960*, p.210.

⁷⁰ *Program Tuntutan SBKA 1957*, pp.4–28. Cf. ILO, *Report to the Government of Indonesia on Wage Policy*. The official exchange rate in 1959 was approximately Rp.45.28/\$US1.00. *Statistical Pocket Book of Indonesia 1963*, p.226.

⁷¹ *Bank of Indonesia Reports 1959–1960*, p.209. Decrees of the Minister of Finance Nos. 7 and 10 which were repealed with the issuance of Decree no 34 lifting the level of the salary to be frozen. Regulations affecting railway workers were PP Nc.40/1959 and PP No.41/1959 on former railway and telephone businesses of the DSM. See de Haas–Engel ‘Peraturan Gadji’, pp.3–10.

rights of former Dutch private railway workers who were now employed by the DKA,⁷² the achievement of conditions better than those enjoyed by the bulk of railway workers could only add to the disquiet about the ad hoc nature of the regulations applying to railway workers. Nonetheless, whenever new regulations came into force, as with those in 1961 on pay and pensions, unions were quick to highlight their efforts in the matter.⁷³

Although the core of the PBKA's membership was not from the mass of lower-level workers it would be wrong to see the union as non-caring of the difficulties of that group. After the issuing of PGP/1961, and again after its success in pressuring the Government to formulate a *UU Kepegawaian*, the PBKA sent constant memoranda to the Government about the position of casual workers who, without *pegawai negeri* status, were ineligible for sick leave, old age security and other benefits. The union thanked the Government for its help but asked that the position of casual workers and their entitlements be determined in a new law for that purpose.⁷⁴ It urged the Government to bring to fruition "a social security which would bring Indonesia into line with other countries who were already progressive in that field—*Mudah-mudahan!*"⁷⁵ In 1963 the PBKA expressed its concern over the protection of the social security of lower-ranked workers "who usually don't pay attention to their rights".

The interview with the former trainer cleaner gives substance to PBKA concerns over these workers. He did not know that "there was a *Undang-Undang Kepegawaian* which was for all".⁷⁶ It was for workers who were ill-educated and uniformed, who may not have requested, as was their right, their annual leave, that the union wanted workers to be able to use that leave in the following year. To make the employer responsible for long-service leave notification; and to give for every six months postponement of this leave an extra six working days bonus.⁷⁷ Such rights for lower-level workers were also demanded by the SBKA and that union was as constant in its calls for justice for workers as was the PBKA. The SBKA pressured strongly for periodic examination of the housing provided for workers, and for a just distribution of that housing. The wife of a former railway worker in Jakarta recalls that in her husband's workplace "only about half of the workers received free housing from the DKA", and the women's group to which

⁷² *Suara SBKA* 30 [April 1955]. np. *Laporan Singkat* [1955], pp.15–16.

⁷³ PP No.200/1961 and PP No.225/1961. See *Pembina* 7/8 [1961], p.5. "It can be said that the efforts of PBKA to help our *kaum pensiunan* [pensioners] comrades have achieved fair results".

⁷⁴ *Pembina* 9/10 [1961], p.9.

⁷⁵ *Mudah-mudahan* translates as I hope! *Pembina* 5/6 [1961], pp.10, 14. At this point the *UU Kepegawaian* had been acceded to by acclamation in the DPR but was awaiting validation into law.

⁷⁶ Interview 30 August 1995, Jakarta.

⁷⁷ *Pembina* [June 1963], p.31. The Civil Service Law for which the PBKA [and the SBKA] struggled came in 1961. *Undang-Undang Pokok Kepegawaian* [UU 16/1961].

she belonged “was always trying to advise the DKA to give accommodation for the lowest-level workers”.⁷⁸ The SBKA also called for equality of treatment for women workers in the railways in the giving of family support, justice in *formasi*,⁷⁹ and official holidays for workshops and locomotive depots where many of the lowest paid workers were employed.⁸⁰

‘Grass-roots’ representation

We may gauge the extent of worker's problems from the Report to the Fourth Conference of the PBKA. Up to July 1955, approximately 900 letters requiring help had been sent to this union only.⁸¹ Both the SBKA and PBKA were quick to point to their successes in the successful resolution of the day-to-day problems of their members. In the journal and Conference Reports of the PBKA the listing of successful resolutions was, as to be expected, self-congratulatory, but still impartial.⁸² That is, with very little reference to the SBKA. On the other hand, as described in the SBKA's journal and Conference Reports, the listing of its day-to-day work was often a reminder of the failures of its competitor for worker loyalty—the PBKA. The question that we must ask concerning the grass-roots representation of both unions is, “was it worthwhile?”

Was a *capil* [a broad sun hat made of pandanus and palm leaves] important to a railway switch guard at Blitar?⁸³ Were the complaints by a letter writer to the union magazine over the increased scheduling of trains which allowed a too brief ‘turn around’ so that often trains departed without proper checking, and without personnel changes, which meant many workers had a ten hour day, worthy of consideration?⁸⁴ Was it worthwhile supporting the cause of three workers who, after working for the DKA for

⁷⁸ Interview May 1996, Jakarta. The women's group to which the informant referred was the IWKA—*Ikatan Wanita Kereta Api*—an association for wives of white-collar workers, and for women white-collar workers, formed August 31, 1955 in Surabaya, from sixteen organizations of wives of white-collar railway workers. The PNKA *asrama* workers interviewed by Dennis Cohen in the 1970s told how any repairs to housing were undertaken by the workers themselves, never by the DKA. Cohen writes: “according to everyone I talked with, no repairs or improvements had been made by the administration since the dormitories had been built [in 1950]”. Cohen, “Poverty and Development”, p.125.

⁷⁹ *Suara SBKA* 1 [September 1954]. np. As used by the DKA/PBKA/SBKA/ *formasi* meant the budget line set for more employment of workers. Both unions called for greater justice in this area—for a ‘proper’ *formasi*—for it affected promotion of permanent workers, and workers with provisional status. See also *Laporan Singkat* [1955], p.15. See photograph in Appendix II.

⁸⁰ *Program Tuntutan SBKA 1957*, p.6.

⁸¹ The Report stated 850 had been settled. *Laporan Singkat* [1955], p.34.

⁸² See for example, *Ibid.*, pp.33–34.

⁸³ *Suara SBKA* [January 1955], p.12.

⁸⁴ ‘Sekitar Perobahan Perdjalananan KA: Peraturan Dinas DKA Menggelisahkan Buruh’, *Suara SBKA* [January 1955], p.17–18.

four years in skilled worker categories, were to be returned to a non-skilled category as railway guards, with all the attendant losses of income and benefits? One of the workers had worked with the railways prior to the war and had also been a *pejuang* [fighter] during the revolution.⁸⁵ Were the efforts of the PBKA to secure a settlement of Rp.4,809.43 for a pensioned worker worthwhile?⁸⁶ Was the representation by the SBKA on behalf of an aggrieved member of the PBKA worthwhile? A letter from this worker told how he had been detained by the police for four months on charges of stealing and was dismissed from his position. However, even when he was subsequently released with a letter stating clearly he was not a wrongdoer, the Board of the PBKA refused his request for help in returning to work. According to the worker the Board felt if the police had detained him he must have been in the wrong. After intervention by the SBKA the worker was reinstated. In his letter he said he was certain that the PBKA was not able to struggle for the worker and he wished to join the SBKA.⁸⁷

The answer to the question: was such representation worthwhile?, must surely be yes. Although we have less information on the PBKA, we may judge from the SBKA's success—measured by the letters, donations, expressions of thanks, and above all in the number of workers who joined,⁸⁸ that the unions' work did bring rewards. That, at the same time, grass-roots work was also a contest for members in that it drew members from one union to another, is clear for the correspondence to union journals.⁸⁹ Success in gaining promotions to permanent status for workers, and from one level to another; the achievement of pensions or back pay payments for workers and/or their dependants was often rewarded by contributions to union coffers. Such gratitude was understandable in the light of the amounts received by the workers.⁹⁰ The cash payments returned 'in gratitude' ranged from a percentage of the amount received, or between Rp.5

⁸⁵ Letter to President Sukarno from Kasman, Semarang, requesting attention to his plight. Resolusi Rapat Kerdja SBKA Anak Tjabang Bengkel Semarang, 3 September 1954. *Arsip Nasional: Koleksi Arsip Kabinet Presiden R.I. 1950–1959. No.1505*.

⁸⁶ *Laporan Singkat* [1955], p.33.

⁸⁷ Letter dated Jakarta 21 May 1956 to DP SBKA in Jakarta from an aggrieved member of PBKA, Jatinegara. *Suara SBKA* [July 1956], p.16.

⁸⁸ In his research Cohen found patron–client relationships to be a strong influence on railway workers' choice of union [and political party]. Cohen, "Poverty and Development", Chapter V. Rather than contesting that view we may see grass-roots work as another strand of influence.

⁸⁹ See Letter from the members of the PBKA Sub-Branch Pengkok District, Yogyakarta, requesting permission to leave the PBKA because the "PBKA only stresses that we work energetically and hard...we feel as yet no benefit from the PBKA struggle". All the members signed by name, position and work number. *Suara SBKA* [January 1955], p.16.

⁹⁰ In just one instance, amounts ranging from Rp.1,025.75, Rp.500.26, to Rp.40 were returned to workers of the Sidoarjo branch. *Suara SBKA* [February 1955], p.25. In another, considerably larger amounts ranging between Rp.7,520 and Rp.6,400 were gained for members. *Suara SBKA* [December 1954], p.24.

to Rp.20.⁹¹ Attending the unions' grass-roots work were the many instances of kindness and mutual-help by branch members themselves: the collections taken up for widows; for flood victims; for victims of crime,⁹² or for the victims of natural disasters such as the eruption of Mt. Merapi. The PBKA, for instance, sent Rp.25,000 to the *Bupati* of Magelang to aid the sufferers.⁹³ The grass-roots representation of both the SBKA and the PBKA could fall under the rubric of *tuntutan ketjil-hasil* [small yield demands] and *aksi ketjil-hasil* [small yield actions]. This was a term used by SOBSI in urging its base organizations to successful mobilization and representation of workers.⁹⁴ Mention should be made of the *kebora* [*kebudayaan olahraga*—culture and sport] work of the unions, particularly of the SBKA. The SBKA's success in this area was helped by its organizational structure where local activities such as music classes or dancing, and larger, more celebratory entertainments were arranged at the *Seksi Kebora* branch, or sub-branch, level.⁹⁵ In the sporting field the SBKA was not alone in its efforts. Beginning in 1953, the DKA arranged an annual sports festival—*Pekan Olah Raga Kereta Api*—PORKA—for railway workers.⁹⁶

Lastly, in listing the work and achievements of the unions we must turn to their *sosek* [social/economic] funds: the BSP/KWKA—*Badan Sosial Pusat/Kematian Warga Kereta Api*, and the *Dana Hindromartono*. Such funds were necessary because of the ephemeral nature of the 'wins' for workers. The struggle was not only about the expansion of conditions, but also about defending their existing rights. The 1954 General Report of the SBKA issued a timely reminder of the problem:

⁹¹ *Suara SBKA* 60 [February 1953], p.10.

⁹² These are noted throughout the issues of *Suara SBKA* from 1953–1960. For example, see *Suara SBKA* [September/October 1955], p.12. *Suara SBKA* [March 1955] where amounts of Rp.687.83 and Rp.1,489.91 were collected by the Sidotopo and Manggarai sub-branch respectively. *Suara SBKA* December 1954], p.24.

⁹³ *Antara*, 19 June 1961.

⁹⁴ SOBSI, *Masalah Front Persatuan Buruh* [Diktat untuk Sekolah–Sekolah SOBSI Tjabang, Badan Dewan Nasional SOBSI: Djakarta, 1959].

⁹⁵ See, for instance, *Suara SBKA* [September/October 1955], pp.3–9. *Suara SBKA* [June 1956], p.14. *Suara SBKA* [February 1955], p.25 noted dancing practice three times a week at the Blitar engineering depot sub-branch where the teacher was important in the Blitar branch of *Lekra*—the cultural organ of the PKI. For an authoritative account of *Lekra* see Keith Foulcher, *Social Commitment in Literature and the Arts: The Indonesian "Institute of People's Culture" 1950–1965* [Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University: Clayton, 1986]. An article in *Pembina* 7/8 [1961], pp.27–28. 'Buruh Dalam Budaya, [Workers in Culture] questioned the necessity of a 'culture observer' in worker's lives. This was a thinly-veiled attack on *Lekra*. In its 1954 General Report the SBKA issued a warning that celebrations such as the forthcoming one for the union's anniversary should be simple "weighing up the conditions of the time". "Don't throw away work, money and time which takes away from the profit of the organization". *Laporan Umum* [1954], p.21.

⁹⁶ *Sekilas Lintas 25 Tahun Perkereta–Apian*, p.85.

successes are not permanent but must be defended for dismissals and price increases mean that as we go along successes lose their meaning.⁹⁷

The BSP/KWKA

Arguably the most successful of the two funds was the BSP founded in 1950 by the PBKA and the DKA.⁹⁸ It was headed by Poeradiredja, with R. Koerdi Soemintapoera as Secretary, and Wiriaatmadja as Head of the Central Savings [*Pusat Tabungan*] Section. The objective of the Fund, which began operation in 1952, was “to help the efforts of the Government towards the achievement of community prosperity” through the provision of savings and loan facilities. Lending was for household necessities only, but the organization also acted as an insurance fund. In the event of the death or permanent incapacitation of a member a payment was made [if death had occurred, to the member’s family] based on the premium paid by the member concerned. In 1958, Poeradiredja reported that seven out of the thirteen sections of the BSP were operating satisfactorily. One, the development fund, was frozen temporarily because of the difficult economic conditions being experienced in the country. This was a pity since the purpose of this fund was to enable workers who paid into that section to own a house [on their own land] to a value of no more than Rp.10,000. The BSP had calculated that the lowest-level worker could repay that amount within a period of thirteen to fourteen years.

The measured words of Poeradiredja in reporting on this event: “it is not my intention to admonish the Prime Minister, to change the economy, if indeed that is possible”, were an indication of how carefully the political tensions had to be negotiated. The amount deposited in the savings section for the year, Rp.7,500,000 [seven million five hundred thousand rupiah], was not insignificant. Nor was the amount lent for daily household necessities—Rp.5,000,000 [five million]. Benefit from the cooperative operated by the BSP was only for those members who paid a minimum of Rp.250. This amount it may be assumed was beyond the capacity of casual and lower-level workers. In the *Bagian Perindustrian* [Industrial Affairs Section], with help from the ICA [International Cooperative Administration] a shoe factory was in operation. With help from the Army and SOKSI a successful ready-made clothing factory was established, and a rice-mill “with fairly uneven results” was in operation. As well, there were smaller enterprises such as batik and soap factories.

⁹⁷ *Laporan Umum* [1954], p.27.

⁹⁸ The information in this section is taken from a report by Poeradiredja in *Berita DKA* [1959], pp.1–15. Badan Sosial Pusat Buruh Kereta Api: Peringatan pembukaan penggilingan padi BSP 1958 [Central Social Body of Railway Workers: Celebrating the Opening of the BSP Rice Mill].

The PBKA also operated a polyclinic and maternity clinic named after Emma Poeradiredja, the Director of the KWKA and a DKA Director.⁹⁹ In 1958, for a monthly contribution of Rp.2.50 the KWKA provided cash support to the wife or children of a deceased member of Rp.1,000. The amount paid as compensation on the death of a member's wife or child was Rp.150 and Rp.100 respectively.¹⁰⁰ Initially the KWKA insured only 'active' railway workers. In 1958, a change in operation was implemented and pensioned workers no longer had to leave the fund on retirement. In 1961 the KWKA announced a premium rise because members were in need of larger benefits. For Rp.6 per month the payments became Rp.2,500, Rp.500 and Rp.300 respectively. In addition, the larger compensation now covered disablement "as a consequence of an accident not caused by his own mistake and if he is not able to work again in his former position". This was to afford some protection to the lower-level worker. In an improvement on the 'pay-out' system the Congress also decided to increase the advance payment when a member died to 50 per cent of the amount owing. Higher benefits were received on payment of higher premiums.¹⁰¹ By 1963, despite Poeradiredja's leadership of both organizations, there were clearly tensions between Board members of the PBKA and the BSP. A resolution of the Sixth Congress of the union demanded the reorganization of the BSP because "BSP Board members must be people who *berjiwa* [have the spirit] of the PBKA...therefore members of the PBKA Board or workers designated by the Board must sit in the BSP Board".¹⁰²

The Dana Hindromartono

Established initially in Yogyakarta in 1952, the *Dana Hindromartono* had its roots in the funds, such as the Railways Worker's Fund in Jakarta, operated by the SBKA during the revolution.¹⁰³ The objective was to have a lawfully constituted social fund, whose name honoured a hero of the workers, which would "fill a hole in the provision of railway workers social needs". Altruism aside, ideology also played its part. In 1957, in a clear reference to the BSP/KWKA, Soetrasno the Secretary of the Fund claimed that the Fund was also established because "groups and elements which

⁹⁹ For more on the career of Emma Poeradiredja see Chapter VII of this study.

¹⁰⁰ Up to 1958, the average yearly amount paid out by the KWKA was between Rp.600,000 and Rp.1,000,000. Poeradiredja, *Badan Sosial Pusat Buruh Kereta Api*.

¹⁰¹ *Pembina* 5/6 [1961], p.19.

¹⁰² *Pembina* [June 1963], p.19.

¹⁰³ For an account on worker welfare funds—mutual benefit societies—during the colonial era see John Ingleson, 'Mutual Benefit Societies in Indonesia', *International Social Security Review* 46, 3 [1993], pp.69–77. The information on the *Dana Hindromartono* in this section is taken from *Peraturan Dasar Jajasan Dana Hindromartono: Peraturan Rumah Tangga Fonds Kematian Jajasan Dana Hindromartono* [Jakarta 1957].

were anti-*buruh* had formed a social body which was not democratic and which caused losses to workers". The Fund was an autonomous body, but under the direct supervision of a representative body of the SBKA and this was the reason its headquarters was moved to Jakarta where the Executive Board of the SBKA was based. Board Members of the Fund, as were the members of the DPP/SBKA and *Suara SBKA* Boards, were given an honorarium of one per cent of the contributions. Under the Fund's rules coverage was provided for death; incapacity caused by accident; sickness; old-age and for studying.¹⁰⁴

The Fund's rules admitted as contributors, "all workers of the railways; the railways/telephones businesses of the DSM; monthly or daily earners; and all those who worked in the 'sphere' of the DKA, such as restaurants etc." Those who did not work in any of the above but who were needed by the SBKA/*Dana Hindromartono* could also join the Fund: as well, there were honorary members. There was to be no difference based on religion, sex, rank, ethnicity or political allegiance. Those eligible for benefits were members whose wife/husband or children had died; or the heirs of the member because he/she had died. The specific inclusion of women workers can be seen as an extension of the aim of the SBKA, already signalled in its 1954 Report, to try for equality of treatment for women workers in the railways. The extent to which such aims were successful will be dealt with more fully in the case study on women workers, however, it may be noted that left-wing unions generally began to concentrate more on equality for women workers during the mid-1950s.

In contrast to the PBKA Fund, the *Dana Hindromartono* had one scale of contributions: a joining fee of Rp.4, and a contribution fee every two months of Rp.2.50. This clearly reflected the differences in the membership bases of the two unions. On the death of a member Rp.1,000 was paid; the death of the wife/husband of a member Rp.300; a miscarriage or death of a child Rp.125; and a once only payment for incapacitation of Rp.200. Assistance payments could be authorised at the Branch Board level but the amount of excess funds branches could keep in reserve was strictly limited. The SBKA placed great emphasis on the contrast of its flat-rate contributions to the scaled contributions of the PBKA fund, arguing that different scales of assistance "conflicts with the purpose of *tolong-menolong* and *gotong-royong*".¹⁰⁵ The 1954 year-end financial statement showed a balance of Rp.460,588.81; made up of inventory items, money reserves and money still held by branches.¹⁰⁶ The Fund had started with a

¹⁰⁴ The Head of the Fund was Djokesudjono. Note: This was the spelling in the reference cited. Whether this is meant to be Djokosoedjono I cannot tell as there is no other mention.

¹⁰⁵ Achadijat, 'Perkembangan Dana Hindromartono selama tiga tahun', *Suara SBKA* 30 [April 1955], pp.3-6. The information on the finance and working of the fund in the next section is taken from Achadijat.

¹⁰⁶ Inventory: Rp.11,766.00; Money reserve Rp.52,362.00; Branch money Rp.396,460.81.

loan of Rp.34,500.00 from the SBKA, cash receipts of Rp.100, one typewriter, two desks and six chairs. The amount paid out in assistance to members over 1952/52/54 totalled Rp.945,425.00.

By the SBKA's own assessment the building of its Fund had been a struggle. For, although as of March 1955 there were approximately 66,000 union members, only 27,694 of this total were Fund members. The contributions were voluntary and paid directly by members—"person to person". No aid for facilities was received from the DKA. The union referred to own system as "active", its opponents as "passive". The reason for this was the automatic inclusion of workers as BSP/KWKA members, unless they notified their refusal to become so no more than one month after their contribution was deducted from their pay.

Thus the critical difference between the two Funds lay in the procedural operating ties which the BSP/KWKA had with the DKA. It was this last fact which caused the SBKA such consternation. Without its own Fund, members of the SBKA would be connected to, and perhaps influenced by, Poeradiredja-led organizations. Its criticism of the BSP/KWKA was constant, often as has been suggested in the previous chapter, intemperate. However, judging by the letters to the SBKA journal on the unfair load of the BSP pay deduction system, the propensity it had for workers to go into debt, the complaints about slow and late payments, and noting the changes involving the cash advance payment that the KWKA itself made in its operation, such criticism was not without foundation.¹⁰⁷ The SBKA's criticism of the BSP, however, did not stop the union implementing its own *Badan Distribusi Buruh Kereta Api* as a sub-section of the *Dana Hindromartono*. In turn, the SBKA was strongly criticised by the Railways Distribution Board, the BDKA, which maintained that more distribution points would be bad for workers, simply add another opportunity to borrow money and cause "a chaotic situation".¹⁰⁸ Debt was a major problem for workers, but the SBKA saw the establishment of a new distribution body as a means for workers to obtain necessities without the same level of interest as that charged by the BSP.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, *Suara SBKA* [September 1954], p.12. [October 1954], p.12. [December 1954], p.24. *Suara SBKA* [January 1955], p.13. [March 1955], p.15. *Suara SBKA* 30 [April 1955], pp.12-13. The majority of letters or cases cited were identifiable by a worker's name, number and position. From the complaints in the letters a corollary may be drawn between the BSP and the 'people's shops' during the colonial era which sold wares to their members on credit, but with which workers were constantly in debt. On the people's shops set up by *Sarekat Islam* see Semaun, 'An Early Account of the Independence Movement'.

¹⁰⁸ *Putusan Kongres Ke-VI SBKA Tentang Perbendaharaan: Dokumentasi Kongres ke-VI 24-31 January 1957* [Bandung], p.51.

¹⁰⁹ A November 1955 issue of the union's journal published a note left by a worker from Kutoardjo to his father and workmates. The worker killed himself because his debts were too high. From his monthly wage of Rp.152.55 he owed the BSP Rp.114.98. *Suara SBKA* 37 [November 1955], p.12.

Given that there is a five year difference in the financial balances we have for the Funds, it is almost impossible to make comparisons on their success relative to one and other. It does seem clear, however, that each Fund was directed at the group which made up the bulk of its union's membership. We may also be sure that the progress of both Funds attested to the need amongst railway workers and their families for greater financial assistance to ease them through difficult and distressing times.

The closing years

Individually, the leaderships of both unions appeared to have been capable, active and thoughtful in their deliberations for worker welfare. The SBKA protested the limitations placed on unions by the law, and defended the democratic right to hold union meetings without the presence of the security police—DPKN [*Dinas Pengawas Keselamatan Negara*]. It argued against the tax on installing union posters as another limitation on activity. When, in 1956, the Parliament ratified ILO Convention No.98 on the 'Right of Association', Djokosoedjono pointed out that *pegawai negeri* were not covered and he called for a regulation which would validate the right for railway workers.¹¹⁰ Through exchange visits: for instance Singgih went as part of an Indonesian trade union delegation to Australia in June/July of 1959, the leadership sought to educate itself and to better represent its members.¹¹¹ At the Seventh Congress in Semarang in 1961, the union acknowledged the difficulties in the way of improving railway workers lives and of developing the railways so that all might benefit. Nevertheless, it put forward demands for implementation of the new PGPN, an end to the limit on the amount of money earned for overtime work, extra distribution of necessities for *Lebaran*, an increase in cost-of-living allowance, wage increases, work clothing distribution for all *pegawai*, and rice distribution for all government workers in order that casual workers would receive some relief.¹¹² The content of the demands was essentially the same as it had been throughout the 1950s.

The PBKA was equally concerned with educating its members and with defending the rights of railway workers to a better standard of living. Many from its leadership, such as Zulkifli, Tamboenan, Asep Ardi, Tarja, Achmad, Nj. Poeradiredja and Mach. Achjad had also travelled overseas, often funded by grants from institutions

¹¹⁰ *Suara SBKA* 46/47 [July/August 1956], p.10. *Laporan Umum*, p.5.

¹¹¹ Singgih Tirtosudiro, Impressions of the Australian Trade Union Movement, *SUA File*, S390. The delegation included unionists from the KBKI [Kuswara], SARBUMSI [Sundjoto], SBII [S. Narto Muljopramudjo], and Sutardjo from the 'Joint Action Committee of Trade Unions of Foreign Enterprises'. *ibid.*

¹¹² *Antara*, 9 February 1961. The new Executive Board of the union included Head: Soepardi; Deputy Heads: Kartono and Mansjur Lubis; General Secretariat: Subakir, Moh. Rawi and Ronosudarmo.

such as the Rockefeller Fund.¹¹³ At its Sixth Congress in 1963, it urged the PNKA to look at the financial position of workers, and warned that if no relief was forthcoming the union would petition the government to give a subsidy to workers for their 'vital industry' status. It then called on the government to "lighten the load of the lower-level worker from the crush of everyday living which was disruptive to the tranquillity of the worker's family". Like the SBKA it called for an end to the limit on the amount of money for overtime work so that workers might be able to earn a little more.¹¹⁴ Similar concerns, but sadly the ideological divide between the unions which served and competed for railway worker's loyalty was almost unbridgeable. The only time they had been able to come together in some agreement was over the planning for the *UU Kepegawaian*, in the calls for its proper implementation, and in their constant opposition to the limitations placed on the freedoms of railway workers by the articles in PP 8/1952 and PP 11/1952. They had also 'come together' with the formation on May 31, 1963, of the Worker's Management Councils—Poeradiredja and R. Soerojo S.H. from the PBKA, and Mansjur Lubis and Kartono S.H. from the SBKA. Their working together appears to have been untenable.

In a resolution from its Sixth Congress the PBKA called on all representatives from unions to try to make a "harmonious atmosphere and prevent antagonisms between members of the *Dewan Perusahaan*".¹¹⁵ In many ways the Sixth Congress can be seen as a defining moment in the PBKA/SBKA relationship. Army support had strengthened the PBKA and the union called for a move away from the past—the "liberal" period. Unions were now to be a "comrade" or "partner" with management in aiming for a "just and prosperous future" and the PBKA must move away from the various groups who still had the opinion that they were opponents of management.¹¹⁶ The context of this call was a period of increasing tension between the Army and the PKI. Aidit delivered a speech to the Heads and *pegawai* of the Ministry of Labour in which he warned against the efforts to split the militant unions in state enterprises by the name change to *karyawan*: to *persatuan karyawan* or *organisasi karyawan*, and warned against the "intimidation" of workers to leave the old unions and enter the *organisasi karyawan*. "Workers themselves" [he stated] "already say they are *organisasi madjikan*" [employers' unions].¹¹⁷

¹¹³ See PBKA, *Laporan Kerdja 3 Tahun*.

¹¹⁴ *Pembina* [June 1963], pp.4–20.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.19.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.4.

¹¹⁷ D.N. Aidit, 'Kaum Buruh Semua Negeri Bersatulah', *Dekon Dalam Udjian* [Tjeramah didepan para pendjabat dan pegawai Departemen Perburuhan pada tanggal 17 Djuni 1963, Jajasan Pembaruan: Djakarta, 1963].

There are no SBKA journals to be found for the 1960s, but the attitude of the union towards the PBKA is to be gleaned from the pages of *Harian Rakjat*, *The Indonesian Herald*, and from *Antara* reports of the eighth conference of the union in March, 1965. It had entered the new year demanding a 100 per cent increase in pay for the former DSM workers in North Sumatra,¹¹⁸ and the period prior to the conference and of the previous year had been one of calls through the pages of *Harian Rakjat*, of crush!, take over!, retool! At the Semarang conference Minister Sudibjo called the SBKA a *pandu* [guide] of the workers movement. Lieutenant General Hidajat, the Minister for Tourism, Post and Telecommunication, announced that the PNKA needed to be cleansed of prohibited party members from the PSI and *Masjumi*. For the SBKA this meant the PBKA. In a culmination of years of tension, dispute, name calling and outright ideological warfare, the union was successful in persuading Sukarno to 'freeze' the PBKA on April 1.¹¹⁹

In June, the SBKA protested that the PBKA had been given the opportunity to 'return' by Colonel Djoehartono in his position as Deputy to the Secretary General/Head of the National Front Board. According to the SBKA, Djoehartono had issued a letter saying that it was incorrect that the PBKA was frozen. It should not be 'unfrozen' the union continued, because it was counter-revolutionary and tainted by its involvement in Pasundan.¹²⁰ The SBKA not only continued but heightened the pressure on the PBKA. On September 9, Labour Minister Sutomo met a 100 strong delegation, headed by Soepardi, from the union. The Minister stated that he recognised the SBKA "as a militant and revolutionary organization" and that "serious attention must be given to the SBKA's demand to dissolve the PBKA". Sutomo added that he hoped that the SBKA would continue taking action "to eliminate counter revolutionaries from their organization".¹²¹ The *Partindo* Party supported the SBKA and called for the dissolution of all "organizations which are agents of the CIA". The PKI increased the pressure by

¹¹⁸ *Harian Rakjat*, 7 January 1965.

¹¹⁹ As with *Masjumi*, the PSI and the KBSI had been banned in 1960. The KBSI had been banned from operating in Central Sumatra from December, 1958 by order of the regional military commander. Hasibuan writes that the banning of the KBSI affected the operation of the PBKA in that region. Hasibuan, *Political Unionism*, p.75. This would have been a difficult time for Poeradiredja, but his position at the "centre" rather than in the region clearly enabled him to survive. The support of the anti-communist elements in the Army and the PNKA was therefore vital for the PBKA in Jakarta and Bandung. Although the PBKA's headquarters were in Bandung [as was the PNKA] Poeradiredja himself lived in Jakarta.

¹²⁰ *Harian Rakjat*, 9 June 1965. Pasundan was the name given to the Dutch-inspired federal state of West Java. It was later dissolved in February 1950. G.B. Clancy, *A Dictionary of Indonesian History Since 1900*, [Sunda Publications: Sydney, 1992], p.218. For Poeradiredja's involvement with the Pasundan Association see Chapter II fn.100.

¹²¹ *Harian Rakjat*, 9 September 1965 [cited in United States Embassy Translation Unit Press Review hereafter USE]

announcing full support for the joint demand of the KBKA/*Front Marhaenis* and that of some members of the PBKA for the dissolving of the PBKA/’Rightists Socialists’: “counter revolutionaries must not be pitied or forgiven: they must be destroyed”.¹²² Then, early in September Subandrio announced that the ‘Supreme Command for Retooling the Revolutionary Apparatus’ had taken over the case of the PBKA and would handle the retooling of bureaucratic capitalists and thieves.¹²³ [A sense of the atmosphere on the streets of Jakarta at this time can be gauged from the photographs in *Harian Rakjat*].¹²⁴ Finally, two days before the alleged coup attempt of September 30 Sukarno spoke to railway workers at the commemoration of ‘Railway Day’ in the Sports Palace. He warned:

if there are still persons who deviate from the path of revolution,
then counter revolutionary groups in the State Railway Enterprises
will also be dissolved like the BPS and the *Murba* Party.¹²⁵

Harian Rakjat reported: “Thousands of Railway Workers applauded the statement of the President and they yelled: “Dissolve the SOKSI/PBKA ... The PBKA is the follower of neo-colonialists, the PBKA is the tool of the CIA”.¹²⁶

Two days later, caught as it was in the aftermath of the events of September 30, the largest union of railway workers was alive in name only. On October 16, the PNKA, by order of Major General Suharto, was placed under the supervision of Kostrad. “The Army announcement noted the participation of railway personnel in the September 30 movement...”¹²⁷ In a parallel announcement General Hidajat now issued a revocation of all instructions and decisions against the PBKA which he said “were contrary to the Minister’s decision and are therefore automatically nullified”.¹²⁸ And the ‘small fry’? In a foretaste of events to come, *Sinar Harapan* reported on the arrest of 112 people in the Jatinegara area, twenty nine of whom were railway workers at Manggarai. “They are accused of participating in the *Gestapu* movement and therefore the Manggarai State

¹²² *Ibid.*, 8 September 1965 [USE]. The statement by the PKI also demanded support for Sukarno’s ‘Takari’ speech concerning the purging of BPS elements in the society, including unions such as the PBKA. The most authoritative account of the BPS, and PKI Army tensions is to be found in Harold Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia*. See, especially, Chapter II. ‘Guided Democracy: The Uneasy Balance of Power’.

¹²³ *Harian Rakjat*, 9 September 1965 [USE]

¹²⁴ See Appendix II.

¹²⁵ *Harian Rakjat*, 29 September 1965 [USE]

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ American Embassy Djakarta, Telegram to the Department of State October 18 1965. *Asia and the Pacific Security Files 1963–1969. 6001 Cables Vol. V October 1965–November 1965.*

¹²⁸ *The Indonesian Herald*, 18 October 1965.

Enterprise has taken firm action and they have been suspended”. “One of the employees by the name of Odjo was desperate and during the examination committed suicide”.¹²⁹ Odjo’s comrades in the wider railways’ workforce were, according to a 1970 report of the PNKA, screened, then either reinstated or dismissed. Of the SBKA members, 51,810 were screened; 46,876 were allowed to return to work and 4,361 were dismissed.¹³⁰ There are workers missing from these estimates many of whom were no doubt killed. It is a sad postscript to the history of railway workers unions in Indonesia to remember that Kadarisman, the VSTP leader whom the Dutch exiled to Upper Digul in 1927, died of malaria in the Cowra Internment Camp, Australia, in 1943. It is an equal tragedy that so many of the members of the railways’ ‘front-line troops’ died on their own soil at the hands of fellow Indonesians.¹³¹

Conclusion

In his very fine study of the *asrama* PNKA in the Jakarta of the 1970s, Dennis Cohen has observed that his was the story of “winners”—of those workers who were members of the PBKA. For it was they who were willing to admit to him their union allegiance. Present-day interviewees, although willing to speak of their working conditions and everyday difficulties during the 1950s and 1960s, were equally reluctant to claim communist union allegiance. This is the reality of contemporary Indonesia. It is for this reason that this case study has looked at the activities of both the major railway workers unions. It has not dismissed the issue of union political allegiance for it would be impossible to do so. Instead, to find a more complete history, one which includes the ‘winners’, and ‘losers’, it has attempted to look beyond to the struggles for better conditions: to the everyday activities which made up the social economic work to improve the lives of railway workers.

* * * * *

¹²⁹ *Sinar Harapan*, 19 October 1965 [USE]

¹³⁰ *Sekilas Lintas 25 Tahun Perkereta-Apian*, p.92.

¹³¹ On the death of Kadarisman see, ‘Letter from Cowra Camp’, *C.H. Campbell Deposit*, P.81/80.

Chapter IV

Coolies In The Workforce

Introduction

The demands for improvement in their working lives by maritime workers were the same as those of their railway worker comrades: for suitable housing; better wages and workplace conditions. But the struggle to achieve greater dignity in their lives, and the actions of the major post-independence union which represented them, the *Serikat Pelabuhan Pelajaran Indonesia*—SBPP—was different. We know that the more militant and widespread strikes of the railway workers took place against the DSM, but we also know that their major employer was the DKA. Until 1957, the maritime workers' fight for improved working conditions was more critically influenced by the issue of race because the majority worked for foreign employers: between employers and workers, and European workers and Indonesian workers, it was a complicating factor in discussions and negotiations, and a constant source of friction between the employers and unions. It was the issue of race which provided the post-independence maritime unions with a strong link to the history of colonial maritime unionism. The largest shipping company the *Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij*—Royal Packet Navigation Company, had virtual monopoly of the large inter-island shipping industry.¹ For most Indonesians it remained a potent symbol of colonial rule. As Sutter has observed: "probably no foreign enterprise in Indonesia attracted a greater amount of enmity than the KPM".²

Frank Broeze has argued that a dichotomy can be observed in the pattern of worldwide maritime labour history which is rooted in the commitment on the part of workers to militant action and radical ideologies, and on the part of union leaders, to pragmatic and "even accommodationist" actions. Further, after the initial militancy, this dichotomy becomes a "permanent feature of the maritime scene". Worldwide, according to Broeze, the effect of this dichotomy on maritime unions was varied. In many ports labour broke away, took direct action, or replaced moderate leaders by radical ones. In other ports pragmatism prevailed and alliances were often formed with "adjacent unions and international unions".³ There was certainly an 'expanded consciousness' of maritime

¹ *Economic Review of Indonesia* IV, 3 [July/August/September 1950], p.96. Hereafter the KPM.

² Sutter, *Indonesianisasi*, p.932.

³ Frank Broeze, 'Militancy and Pragmatism', An International Perspective on Maritime Labour 1870–1914, *International Review of Social History* XXXVI [1991], p.165.

labour post-independence which, in effect, provided the springboard for increased radicalism over the 1950s. In some actions maritime workers and their unions were not always in concert with each other. As well, leaders left to form new unions and alliances were sometimes formed for political reasons—such as over the West Irian issue. International alliances were formed, and nurtured. Thus, the history of Indonesian maritime labour and of its militancy falls within the general pattern suggested by Broeze. The important caveat is that the dichotomy between ‘militant’ workers and ‘pragmatic’ leaders was never as sharp as the pattern suggests. Workers and unions needed each other.

At the beginning of the decade dock labour was selected by the shipping companies and their agents—and then often through *mandors*. The labour force was highly casualized and largely illiterate, and unorganized.⁴ On the one hand, this meant that rank-and-file activity was harder to coordinate, on the other, that workers needed union representation. Seamen were also in a weak position: foreign shipowners could, if they so desired, replace Indonesian seamen by Chinese, Malayan or Netherlands labour. This pattern of labour relations was firmly rooted in the colonial labour relationship of maritime labour.⁵ The aim of this case study is to look at the efforts of maritime workers and their unions to overcome these difficulties and to make changes from the old pattern of labour relations. The term maritime labour is used here to cover a broad spectrum of workers on the shore and sea. The SBPP covered ‘seamen’ which included everyone on the ship—officers, petty officers, stewards, cooks, sailors and, as well, dockers, fishery workers, clerical workers, river transport, harbour transport workers, dry dock and ship building.⁶

The early history of maritime union formation

As with factory workers from the *Personeel Fabrieks Bond*—PFB—maritime workers also took part in strike action in 1920 to protest their conditions.⁷ It was as a consequence of this increased militancy of colonial workers that ‘Article 161 bis’ forbidding strikes was inserted into the Penal Code on May 10, 1923, by the Indies

⁴ Cf. ‘Pekerjaan Pelabuhan di pelabuhan kita’, *De Werker* 24 [31 Mei 1949].

⁵ See John Ingleson, ‘Life and Work in Colonial Cities: Harbour Workers in Java in the 1910s and 1920s,’ *Modern Asian Studies* 17, 3 [1983], for a discussion of the pattern of recruitment and conditions of harbour workers, their unions and their militancy during the colonial era.

⁶ Tuk Subianto, Report to the 1956 Seamen’s Union of Australia Annual Convention June, 1956, *SUA File, S390*. See Broeze, ‘Militancy and Pragmatism’, pp.165–200, where he identifies a ‘broad category’ of maritime workers to include the pivotal role of dockworkers, seamen, semi-skilled and unskilled, shipbuilding, repair and maintenance workers.

⁷ For more on the PFB see, Pringgogidgo, *Sedjarah Pergerakan*, p.82.

Government.⁸ The penalties under the regulation were severe: anyone directly or indirectly inciting a strike by means of speech, writing or drawing would be given five years gaol or fined f1000.⁹ This regulation, together with the 1923 regulations of the *Inlandsche Marine Board*,¹⁰ was to provide a catalyst for the formation in February, 1925, of the *Serikat Pegawai Pelabuhan Lautan*—SPPL, [Harbour Workers and Seaman's Union]. After the founding of the SPPL the colonial authorities established the Labour Bureau as a countermeasure to blunt some of the support going to the new organizations and the general workers' movement. The SPPL was itself the successor union of the *Havenarbeidersbond* [Harbour's Workers Union]¹¹ founded in 1919, and having ties through its leadership and members to *Sarekat Islam* and the PKI. Although an Islamic organization, *Sarekat Islam* had a substantial Marxist membership and tension and fissures developed within. At its congress in 1921 *Sarekat Islam* decided to remove all members belonging to other political organizations: a measure aimed principally at the communists.¹² Ever after tension between Islam and communism impacted on the labour movement, including maritime workers.¹³

Through the founding of the SPPL Indonesian maritime labour became linked with International communism, although, the *Vakinternationale Merah* [*Profinintern*—Red Labour International] acknowledged that the revolutionary links in the East were weak: "the revolutionary trade union movement has not had a satisfactory, practical effect among the workers in the colonies".¹⁴ The 'weak link' was a factor in the decision by the Pacific Transport Workers Conference in Canton in June, 1924, to increase work amongst Eastern seamen and dockers.¹⁵ At the conference, on the initiative of the

⁸ S.K. Trimurti, *Hubungan Pergerakan*, p.13.

⁹ See *Waterside Workers Federation of Australia Indonesia File, N114/190*. Hereafter WWF. Contained in the act to do with prevention of labour strikes were various clauses directed against political organization within the Dutch East Indies. For example, it was deemed an offence to insult or to intend to overthrow the Government, to hold a meeting of more than three persons without prior notification, or to disturb the peace. Under the 'Exorbitant Act' those thought to be disturbers of the peace could, without any legal proceedings, be exiled for an indefinite time at a specially appointed place. *ibid*.

¹⁰ *SBPP Program Perjuangan 1956*, p.5.

¹¹ See Ingleson, 'Life and Work', pp.464-470, for discussion on the leadership and position of the *Havenarbeidersbond* in Semarang, Batavia [Jakarta] and the other harbours in the Dutch East Indies.

¹² Ruth T. McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* [Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1965], p.104.

¹³ Cribb has written of the colonial PKI organizing amongst sailors and waterside workers at Tanjung Priok, and of the party's association with the Jakarta underworld in order to look for an 'alliance' "against local officials or Islamic leaders" intent on breaking up the PKI. Cribb, *Gangsters and Revolutionaries*, p.31.

¹⁴ McVey, *The Rise*, p.208.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.276.

Profintern, an international union of *Pelaut dan Buruh Merah di Pelabuhan Pelabuhan Pasifik* [Red Seamen and Workers in Pacific Harbours] was established, with different sections for China, the Philippines, Japan, India and Indonesia. Within Indonesia, a centralisation of maritime labour unions began: the *Serilagu—Sarekat Laut dan Gudang* [Seamen's and Dockers' Union] in Semarang; the *Sarekat Kaum Buruh Pelabuhan* [Dock workers' Union] in Surabaya; and the *Perserikatan Buruh Pelabuhan dan Lautan—PBPL* [Harbour and Seamen's Association] in Jakarta were joined to form the *Sarekat Pegawai Pelabuhan dan Lautan—SPPL*. This union was combined with the *Sarekat Pegawai Laut Indonesia—SPLI* which had been established in 1924 in Amsterdam by Semaun [of the railway worker's union] to represent Indonesian mailboat seamen.¹⁶ In March 1925 the SPLI headquarters were moved to the SPPL office in Indonesia and the SPPL joined both the Indies Trade Union Federation and the Red Labour Secretariat. The amalgamation of the various maritime unions, however, was not without problems. Both the Jakarta union and the *Serilagu* wanted control of the central body and this appeared to delay unification.¹⁷

The account of the formation of the SPPL by its post-independence successor union the SBPP focuses on internal reaction to colonial conditions.¹⁸ Conversely, Ruth McVey in her work on Indonesian communism lays emphasis on the external influence of international communism. Clearly external conditions influenced the centralisation of the unions; however, the historiography on maritime labour militancy during the 1910s and 1920s shows workers themselves were often independent of communist ideology and moreover willing to take action themselves.¹⁹ Notwithstanding this, at the union level the connection of the SPPL with the PKI meant moves by the Indies Government against the PKI impacted on the SPPL. The prohibition on the right of assembly imposed on the PKI by government decision on November 28, 1925, for example, extended to include the SPPL.²⁰ After the failure of the PKI revolt of 1927, execution of some of the rebels, detention of others, and exile to the Digul River Camp in New Guinea of most of the PKI leadership,²¹ union activity, as we have seen for the railway workers, was effectively halted.

¹⁶ Pringgogigdo, *Sedjarah Pergerakan*, p.85. See also McVey, *The Rise*, p.461. The total reported membership after the unions were combined was 3,000 seamen and 9,000 dockworkers. *ibid.*, p.442. fn.78. The figures are on the 'high side'. This is due to the usual problem associated with union numbers for the period—how and who was counted. I am indebted to Professor John Ingleson for this information.

¹⁷ Ruth McVey, *The Rise*, p.276.

¹⁸ See SBPP *Program Perjuangan 1956*.

¹⁹ Cf. Ingleson, 'Life and Work in Colonial Cities', pp.464–470.

²⁰ Ruth McVey, *The Rise*, p.471. fn.67.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.353.

In spite of these restrictions on union activity there were actions over working conditions. For maritime workers one of the most critical was the February 1933 action aboard the Dutch warship *Zeven Provinciën* where Indonesian and Dutch sailors mutinied over a reduction in their pay: one of the few times in the history of maritime labour that race lines were crossed during a dispute. After the five day mutiny was put down by the bombing of the *Zeven Provinciën*, on the order of the Dutch Government the Indonesian and Dutch sailors killed in the action were buried separately. In February 1958, on the twenty fifth anniversary of the mutiny, the remains of the twenty two Indonesian sailors who had died were re-interred in the 'Hero's Cemetery' at Kalibata. "Survivors, acknowledging the words of appreciation, voiced their opinion that the present men on Indonesia's waterfront were less militant and courageous than the crew of the *Zeven Provinciën*".²² The mutiny became known as '*Kapal Tudjuh*'. Later, this was to become the title of the workers' magazine of the SBPP and the action of the sailors a reference point for the post-independence unions.

Unfortunately, unlike the magazines of the railway worker's unions, few issues of *Kapal Tudjuh* remain. The history of the maritime workers of Indonesia, and especially those of Jakarta and their place in the post-independence life of the city has, therefore, to be teased out from other sources: newspapers; official documents such as the KPM files; PKI and SOBSI documents; magazines or journals of the period; and, most importantly, from the correspondence and material in the Seamen's Union of Australia files which came through the association of the Australian union with the General Secretary of the SBPP—Tuk Subianto. From this material we may look to the questions of militancy and pragmatism, and to the question of the "less courageous".

For land bound maritime labour during the Japanese occupation there is little historiography on which to draw. Shipping was interrupted because many KPM ships were captured or sunk. Those that were not were sent to either Australia or India to serve in the war effort, and the few Japanese ships in Indonesia were used for transport of official cargo.²³ Japanese plans for the construction of wooden motor ships on Java were not particularly successful and Indonesian *perahus* and a small number of Chinese motor vessels were the main form of inter island transport. Initially this was economically profitable but by the end of the War "a large part of the *perahu* fleet was said to have been out of commission".²⁴ Maritime workers would have been amongst those mobilized for

²² *Review of Indonesia* 5, 3 [March 1958], p.17. Frederick, in writing of Sutomo and the struggle groups in Surabaya, notes the presence of Abdullah who had a "special claim on Sutomo's attention derived from his modest *kampung* fame as one of the mutineers on the *Zeven Provinciën*". Frederick, *Visions and Heat*, p.248.

²³ H.W. Dick, *The Indonesian Interisland Shipping Company: An Analysis of Competition and Regulation* [Asean Economic Research Unit: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1987], p.12.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

work on the wharves, and many amongst the hundreds of thousands of workers from Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries transported to work on projects such as the Burma railway: thousands never to return. With the aim of establishing better working relations with ordinary labourers, such as those on the wharves, the Japanese dropped the usage of the word *coolie* [a more pejorative term] and replaced it with the “supposedly neutral Japanese word, *romusha*”. However, because of the coercive nature of labour mobilization and the “extremely harsh” working conditions *romusha* “quickly came to assume a connotation much worse than *coolie*”.²⁵

In the administrative offices of the harbours Indonesian workers were under the *Gunseirei-bu* the technical department responsible to the *Kaigun* [the Naval Military Government] rather than under the direct control of the *syahbandar* [harbourmaster].²⁶ In the same manner as the railway workers at the time they were not given high level positions. The early stages of the occupation were taken up with restoration of infrastructure; road bridges, railway bridges, factories, oil wells, and harbour facilities, including the unblocking of harbours.²⁷ These facilities had been destroyed as part of the Dutch ‘scorched earth’ strategy. Labourers were used by the Army for defence projects, whereas the Navy, which had its bases in Java, employed skilled workers and permanent labourers as maritime labour for such work as ship building and repairing. A total of 67,699 people were employed by the Navy: the largest number being forced labourers. Indonesian *romusha* engaged in hard work received a smaller rice ration than Japanese soldiers: those engaged in light work smaller again. Sato estimates that the average rice ration for *romusha* was around 380 grams per day. Dockers at Tanjung Priok received f0.40 per day the same as an ordinary labour in the tin mines.²⁸ It will be argued that for a considerable period of the next two decades maritime labour, especially those performing the harder, dirtier work—the *coolies*—continued to receive wages at the margin of existence and this was the major contributing factor in their militancy.

²⁵ Sato, *War, nationalism and peasants*, pp.159–160. Sato argues that we have extant records of the horrific conditions on such sites as the Thai–Burma railway owing to the number of Europeans who were employed in its construction and who, at the time, or subsequently, recorded the events. Because of this historians, having understood *romusha* to mean, primarily, those labourers sent overseas, have underestimated the numbers mobilised. Most labourers worked within Java and “there are few records of the work conditions on the construction sites where only Asian workers were employed”. *ibid.*

²⁶ Interviews with Kapten Abdul Malik bin Ahmad Syafi 14 Des. 1985, 12 Okt. 1987, *Dibawah Pendudukan Jepang*, p.40.

²⁷ Sato, *War, nationalism and peasants*, p.161.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 162–172.

Building a trade union 'off-shore'

The period of maritime history under the occupation [again unlike that of the railway workers] had broad 'off-shore' international connections. There was a strong expression of external working-class sentiment for Indonesian maritime labour, either in its fight against the return of the Dutch, or against wage injustice based on race which reflected, in confirmation of Broeze's assertion, "a worldwide maritime culture". Waterside workers from Australia, the Netherlands, India, Egypt, Singapore and the United States, for example, 'welcomed' the revolution with a boycott of Dutch shipping.²⁹ In Australia, where the 'Netherlands East-Indies Government In-Exile' had made its headquarters, boycotts and strikes by Indonesian seamen and Australian maritime workers were a major factor in disrupting Dutch plans for a speedy return to power. Australian maritime labour [through thirty one trade unions], and "four unions of Asian seamen, including the newly formed *Sarekat Pelayar Indonesia—Sarpelindo* [Indonesian Seamen's Union temporarily based in Sydney] imposed boycotts on any Dutch activity likely to aid the war on the Indonesian Republic".³⁰

The first strike in Australia of Indonesian seamen on April 1, 1942, was less than a month after the Netherlands Indies surrender to the Japanese. The cause of the strike concerned a war risk bonus paid to seamen of other nationalities, but not to Indonesian seamen.³¹ Many other strikes in Australia, although within the wider framework of the revolutionary struggle, also concerned wage inequality based on race. Continuing Dutch actions concerning the wages of Indonesian employees, stemming in part from a misjudgment of the depth of the revolutionary commitment, and in part from a belief that life could continue as before, deepened further worker's determination to use the strike weapon as a means of achieving wage justice. KPM Notice No. 62, of May, 1945, issued just prior to the Japanese surrender in August, was illustrative of this misjudgment, and of the "old colonial standard". KPM captains were instructed that deferred pay set aside for Indonesian petty-officers and seamen was conditional on good conduct, and "only those seamen whose service [was] continuous and satisfactory to their captains and/or the KPM as from June 1943 [were] entitled to receive their deferred pay. The deferred pay of 25 guilders to all seamen [was] to be regarded as a bonus for their services". The instruction at the same time that the wages of petty-officers were to be reduced, leaving them three pounds [in Australian currency] less a month to live on,

²⁹ See Rupert Lockwood, *Black Armada: Australia and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence* [Hale and Iremonger: Sydney, 1982], p.319, for a full list of the countries where boycotts were imposed.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.4. Cf. Joan Hardjono and Charles Warner [eds.], *In Love with a Nation: Molly Bondan and Indonesia her own story in her own words* [Charles Warner: Australia, 1995], p.34.

³¹ Lockwood, *Black Armada*, p.63.

confirmed the alienation of those “previously inclined to accept Dutch sovereignty”.³² As Rupert Lockwood's book—*Black Armada*—shows, Indonesian working-class consciousness in Australia during the period of NICA increased as workers gained improved conditions from their actions. In this way, the connection between raised working class consciousness during the stay in Australia and later maritime militancy was very strong. It was in this atmosphere of maritime comradeship and militancy that Tuk Subianto was nurtured.³³

Union formation ‘on shore’

We have seen in the previous chapters how the railroads and trams were seized by *pemuda*. Maritime labour was also part of that revolutionary zeal. The Tanjung Priok area was a ferment of armed group activity as it became the ‘front line’ against the returning Dutch for the North Jakarta region. In his account of this period Hadisutjipto writes of the formation of a BKRL—*Barisan Keamanan Rakjat Laut*—and that amongst other groups making up this body was the *API Pelabuhan* with D. Hasibuan as its head. He also notes the existence of a *Kelompok Kaigun* which was made up of people working in the administrative offices of the navy which in turn was involved in the work of the Japanese secret police. It appears this fact made relations between members of the *Kelompok Kaigun* and other revolutionary groups difficult.³⁴ Not long after proclamation, the BBI in Tanjung Priok seized control in the three harbours and named Dauhan Hasibuan as the new Director with the three harbours under the leadership of Tjitrawiguna, Suprijadi and Sjamsudin respectively.³⁵ Tjitrawiguna appears in many accounts of this period. For instance, in an eye-witness account we learn of the presence of a “charismatic” leader at Tanjung Priok, named Pak Tjitra, who mobilized many harbour workers for the struggle.³⁶ By November of 1945, the Dutch were once again in control of Tanjung Priok harbour. According to Hadisutjipto, prior to the restoration of Dutch authority, the BBI in Tanjung Priok had arranged a ‘working agreement’ with the Allied Army that payment for work must be in line with a determined agreement. Apparently the agreement was not always abided by, but Hadisutjipto, with a somewhat idealistic claim, has claimed that it meant “the Allies, Dutch and NICA could not now forget that Indonesians could take power unto themselves”.³⁷

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70.

³³ Cf. B. Fitzpatrick and R.J. Cahill, *The Seamen's Union of Australia 1872–1972* [Seamen's Union of Australia: Australia, 1981].

³⁴ Hadisutjipto, *Bara dan Njala*, pp. 19–53.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Interviews with Kapten Abdul Malik bin Ahmad Syafi, *Dibawah Pendudukan Jepang*, p.40.

³⁷ Hadisutjipto, *Bara dan Njala*, p.54.

We have only 'scattered' information on the actual formation of maritime unions during the revolution, on their connection with one another, or on how they operated. Maritime workers were part of the revolutionary forces which seized boats after the Japanese surrender.³⁸ In October of 1945, 7,000 dock workers went on strike in protest against the loading and unloading of Dutch ships. On the intercession of the English they were ordered back to work. The workers returned but refused to undertake work for the "interests of the Dutch".³⁹ After the Japanese surrender, in the first flush of *Kemerdekaan!*, few people had wanted to work for the returning Dutch and Japanese troops were, ironically, 'recruited' as *koeli pelabuhan* [harbour labourers]. On the restoration of their control of the wharves the Dutch authorities in Jakarta, hoping to develop the wharves, overcome infrastructure problems and, no doubt, wary of Indonesian maritime labour fired with revolutionary zeal and fuelled by its war-time boycotts in Australia of Dutch shipping, tried to hold the Japanese labourers in Indonesia but they were sent back to Japan in 1946.⁴⁰ In this year it was reported that the *Badan Pemberontakan Republik Indonesia*—BPRI—was successfully agitating amongst the *koelies* at the KPM owned *Unie-Kampong* at Tanjung Priok and that waterside workers were on strike.⁴¹ In 1947 workers were again on strike. This time because two of their comrades [according to the Dutch report] had been "lightly wounded" during a search by the Dutch military. The Dutch files record that plans for a strike "seem to have existed for some time but there is no unity amongst the workers".⁴²

We can confirm the difficulties for union formation in the maritime industry from the contents of a letter from the Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia to the then Deputy Prime Minister and Vice-Chairman of SOBSI [Setiadjit] on October 29, 1947.

³⁸ See *SBPP Program Perjuangan 1956*.

³⁹ *Soeroeh Boeroeh* [15 October 1945]. It was said that the Dutch fired at innocent workers and strapped ten of them to poles, insulted workers wearing nationalist badges, and threatened to shoot down followers of Sukarno. *The Voice of Free Indonesia* 1 [1945].

⁴⁰ 'Pekerdja Pelabuhan 'Unie-Kampong'', *Mimbar Indonesia Nomor Kerdja* 18 [1 May 1948], p. 35.

⁴¹ DOBIN, 30/11/1946, NEFIS, *Algemene Secretarie* 1e. 1-11-18-3. *Minggoean Merdeka* [17 May 1946]. np.

⁴² DOBIN, 330, 13/5/47, *Rapportage Indonesie* 130.

Dear Comrade,

I venture to write this letter in the hope that it may get through to you with an earnest desire to establish some permanent contact between yourself as leader of the Trade Union Movement of the Republic and myself on behalf of the Trade Unions in Australia.

Our political campaign for the independence of your Republic has been kept on a fairly high level here, the basis of which has been the sustaining of the ban on Dutch ships to the Indies....

We have been placed somewhat at a disadvantage in assessing tactical moves within the Republic, having to rely on sketchy newspaper reports which are largely distorted to suit the policy of the owners...[we] feel that we will be able to maintain the high political level around your struggle...if more particular and detailed information can be received in a more direct way...

I would like as soon as possible, without wanting to impose too much on your valuable time, to know...[c] What is the situation relating to the functioning of SOBSI and its organisations in Dutch held areas, and what steps have been taken by the Dutch against them...what is the morale like now, compared with the high morale that I witnessed during my memorable visit to your Republic?...

To show that we are keeping the ball rolling here in Australia I have just returned from a five weeks union organising tour of the branches of our Dockers Union throughout Queensland, during which tour I addressed many enthusiastic meetings on Indonesia, and raised 350 pounds from the Dock workers with more to come for the purchase of medical aid for your Republic...

On behalf of the Waterside Workers' Federation and the Labour Movement of Australia I send sincere greetings to your people and their leaders, greetings borne out of a common struggle for a common objective.

Long Live the Republic of Indonesia!
E. Roach—Assistant General Secretary.⁴³

In spite of the difficulties there were at least two relatively large unions representing maritime workers during the revolution. The *Serikat Buruh Kapal dan Pelabuhan*—SBKP [Ship and Harbour Workers], and the *Serikat Buruh Lautan dan Pelajaran*—SBLP. Both, as their names suggest, aimed to cover seamen and harbour workers. At a large conference of maritime workers in Surabaya in October, 1950, the two unions amalgamated to form the SBPP. The talk at the conference was of "[t]he imperialists and capitalists trying to divide the working-class. Therefore a powerful organization was needed free from anarchistic and opportunistic leanings". The walls of the conference building were decorated with Indonesian and Workers' Flags, and photos

⁴³ Letter to Dr. Setiadjit from E. Roach, *WWF Indonesia File, N114/190*. Note: At this time Setiadjit was Chairman of the Labour Party, and Vice-Chairman of SOBSI. Roach had addressed Setiadjit as President of SOBSI and with the title of Dr. The *Serikat Buruh Maritim Indonesia* was founded on 30 March 1947, in Jakarta, but the connection with later unions is unclear. Taking into account the fee structure—membership fees of one per cent from total income with the smallest amount to be Rp.1.50 and a joining fee of Rp.5—this would appear to have been a white-collar union. *Anggaran Dasar SBM1*.

of Karl Marx, Engels, Sukarno, Hatta, and “worker’s heroes” such as Amir Sjarifuddin, Suripno and Harjono who had been killed in the aftermath of Madiun. The Conference closed with shouts of ‘*Hidup Proletar Sedunia!*’ ‘*Hidup Demokrasi Anti-Imperialis!*’ [Long Live the Workers of the World! Long Live Anti-Imperialist Democracy!].⁴⁴

The SBKP had been established under the leadership of R.M. Hadiono Kusumo Utjojo, who in 1950 became chief of the Mediation Service of the Ministry of Labour. He was also a “pioneer in the field of Indonesian wharf and warehouse companies” with his establishment of the *N.V. Veem Djawa Madura of Jakarta*.⁴⁵ Also amongst the founding group were Lukman Wiridinata, Dr. Djuanda and Ali Budiardjo. All three were highly connected republican figures of the time who were later to have positions within the national elite.

After the formation of the SBPP none of the men appear to have been involved, at least at the leadership level, with the union. In fact, in 1952, Kusumo Utjojo was the employer’s representative on the *Panitya Perumahan Buruh Tanjung Priok*—Housing Committee for Tanjung Priok Workers established by the Minister of Labour at that time, Tedjasukmana.⁴⁶ As with Tedjasukmana in his several roles as party leader, business owner and Minister of Labour, Kusumo Utjojo was able to “wear many hats”. Much to the disquiet of the SOBSI/SBPP, Tedjasukmana was active in the establishment of a trade union of dock workers within the SMN Company. For this he was accused of attempting to split the SOBSI/SBPP union which, there is little doubt, would have been his aim.⁴⁷ It is evident that throughout the 1950s and 1960s the involvement of men at the leadership level of unions who did not come from amongst the workers continued. Subianto reported in 1956 that the development of the rank and file of all maritime workers to a greater working class consciousness was slow because of the involvement of officials in union affairs.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Kementerian Perburuhan, *Situasi Perburuhan Dalam dan Luar Negeri* [October 1950].

⁴⁵ Sutter, *Indonesianisasi*, p.954. The SBKP was formed in April, 1948.

⁴⁶ *TMP* 3/4/5 [July/August/September 1952], p.41.

⁴⁷ SOBSI, General Report of the Central Bureau of SOBSI delivered at the SOBSI National Conference September 28, 1952. *SUA File*, N38/304.

⁴⁸ *SUA File*, 390. Lukman Wiridinata become Minister of Justice in the Wilopo and Burhanuddin cabinets. Ali Budiardjo Secretary General for the Defence Minister in the Hatta Cabinet, and Secretary General of the Ministry of Defence in the Wilopo Cabinet. Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy*, pp.62, 289, 180. On Djuanda see Chapter II of this study. Feith writes that “most unions were run, at least at the higher levels, by white collar persons who had been sent by their parties to work in the trade union”. *ibid.*, p.106. While this appears to be true for the SBKP, it was not so for the later SBPP, nor for the SBKA discussed in Chapters II and III of this study. Although it is true that white-collar workers were prevalent amongst the central leadership of the SBKA, they derived their white collar-status from their railway occupation.

There were many unions representing all sections of maritime labour: some were aligned with the other major labour federations—the KBKI, SOBRI and the SBII, and others were independent, that is free of any major political alignment. Of the independent unions the largest was the *Serikat Pelajaran Seluruh Indonesia*—SPSI—under the leadership of J.R. Jans. Amongst the leadership body of the SPSI were several members of the PSI.⁴⁹ In 1958 it was reported to have a membership of between 12,000 to 15,000 thousand.⁵⁰ Goldberg, as he had done with Poeradiredja of the PBKA, called Jans an outstanding trade union leader.⁵¹ Jans was Dutch, and in 1956 a Director/Owner of a large transport enterprise—Veem—Jans. Another independent union, for which no membership figures are available, was the *Serikat Buruh Teknik dan Pelabuhan*—SBTP—under the leadership of Johan H. Jacob. Other maritime unions included two affiliated with the KBSI: the *Serikat Buruh KPM* under the leadership of Marpaung, and the *Federasi Buruh Maritim Indonesia*—FBMI—under the leadership of A.P. Lolong and M.T. Ritonga.⁵² The SOBSI aligned SBPP was by far the largest and most active of the waterfront unions and it is for this reason that the study concentrates on its activities. The following chart gives the reader some idea on the number of unions representing maritime labour on the Jakarta waterfront.

<i>PKI/SOBSI Affiliated</i>	<i>Other Party Affiliated</i>	<i>Independent UNIONS</i>
SBPP Branches in all main harbours/sub-branches in coastal ports. <u>Tanjung Priok Sections:</u> KPM: KJCPL: SMN: NISHM: OCEAAN: NISE: Veemcombinatie IBVV: <i>Unie- Kampong</i> : Droogdok Mij SBKB [<i>Serikat Buruh Kendaraan Bermotor</i>] The KPM Central Jakarta Branch	PNI/KBKI/SBLP MURBA/SOBRI MASJUMI/SBII PSI/KBSI [SB/KPM and FBMI]	POB [<i>Pusat Organisasi Buruh</i>] SB <i>Borsumij/Tanjung Priok</i> SBTP/SBPI [name changed in 1955 to <i>Serikat Buruh Pelajaran - Association of Indonesian Harbour Workers</i>] SPSI [local branches as well as industry-wide branches eg. PELNI] PPDPP [<i>Persatuan Pekerdja Djawatan Pelajaran Pemerintah - Shipping Workers' Clerical Union</i>]

Ownership on the waterfront

Although departmental control was transferred into Indonesian hands in late 1949, majority ownership of shipping, and by extension control of labour, remained in European hands—primarily Dutch—until December 3, 1957 when the KPM central

⁴⁹ Cf. Tedjasukmana, *The Political Character*, p.57.

⁵⁰ U.S. *Directory of Labor Organisations* 1958.

⁵¹ Goldberg, 'Tasks Ahead for Free Trade Unions', p.2.

⁵² U.S. *Directory of Labor Organisations* 1958.

office was invaded by workers who read a proclamation 'taking over' the company.⁵³ Over time, in co-ordination with Governmental interests [although having no direct monopoly from the State], the KPM had developed "a highly organized and well equipped shipping organization". Indonesians, through their *perahus*, largely controlled the "short distance traffic along the coast and between neighbouring islands". The Indonesian *perahus*, an estimated fleet of 1000, provided the link to the collecting harbours where the export goods were transported by inter-island shipping to ocean harbours for transshipment.⁵⁴ The large majority of the maritime labour needed to traverse and to connect the Archipelago with the outside world was Indonesian, strategically placed, and, therefore, with an importance belied by its numbers. Nonetheless, apart from the *perahus*, Indonesians had little commercial equity in shipping.

During 1947 there were several initiatives to develop an Indonesian commercial interest in local coastal traffic. In March, the Mutual Shipowning Foundation was established under the auspices of the Department of Economic Affairs and the KPM. Then in June, two Indonesian shipping companies were formed.⁵⁵ The shore personnel of the shipping companies were, for the most part, Indonesian, whereas the ships were manned exclusively by Indonesians. Both companies had Indonesian Directors assisted by a Dutch Director appointed by the companies.⁵⁶

Howard Dick has observed that the move to make control changes in the "feeder services" was the result of Dutch desire to achieve nationalist elite support during the revolution. The nationalists resisted the return of the pre-war status quo. The fact that the fifteen-year 'Great Archipelago Contract' had lapsed on January 1, 1946 and was subsequently not renewed was a sign of the changed circumstances within the shipping industry.⁵⁷ On the other hand, the Dutch Government, whilst acknowledging that it might appear strange for a large capitalistic shipping company long concerned with profits—particularly one whose reputation pre-war was to hold competition at bay by the

⁵³ Feith, *The Decline*, p.583. Early Indonesian participation in shipping was limited to the operation of sailing vessels. It was hoped to strengthen the navigation companies operating sailing vessels [such as the co-operative navigation company Roepelin, established before the war at Surabaya], but the lack of engines meant that trade was dependent on the wind.

⁵⁴ *Economic Review of Indonesia* IV, 3 [July/August/September 1950], p.96.

⁵⁵ *Stichting Gemeenschappelijk Schepenbezit* or SGS—Joint Shipowning Authority]. SGS had 45 per cent of the shares in each company with the balance taken by private Indonesians and district governments. The *Maskapai Kapal Sulawesi Selatan*—MKSS—later called the *Perusahaan Pelajaran Sulawesi Selatan*—PPSS—at Makassar, and the North Celebes and Moluccan Coastal Shipping Coy—known generally as NOCEMO, later as the *Pelajaran Rakjat Indonesia*—PERINDO—at Menado. The purpose of the foundation was to act as intermediary between the Netherlands Indies Government, the KPM, and the Coastal Shipping Companies. *Economic Review of Indonesia* III, 4 [October/November/December 1949], p.114.

⁵⁶ H.W. Dick, *The Indonesian Interisland Shipping Company*, p.13.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.13. cf. Dick, p.38, fn. 30 for the meaning of the contract.

exertion of every effort—to willingly move aside for another, presented the view of KPM as a “guiding hand”, using its years of experience to help build an Indonesian mercantile marine.⁵⁸

During the Round Table Conference bargaining the status of the KPM was an issue of real contention because, for both sides, it was “a potent symbol”.⁵⁹ Although with very different connotations, for both the Dutch and the Indonesians it symbolized colonial power. The most major concession gained by the KPM under the terms of the RTC was the granting of equal rights for the Dutch flag in the inter-island trade. Then, during the early months of 1950, further proposals for control from the Indonesian Government led to major concessions from the KPM. The company carried on business as usual but Dick has commented, that after December 1950, “the KPM Board accepted that the company no longer had a long-term future in Indonesia” and investment in the inter-island trade stopped.⁶⁰

For its part, the Indonesian Government embarked on a process of “Indonesianization” of the shipping industry. A new state enterprise PELNI—*Pelajaran Nasional Indonesia* [Indonesian National Shipping] was formed. PELNI was “authorized to operate ships on its own account in competition with KPM on the main trunk routes”. The *Djakarta Lloyd* and *Inaco* [Indonesian Navigation Company] companies, the latter to undertake inter-insular communication, were also formed in 1951.⁶¹ The *Djakarta Lloyd* company was established with capital of 30,000,000 Indonesian guilders, and with the expressed aim of competing with KPM.⁶² Originally the Government had planned to take over the whole of the KPM fleet, but this, and the plan to monopolize coastal shipping was abandoned in January 1951, although the Government did continue with the planned national shipping service with nine ships ordered from abroad.⁶³

⁵⁸ *Economic Review of Indonesia* III, 4 [October/November/December 1949], p.114. Further changes were made with the establishment of the Department of Shipping on March 1, 1947. The Department was separate from the Shipping Office of the Department of Economic Affairs, and different roles were assigned to each with a distinction between the technical and economic aspects of shipping. ‘Assisting at negotiations and supervising terms of labour’ was left to the Shipping Office, under the direction of the Department of Economic Affairs. *Economic Review of Indonesia* 1, 5 [May 1947], p.75.

⁵⁹ Dick, *The Indonesian Interisland Shipping Company*, p.15.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ See, *ibid.*, p.17, for a discussion of the tensions and difficulties caused when the Government withdrew support from INACO in favour of PELNI. The national company was seen as taking much needed government financial support away from other national endeavours involving prominent business people.

⁶² BBC, 24 March 1950.

⁶³ BBC, 8 January 1951.

That foreign control of the strategic shipping industry was a central concern of not only government, but also of workers and unions, is well illustrated by the political and economic support given to the new company. With the President of the company an Indonesian, and a number of senior government officials on the Board of Directors,⁶⁴ the SPSI under the leadership of Jans showed support for the new company by subscribing 6,000,000 Indonesian guilders to the company's capital. The main source of capital was Government subsidy and shareholders in the Seamen's Union were to receive forty per cent of the profits; company employees another forty per cent and twenty per cent was to form a reserve fund. It was also acknowledged by the authorities that attention needed to be paid to the Indonesian *Veems* [storage companies] of which there were only two operating in Jakarta at this time—*Indonesian Veem* and *Djawa Madura Veem*.⁶⁵ The latter was the company founded by Kusumo Utjojo the former head of the SBKP. We may conclude therefore, that there was a wide gap between those at the top of some maritime unions and the workers who made up the membership.

In 1954, there were moves to effect greater Indonesianization of the shipping industry through the transferral of port warehousing, stevedoring and lighterage to Indonesian firms. Because these companies leased warehouses and equipment from port authorities takeover involved little disruption. Dick maintains that the KPM “was not loath to surrender its terminal operations which, being very labour intensive, had been plagued by industrial strife”.⁶⁶

A new Ministry of Shipping was formed in April, 1957, and after the expulsion of the KPM in December its offices were taken over by the Ministry, not PELNI. This move signalled the change from government participation in the shipping industry through PELNI, to government regulation of the industry through the bureaucracy, and furthermore, a change in the commercial principles versus social and political equation.⁶⁷ Still, it is clear that in the early years of the decade to 1957, government actions were designed to alleviate at least some of the difficulties associated with the maritime environment—KPM dominance, lack of indigenous ownership and space for indigenous capital to operate.

In all this the position of maritime labour was a somewhat invidious one. In his work on the inter-island shipping industry Dick refers to the *omschakeling* [disengagement] of the KPM from 1952. For the workers this meant carrying on

⁶⁴ It was reported at this time that the government officials were without financial interest in the company. *BBC*, 24 March 1950.

⁶⁵ *Mimbar Indonesia* [1951], p. 8.

⁶⁶ Regulation No. 61/1954. Dick, *The Indonesian Interisland Shipping Company*, p.18.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.25.

negotiations with a company with little commitment to its Indonesian workforce. As the KPM continued to make profits despite the gradual erosion of its position by competition from PELNI and private shipowners,⁶⁸ industrial strife on the waterfront and at sea against the KPM and the other foreign owned companies increased. On the other hand real benefits to workers did not necessarily flow from the attempts at Indonesianisation of the waterfront. A plethora of small firms operated in warehousing, stevedoring, lighterage and forwarding. Because windfall profits could be made from the evasion of custom regulations the firms were not interested in the "definition nor acceptance of responsibility".⁶⁹ Conditions were chaotic.

Government and maritime labour

Clearly governments had difficult choices to make: enabling Indonesian capital investment, ensuring a relatively stable climate for foreign investment [even though foreign dominance was deeply resented by some], and assuaging workers' sense of injustice. For this reason the early expression of views from political leaders, although warning of the danger inherent in the strike weapon, were sympathetic to the plight of maritime labour. Nonetheless, at the same time, there were measures to control that labour. Maritime unions were as much opposed to the Emergency Law and Laws 22/1957 and 7/1963 because of their vital industry classification as were the railway worker's unions. Another measure designed to control maritime labour was the decision by the Sukiman Cabinet in 1951 which empowered the Minister of Communications to appoint a *Kuasa Pelabuhan* [Port Authority] to find a solution pertaining to the management, transportation, security, and employment of labourers in the ports.

The Port Authority had extraordinary powers: it could call in the assistance of the army and police whenever necessary, see to the guarding of the ports by the military as well as the police, see to the management and employment of Custom and Excise officers, and see to the management and employment of labourers if necessary. In an interview, the Chief of the Service for Custom Duties and Excises [Tapiheru] stated the "unmanageableness" of workers, their seven hour working day and their unwillingness to work overtime were the major problems. He expected, he added, that the dictatorial powers of the new Harbour Authorities would change this.⁷⁰

It was the centrality of the waterfront which ensured, if not action, at least constant political discussion about the conditions of maritime labour. In 1952 twelve per

⁶⁸ In 1956 PELNI carried 25 per cent of the available cargo which increased to 29 per cent in 1957. In passenger trade the KPM dominated with 94 per cent of the traffic. The last full year of KPM operations in Indonesia was in 1956. *ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.29.

⁷⁰ *Indonesian Review* 4 [1951], p.280.

cent of the industrial disputes in Jakarta involved the harbours.⁷¹ The vital importance of shipping to the running of the economy, when coupled with the appalling working conditions, was recognised as potential trouble. In 1951, the Ministry of Labour reported on the distressed fate of the harbour workers. The Report outlined the problems faced by workers overall: low pay, long hours, lack of legally defined rest days, safety problems and poor housing. The position of harbour workers was highlighted, and they were cited as amongst the weakest group in the economy.⁷² The *Badan Kontak Pegawai Pelabuhan* was established. The purpose of the body was to function as a go-between for employers and both *buruh halus* [white-collar workers] and *buruh kasar* [manual workers]. Interestingly, the Head of the BKPP was Tjitra who was able to call on his revolutionary connections to get support for workers in the Tanjung Priok area.⁷³

Harbour workers joined fellow workers of the city under trees or bridges, or in the discarded rusting pipes of abandoned constructions. Worried by the cumulative affect of poor housing, low pay, unhealthy and unsafe conditions on worker productivity, and hence wharf congestion, the Ministry allocated funds for housing expansion at the harbours. For Tanjung Priok the allocation was Rp.3,300.000: for Tanjung Perak [Surabaya] Rp.2,500.000: for Semarang Rp.1,500.000, and for Cirebon Rp.750,000. For Jakarta this meant approximately 110 houses; Surabaya, 120; Semarang, 68 and Cirebon 30. And further funds were allocated for future housing development in 1952 for the harbours outside Jakarta.⁷⁴ It was said that the allocations were in recognition of the special difficulties faced by harbour workers, particularly in the larger urban areas such as Jakarta, and a further protection against an increase in social problems.⁷⁵ By extension, of course, the measures were also to dampen maritime labour militancy of the type which had already taken place throughout 1950.

A profile of maritime labour in 1945 shows continuity in characteristics with maritime labour in the last decades before the War. The majority of workers were *tidak-tetap* [casual], coming from villages far from the harbours where there was little work.

⁷¹ Kementerian Penerangan, *Kotapradja Djakarta Raya Tahun ke-VII*, p.25.

⁷² *TMP* 3 [July 1953], pp.1-2.

⁷³ Support from the Attorney General, Deputy Prime Minister and the Head of the Municipality of Jakarta Raya. There were approximately 91,000 people living in the six *kelurahans* in the area surrounding the five harbours at Tanjung Priok. Approximately 31,000 of this population in the *kelurahan* Tanjung Priok. *Madjalah Kotapradja* [December 1952], p.25.

⁷⁴ Although in the Outer-Island harbours pay, conditions, and food allowances were also the cause of maritime labour militancy during 1950, away from the larger urban centres housing was less of a priority. The official rate of exchange in 1952 was approximately Rp.11.44/\$US.1. *Statistical Pocket Book of Indonesia 1957*, p.177.

⁷⁵ *TMP* 3 [July 1953], pp.1-2.

...buruh di pelabuhan tidak mempunyai pekerdjaan tetap, bekerdja hanya bila ada perahu. Mereka sangat diawasi mandor. Cara kerdja ini tidak memerlukan kongsi jang menjediakan sosial sehingga tidak pasti untuk Undang-undang. Mereka tidak tergolong golongan pekerdja tetap, mereka tidak punya upah minimum. Pekerdjaan mereka sangat berbahaya, seringkali mereka kehilangan anggota badannja. Dengan f1,15 per hari adalah tidak cukup. Apalagi diberikan oleh mandor. Mereka umumnja datang dari desa dan dipotong oleh pemerintah. Mereka tidak bisa lepas dari mandor karena mandor lah jang menjediakan perumahan untuk mereka. [harbour workers do not have permanent work, [they] work only if there is a boat. They are very controlled by the foreman. With this type of work it is not thought necessary to have a commercial agreement which supplies [their] social needs as a result there is no determination by law. They do not belong to a permanent group of workers, they do not have minimum pay. Their work is very dangerous, often they lose limbs [in accidents]. f1.15 per day is not enough. Especially if it is given by the *mandor*. They usually come from the *desa* and are alienated from government. They cannot break free from the *mandor* because it is he who supplies their housing].⁷⁶

Most of the workers were still *mondar-mandir* [moving back and forth], returning to their villages when the farming season began, but spending several months in the cities. There was an interesting disjunction between the views of colonial authorities and the Indonesian authorities on the issue of circular migration. Whereas the Dutch saw circular migration as a 'safety net', not with altruistic underpinnings but as a reason for lower pay,⁷⁷ the Ministry of Labour saw circular migration as a hindrance to better efficiency, and to the improvement of working conditions. It was felt that circular migration reduced efficiency, and the lack of permanent employer/employee direct relationships hindered government plans for social security programs. In order to decrease the system of casual labour the Ministry wanted to put into effect a process of "decasualization of the maritime workforce".⁷⁸ In this way it was hoped that ordinary maritime workers could have both an improvement in their everyday life, and more guarantees concerning work than was presently the case.

By giving workers who were circular migrants the opportunity to become permanent dwellers on the waterfront, the housing program instituted by the Ministry was seen as one step towards decasualisation of the harbour workforce. There was recognition also that sickness benefits, and help for families on the death of a worker, were also vitally necessary to meet the material and social needs of maritime workers—particularly those of the dock workers.⁷⁹ Decasualization of their workforces was often

⁷⁶ 'Pekerdjaan Pelabuhan di pelabuhan kita', *De Werker* 24 [31 Mei 1949].

⁷⁷ Cf. Ingleson, *In Search of Justice*, p.38.

⁷⁸ See *Mimbar Nomor Kerdja* [1945].

⁷⁹ *TMP* 3 [July 1953], pp.1-2.

resisted by employers as it increased the responsibility on them to provide permanent benefits such as pensions, annual vacations and sickness benefits. Manifestly, on the part of many government officials, there was a strong desire to bring some measure of order and certainty into the working conditions of maritime workers. Altruism aside, there was also a need for more productive, efficient workers as an antidote to the problem of harbour congestion. Moreover, altruism began to lose its appeal as worker militancy increased and different government leaders linked the 'unreasonableness' of labour with the recurring dock/harbour congestion. The SBPP as the largest maritime union struggling for an improvement in worker's conditions was seen as part of the problem.⁸⁰

The SBPP

From its inception at the end of 1950, the union had many changes within the leadership positions, but Tuk Subianto was a constant. It is evident that there had been difficulties within the leadership for it was reported at the Second Congress of the union in 1956, that two members—Suhardjono and Sastradihardja—of the twenty five member Central Board had been dismissed for forming another union.⁸¹ At this conference two proposals arising from the Second Conference in 1953 were put into effect. The Central Leadership board was to reflect both the provinces represented by the union: and that the member also be a worker from that province.⁸² In 1963, the Central Board consisted of Sudiona [President]; Subianto [General Secretary and at that time a member of parliament]; Achmad Sumadi [Assistant General Secretary] and S. Conchlo, M. Nirahuwa and Muljono on the Executive. Sumadi had been the union delegate to the 'Second Asian Dockworkers Conference' in Tokyo, of June, 1961.⁸³ All of the other leadership [including Sumadi] were present at the Third Conference of that organization held in Jakarta in 1963.⁸⁴

Subianto's involvement in maritime labour is well worth recording, for he was clearly strong within the union, maintained good outside links with other maritime unions, and came from the ranks of the workers.⁸⁵ Subianto was a seaman on the KPM

⁸⁰ See *Sikap* 27 [20 July 1953].

⁸¹ SBPP, Laporan Umum Kongres ke-11 SBPP, *Kapal Tudjuh* 1 [1956], p.3.

⁸² Tuk Subianto, Monthly Report to the T.U. International of Transport Workers in Vienna 10 March 1956. *SUA File*, 183/21/4.

⁸³ *Report of the Second All Pacific and Asian Dockworkers Conference, Tokyo June 15-17, 1961.* Sumadi, like Subianto, also had strong connections with Australia. During the Japanese occupation of Indonesia he had been Secretary of the Indonesian Political Exiles Association in Australia. He was also an early member of the PKI. See, Ministry of Information, *Political Parties, Armed Groups, Labour Unions and Youth Organizations*.

⁸⁴ *Report of the Third All Pacific and Asian Dockworkers Conference, Djakarta October 4-9, 1963.*

⁸⁵ On Subianto's position in and connection with the TUI see Chapter II, fn.84 of this study.

ship the *Khoen Hua*. When it docked at Townsville in 1942, after the fall of the Dutch East Indies, he was arrested and placed in goal. Later he was interned in the American stockade. In 1943, after publicity from supporters, he was released and joined a Dutch ship ferrying Australian troops and supplies to New Guinea. In this same year Subianto and six other Indonesian seamen met with E.V. Elliott of the Seamen's Union of Australia at the Coal Lumper's Hall, Millers Point, and *Sarpelindo* was formed. Within six months all the Indonesian seamen in Australia were organized. There were branches at Finschhafen and Buna with the headquarters in Sydney. When the war ended Subianto returned to Indonesia and continued his activity in a clandestine manner, infiltrating amongst workers at the harbours.⁸⁶ He was at this stage only twenty years of age.⁸⁷ Molly Bondan has written that the issue of "deferred pay" for Indonesian seamen on Dutch ships, which had been owing since the beginning of the war, was never resolved. The "simmering discontent" from this lay behind the seizure of a KPM ship moored in Tanjung Priok in 1957. And this action "sparked off similar actions in the following days". Subianto led the group of men who seized the ship.⁸⁸ The link with Elliott and the Seamen's Union was maintained by the SBPP through Subianto who attended both the 1956 and 1958 Annual Conventions of the Australian union. The exchange of ideas through letters and conference attendance was no doubt beneficial to both. Subianto remained the union's most outspoken leader until its disbandment with the demise of the PKI and SOBSI.

⁸⁶ Seamen's Journal [June 1956], p.2. *SUA File*, 390. The article, which is a précis of a report by Subianto to the Seamen's Union of Australia, also mentions a branch at Hollandia. However Hollandia, the capital of Netherlands New Guinea, was not liberated from Japanese forces until 22 February 1944. Lockwood, *Black Armada*, p.67. See also the stories in 'Mereka yang Memberontak', *Prisma* 7 [1988], pp.25-41. This records interviews with two sailors, one of whom had been interned in Digul, who belonged to *Sarpelindo*. According to one of the sailors—Suparmin—he was elected Head of *Sarpelindo* and a sailor named Mohammad Senan, Deputy Head. Neither of the two speaks of joining any union organization after their return, although both claim they were active in the 'struggle'. Neither mention Subianto at all. Contemporary Indonesian politics being what they are a reference to communist unions, or knowledge of leaders, would be difficult. Lockwood, *Black Armada*, pp.92, 142, notes Subianto as the leader of *Sarpelindo*, and Suparmin and Senan as activists and former *Tanah Merah* internees. Molly Bondan, on the other hand, records Suparmin and Senan as being instrumental in the establishment of the union. She also records Suparmin's anti-communist feelings, and that neither Suparmin nor Senan were seamen. Hardjono and Walker, *In Love With a Nation*, pp.30, 33, 46.

⁸⁷ There is some difference in the sources over Subianto's age. See, Fitzpatrick and Cahill, *The Seamen's Union*, p.17 who put it at 17 years in 1944, and Lockwood, *The Black Armada*, p.92, who notes 20 years of age in 1945. In 1958, Subianto himself stated he was aged 38 which makes Lockwood's date correct.

⁸⁸ Hardjono and Warner, *In Love With A Nation*, p.99. On the other hand, Rocamora comments that the KBKI section in the KPM "started things by seizing the firm's main offices". Rocamora, "Nationalism in Search of Ideology", p.405. There is room for both accounts as the actions were different and in different places.

Union structure

The organizational basis of the SBPP was along enterprise grouping lines. For example, fitters and blacksmiths could combine to form a section, and then join with various sections from different enterprises to form a branch. Seamen were the one exception. They were directly attached to the Head Office of the union. Although the strength of the union lay in the waterside workers, from 1956 on the union became more active on behalf of seamen's conditions. It had 6,000 seamen members: 2,000 on overseas ships; 3,000 on coastal ships and 1,000 on river transport. Wives of the workers had their own organization. According to Subianto, it was a "separate but integral part". The work of the women's organization was to make contact in the areas where a strike was to take place: "seeking sympathy with the strikers" and assistance by way of food, or money to buy food. As a social welfare part of the union they were also to give assistance to those in the wider community who were in difficulty.⁸⁹ When there was discontent over a decision by the P4P concerning maritime workers women gave support by writing letters of protest to the P4P.⁹⁰

The constitution of the SBPP prescribed that all those who worked in both private and government businesses, departments and foundations in the harbour and shipping arena could join the union. There was to be no difference based on ethnicity, gender, religion or political affiliation. However, members who were not citizens could not be involved in the activities of the SBPP concerning the Indonesian Government. Branches needed twenty five members or more, but contract workers and casual workers could become members on their own account. This stipulation in the constitution was clearly necessary because of the casualized nature of dock work.

There was a once only joining fee—to be paid in cash—and a monthly contribution based on six levels of income.⁹¹ A percentage of the member's contribution went to SOBSI. Without a method such as that available to its co-aligned SOBSI union, the SBKA, the SBPP was not able to collect as large a proportion of its member's fees, although, it does appear to have been one of the few SOBSI unions, along with the SBKA, to achieve over thirty per cent of member contributions.⁹² In its 1956 report the union pointed to the difficulty in collecting membership fees. It noted that the amount of

⁸⁹ Seamen's Journal, pp.15, 16, 23. *SUA File*, 390.

⁹⁰ Letter from Maimunah on behalf of 900 Family Members of the SBPP and SBKB, Pakan Baru, 22 Maret 1956, to the Sekretariat P4 Pusat. *Arsip Nasional: Koleksi Kabinet Presiden R.I. 1950-1959*. No.1505.

⁹¹ *SBPP Anggaran Dasar 1956*.

⁹² SOBSI, *Mengatasi Keuangan* [1956], pp.8-10.

voluntary financial support was higher than the fees received, and that both member's fees and the *Kapal Tudjuh* receipts were a problem which must be attended to.⁹³

In 1956, the union had 55 branches with approximately 61,000 members, 15,000 of whom belonged to the Jakarta branch. Within the union structure there were five sections: Educational and Information; Cultural; Sport; Financial and Social/Economic. Unlike the railway worker's unions, however, the SBPP seems not to have run its own sickness and death benefit fund. No mention has been made of a fund in the literature available and it appears that the union relied on work agreements at the branch level to cover this aspect of social security. A 1956 issue of *Kapal Tudjuh*, for example, recorded an agreement between the Jakarta Branch with the Droogdok My. where the employer agreed to pay to its workers a sum of Rp.1,000 on the death of his wife; and a payment towards the cost of burial for a child of Rp.75.⁹⁴

One of the major problems for the SBPP was the very differentiated workforce which it represented. In some regions almost 100 per cent of the maritime workforce was made up of contract workers. Apart from this the union had to deal with seamen working for foreign employers, and those working for the Department of Shipping who were classified as *pegawai negeri*. After criticism for its lack attention to the *pegawai negeri* the union promised to pay more attention to their problems through its membership of the RKS [*Rapat Kerdja Sama Serikatburuh/Serikatserkerdja Pegawai Negeri*]. However, a very small number of this group of seamen were members of the SBPP.⁹⁵ Moreover, the *pegawai negeri* in the Department of Shipping were a more privileged group of workers in many ways than were the dock workers. For instance, they had two polyclinics at Tanjung Priok to dispense medicines and treatment. There was also a twenty four bed nursing facility for those patients who could not get treatment at the Public Hospital in Central Jakarta. Sailors who were classified as *pegawai negeri* had a special polyclinic for themselves and their families.⁹⁶

White collar workers in the harbour departments who worked for the inter-ocean routes had conditions different to those who worked for the inter-island routes. So too did seamen. Seamen on inter-ocean routes who worked according to contract received blankets, pillows, clothing and eating utensils free. Those on the inter-island had to take these items themselves.⁹⁷ But the greatest concern of the SBPP was for the

⁹³ Laporan Umum, *Kapal Tudjuh* 1 [1956], p.20. The difficulty in collecting fees was an identical problem to that of the colonial maritime unions. Personal communication Professor John Ingleson.

⁹⁴ *Kapal Tudjuh* 4 [1956], p.15.

⁹⁵ *Kapal Tudjuh* 1 [1956], p.10. The official exchange rate in 1956 was approximately Rp.11.47/\$US.1. *Statistical Pocket Book of Indonesia 1957*, p.177.

⁹⁶ Kementerian Perhubungan, *Djawatan Pelajaran Laporan Masa 1950s/d 1952*, pp.55-57. There were also clinics in Surabaya [this one was not for the families of workers], Makassar and Tanjung Uban.

⁹⁷ SBPP Program Perdjuaan 1956.

conditions of those workers who came to be the majority of the SBPP membership—the dock and sea “coolies”. At the beginning of the decade [as the Ministry of Labour had recorded] their conditions were appalling.

The Unie-Kampong

For harbour workers in Jakarta the colonial authorities had provided a housing complex—the *Unie-Kampong* and after the end of the Japanese occupation *Unie-Kampong* once again became ‘home’ to harbour workers and their families.⁹⁸ In her work on colonial port cities Pauline Milone has defined entitled housing as: “the housing provided by an employer as one part of the compensation for work performed”.⁹⁹ *Unie-Kampong*, while not the only means of housing for maritime workers [apart that is from under bridges and in disused pipes] accommodated the largest number of maritime workers under the one roof. The majority were the unskilled members of the workforce. In 1948, nearly 8,000 workers and their families lived behind the barbed wire fences of the *kampong* which had been built in 1920 by four Dutch shipping companies—KPM, Rotterdam Lloyd, Nederland and JCJL.¹⁰⁰ Transportation of labour to port areas increased the time costs of labour, both through the transportation cost and the reduced time for loading and unloading of goods. The companies looked at the system used on the colonial rubber estates for housing labour and drew their inspiration from there. Approximately forty per cent of the workforce of *Unie-Kampong* was used by KPM: Lloyd and Nederland had rights over twenty five per cent each, and Java-China-Japanlijn [JCJL] the remaining ten per cent. For the companies this was the most economical method of operation. Workers were not under any agreement and could be easily dismissed when there was a business downturn. [see above]

In an interview with *Mimbar Indonesia* in 1948,¹⁰¹ the Director of *Unie-Kampong*, Odink, who had been Director of the Belawan KPM operation pre-war,¹⁰²

⁹⁸ There was also a *unie-kampong* in the harbours of Surabaya and Belawan.

⁹⁹ Pauline Milone, ‘Allocated and Entitled Housing: Institutional Paternalism and the Growth of the Colonial Port City’, in Dilip K. Basu [ed.], *The Rise and Growth of the Colonial Port Cities in Asia* [Centre for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of California: Berkeley, 1985], p.231. Housing for railroads, ports, communication departments or government steamship line workers became common in colonial Indonesia [as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, India, and the Far East]. In Batavia [Jakarta] “whole sections of the city [with housing provided by both state-operated and large-scale private enterprises] became identifiable as housing sites of one service or another”. *ibid.*, p.230.

¹⁰⁰ The date mentioned by the writer is wrong. A request by the then Director for a budget to improve the life of the workers through better pay and housing was made to the company in 1917. Archief KPM, 341.1: 623.2. rief No.82 from Batavia 1917, *Algemeen Rijksarchief*. [Hereafter noted as Archief KPM].

¹⁰¹ The following discussion on the *Unie-Kampong* is drawn from ‘Pekerdja Pelabuhan ‘Unie-Kampong,’ *Mimbar Indonesia Nomor Kerdja* [May 1948], pp.35-38.

¹⁰² Nota Heer Zeewan [behoort bij Notulen Jaarvergadering U.K. .Tg. Priok 26/10/36. [Notes of the Yearly Meeting Tg. Priok. Agenda], *Archief KPM*.

said he believed there was a social protection element in the founding of the complex which was to give the workers a certainty of livelihood [*bestaans-zekerheid*]. He acknowledged, however, that the system served the shipping companies' interests through a pool of labour which was always available, and over which the companies assumed proprietary rights. A worker interviewed by Mimbar, in reply to a question asking him his name, answered: "*nama saya koeli pelabuhan*"—my name is harbour coolie. [See photograph in Appendix II].

The *kampong* was located on the eastern side of the harbour bordered by streets in the direction of *Zandvoort* and *Tjilintjing* on the edge of *Kali Kodja*.¹⁰³ It was sited on approximately two hectares of land and consisted of 19 large *pondoks*—eight by sixty metres—separated into three lines running west to east. Barbed wire fences separated the complex from the outside world. Each *pondok* consisted of several large rooms divided into smaller rooms of 2.5 by 4 metres, half of which number had a small porch. In the middle of the settlement there was a shed used as a market. The better accommodation was for the *mandors* [240] and the *hop-mandors* [35]. [The *hop-mandor* was in authority over the *mandor*]. The interior walls of the rooms were black and dirty and often wet and mossy. They were covered with old plaited matting which sometimes gave off a pungent smell. Mixed with the smells from the latrines and the bathhouses, it lingered in the airless rooms. Why did workers stay?

They stayed because their choices were extremely limited. Given the prevailing conditions in the countryside the waterfront represented better living than in their villages: a chance of work, rations and a roof over their heads. Permitted to bring parents and other family members, as long as no more space was requested than was already allocated, accommodation at *Unie-Kampong* offered the chance to keep families together. It was a choice from nothing to poor. Because the laws of hierarchy still applied, the *koeli pelabuhan* [the lowest-level worker] received the poorest accommodation. Management was not concerned if there were too many people in one room. Sometimes as many as ten families lived together. Sleeping and living quarters were lengthwise along the walls of the building with a walking space in between. The lack of privacy inhibited intimacy and for this reason people partitioned their space with tattered old matting retrieved from rubbish tips. Yet, at this point they rarely complained, for complaint meant not being grateful for the generosity of people who had done them a good turn and given them the chance to move a few steps up from privation.

Despite the conditions in the country, in 1948 Tanjung Priok was a busy port. No less than 20 ships per day, not including small motor boats or schooners docked or called at the port. As well as the ships from the four companies, flags from England,

¹⁰³ The writer of the article notes his reluctance to accept the name '*kampong*,' seeing it more as a large complex of boarding houses, rather than the traditional connotation of the word which had imputations of freedom and voluntary residence. To him it resembled a detention camp.

called at the port. As well as the ships from the four companies, flags from England, America, Australia, France and Portugal flew from masts. The Dutch ships were loaded and unloaded by workers from the *Unie-Kampong*, and the amount loaded and unloaded every day was no less than 10,000 tons. This was done by approximately 4,000 workers *koeli biasa* [ordinary *koeli*] and by another 150 workers called *lier-gasten* [skilled winch handlers] whose work was usually on the ships.

The workers came in great numbers to *Unie-Kampong* from the areas surrounding Jakarta, such as Kebayoran and Tangerang, or from much further afield, to see the *hop-mandor* whom generally they already knew, to request work. But this link between *hop-mandor* and worker began, slowly, to change because of new criteria for the selection of workers. In 1948 a chest examination became compulsory,¹⁰⁴ and workers showing obvious signs of malnutrition, yaws, or appearing too thin to carry a 20 kg. load were rejected for work. Thus the *hop-mandors*, each of whom had responsibility for 120 people, were forced to reject requests for work from people of their own *kampongs*. The *hop-mandor's* position was difficult, having to balance his sense of humanity with employers' concerns for profits and, at the same time, complying with the *Arbeidsinspectie* [Labour Inspector] requests that the employers pay attention to the protection of workers.

Each worker had to load and unload ships at the rate of no less than 2.5 tons per day. For this the workers received 750 grams of rice daily—600 grams of *nasi* [cooked rice] and 150 of *beras* [uncooked rice].¹⁰⁵ The 150 grams of uncooked rice could be added to the ration for wives and children who only received an allowance of 100 grams per head. Sometimes there was corned beef, but more often the workers had to be satisfied with salted fish, and once every two days boiled mung beans. In the evenings they were given boiled leafy vegetables. It appears the 750 grams was barely sufficient to enable the workers the necessary strength for such hard work. They were, according to the observer, if not emaciated not as sturdy as the work demanded. For *Unie-Kampong* workers wage levels in 1948 were f0.75 per day for *koeli biasa*, and f1.50 for the more-skilled *lier-gasten*. *Hop-mandors* were paid monthly receiving between f155–f217 with the *mandors* starting at the bottom level. [These amounts calculated for seven days for the *koeli biasa* represented f5.25 per week; a wage of f10.50 for the more skilled; and around f22 for the *mandors*]. In contrast, by 1950 *koeli biasa* in Makassar harbour were reported to earn f2 per day. This wage, however, was calculated at piece rates of f0.04 per load. To earn f2 each worker had to carry 50 cases weighing on

¹⁰⁴ The chest examination was not scientific enough at this stage to involve microscopic examination of saliva or urine.

¹⁰⁵ This is a small ration but the writer noted that the Allied servicemen detained at *Unie-Kampong* during the war had to work hard on 80 grams per day. Official exchange rates in 1948/49/50 were approximately Rp.100/Dutch florin100. *Statistical Pocket Book of Indonesia 1957*, p.177.

average 95 kg. each and walking an average 30 metres per load in hot, dirty and often dangerous conditions. Only the very sturdiest could earn f2.¹⁰⁶

The level of wages of the *Unie-Kampong* workers allowed for few extras, or for few cultural celebrations and commitments such as circumcisions. Pre-war, films were shown at the complex but the cameras were taken by the Japanese. Evening life was therefore quiet. At night some, especially the Bantenese, would go to the prayer house; some to the market to look. Sometimes, on pay days, to buy from the Chinese shopowner. And some would visit prostitutes in *Kodja*. The percentage of workers with venereal disease was estimated to be around two per cent. Since over eighty per cent of the workers had wives and children, in the evening the field in front of the *pondoks* was often busy with people. If they were not too tired after the day's heavy work, many sat in the field and talked or played cards. Gambling was not forbidden as long as the curfew wasn't broken, for workers had to be fresh for the next day's work. Behind the barbed wire fence rules such as these were enforced by *kampong* guards. Every morning in front of the main harbour entrance there were lines of workers. The only ones permitted to enter the waterfront were those with the corresponding days letter code. According to the Director, the workers in 1948 were not agitating to form a union or association, "but it was up to them" [he said] "they must take action to improve their own fate".

The other group of maritime workers whose story we may look to were known as *badjo*—coolie sailors who were taken on board between the inter-island ports to handle cargo. The following letter from a former crew member on one of the 'Blue Funnel Line' ships sailing the route in the 1950s describes their conditions.

—the *badjos*

...I travelled regularly to Asia throughout the 1950s as an Officer serving on British Merchant Ships. My first voyage was in 1951 as a teen-aged midshipman with the Blue Funnel Line, more correctly named Ocean Steamship Company. They operated a fleet of about 130 ships, except for about 12 under the Dutch flag all operated under the British flag. They covered most of the worlds major trade routes, but with the emphasis on S.E. Asia.

We sailed from Liverpool and London fully laden with manufactured goods and returned, also fully laden, with in the case of the S.E. Asian route raw materials, typically rubber, rattans, timber, tin, latex and palm oil in deep tank storage, and copra. If any space at all was left, we called in at Colombo and filled it with tea.

The Indonesian route posed many problems. It was the most violent of all the companies operational areas, life assurance was unobtainable while serving on this route. The pilferage rate on cargo as well as anything portable aboard ship was the highest that we experienced world wide. At the time this was attributed by all concerned to the inherent villainy and dishonesty of the Indonesian

¹⁰⁶ Sugardo, 'Pemogokan dan Militer', *Mimbar Indonesia* [1 April 1950], pp.11–13.

people. Subsequent experience has taught me that this opinion was false, and that the enormous rate of theft of cargo was simply due to abject poverty. The favourite target was foodstuffs. One particular favourite being 'Brands Essence of Chicken'. I don't think that we succeeded in landing any of it ashore. The violence, I believe, was due to the harsh colonial regime, followed by Japanese occupation and then the particularly bloody independence struggle.

After discharging the outward cargo in the main ports of Tanjung Priok, Surabaya, Macassar and Balikpapan we would backload with a general cargo of Indonesian raw materials, usually for discharge at the European ports... If, however, we were going on the "copra run" we would embark at any one of the main Indonesian ports two or three hundred labourers known as "*Badjoos*". We would also embark on deck several motor driven boats and small barges, the *Badjoos* slept on deck in the shelter of the boats. I am unsure as to whether these labourers were criminals or an underclass of lowly regarded workers. Whilst ashore awaiting a ship they were confined under guard in high fenced encampments and to the best of my knowledge had little if any contact with the rest of the community. It would appear that they had little female company as homosexuality was obviously common. For work purposes they were divided into gangs of about twenty, one gang to each of six cargo holds, each gang under the supervision of a native foreman. Several gangs would work ashore where supervision was I think usually exercised by a Dutchman. Throughout the time aboard ship they were self sufficient with food, which was cooked by themselves on deck. The ship was responsible only for the supply of fresh water for cooking and drinking. Salt water for washing was available in unlimited quantities via fire hydrants, fresh water was strictly rationed as it was unavailable en route. This posed us serious problems as they would often use fresh water for washing, a luxury unavailable in their camps and we would be forced to impose more severe rationing. This invariably caused ill feeling and at time almost mutiny, a dangerous state of affairs as their tool of trade was a knife, for slitting copra bags.

On arrival at our first loading stop, not a port as such, just a sheltered bay, we would anchor and discharge overboard the boats and an appropriate number of *Badjoos*. The boats would be beached and the copra, in bags, carried from the warehouse to the boats. When full the boats would be towed back to the ship, where using our own derricks the copra bags would be hoisted aboard over the holds, each bag would be slit, and the copra decanted into the ships holds in bulk. This operation would continue until the warehouse was empty...the boats and men would be reloaded and we would steam to the next port, usually the next bay, rarely more than a couple of hours away. We would do sometimes three of these stops in a day, working around the clock. This would last for two to three weeks until the ship was fully loaded. The *Badjoos* rested only between stops... Once loaded we returned to the port of embarkation, discharged the *Badjoos*, and with much relief headed for either Liverpool or Rotterdam where the cargo was discharged into the soap and margarine processing plants of Unilever.

The *Badjoos* as far as I am aware remained in their camps until the next ship required them, whether they were employed in any other activity I don't know, nor do I know if they could ever have a normal life.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Personal letter to the author from Brian Sample [Officer with the Ocean Steamship Company]. December 1995.

Conclusion

The general workers on the waterfront, the coolies of the *Unie-Kampong* and the *badjos* on the ships represented for the SBPP all that was wrong with the conditions of maritime workers. Coolies at the *Kampong* seemingly had a greater chance of “normalcy” with their ability to bring family members with them. Although, “only as long as no extra space was demanded”. The SBPP fought against both systems of worker/employer relations.

The union believed that contract workers, as instanced by the *badjos*, were an example of colonial repression. Employers did not have a duty to give proper conditions to their workers—suitable wages; family allowances; sickness and old-age security. They could be dismissed at will. On the other hand, it felt that the system of *kamp-kamp kerdja* [labour camps] as instanced by the *Unie-Kampong* made the worker a “thing to be traded and cheap to pay”.¹⁰⁸ By 1950, there was an SBPP branch in *Unie-Kampong* which formed one of several sections of SBPP unionization of maritime labour at Tanjung Priok that was to carry the union and its workers into the actions against their employers. The *Badjos* were also becoming unionized. How the union went about solving some of their problems and what success it had is the subject of the following chapter.

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¹⁰⁸ SBPP Program Perjuangan 1956.

Chapter V

Action On The Waterfront

Introduction

The history of Dutch oppression of union and worker militancy pre-war, in Australia, and during the revolution, was not forgotten by maritime workers. By the time the Dutch acknowledged formal loss of empire in 1949, revolutionary zeal, rising expectations through expanding working-class consciousness, and race, were an explosive mix on the waterfront in Indonesia, not the least in Tanjung Priok, the largest harbour. The old Dutch hierarchy of pay and conditions based on race was still applicable. On labour relations during the 1920s S.K. Trimurti has written: *suasana makin hangat* [the atmosphere was becoming more and more heated].¹ For maritime labour at the start of the new decade this was an especially apt phrase. In his work on American maritime workers of the 1930s, Bruce Nelson has argued that in their search for better working conditions there were “tendencies towards spontaneous radicalism inherent in their subculture...waiting for a spark to ignite them”.² Was this the case for Indonesian maritime workers? And, if so, did such radicalism help gain improvements in their conditions? In an attempt to answer these questions the aim of this chapter is to look first to the early strike actions of workers and unions; the raising of one major strike, and the work of the SBPP within that strike. Finally, it is to the next ‘new’ era for maritime workers—the former colonial employer’s removal from the waterfront—that we must turn to see whether this period marked a change in their conditions and in the actions of their largest union.

Strike ‘patterns’

The early signs that maritime labour was seeking to look after itself and redress some of the inequalities came in January of 1950, when 2,000 members of the Seamen's Union, citing Article 27 of the Constitution which confirmed the equality of all citizens before the law, sent a written statement to the KPM Board of Directors in Jakarta demanding an increase in the salary of Indonesian seamen.³ Demands for changes to the existing inequality in wage scales and allowances between Indonesian [local] and foreign

¹ S.K. Trimurti, *Hubungan Pergerakan Buruh*, p.11.

² Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* [University of Illinois Press: Chicago, 1990], p.4.

³ *Aneta*, 5 January 1950.

workers, long an irritant in workplace relations, was thus one of the first workplace conditions to be questioned by workers in the new year. For unions and workers, whether sea or shore, to work long, hard hours under appalling conditions and for less entitlements than workers of another race when freedom had been won, was simply too much to ask. It is not easy to overestimate the importance of this factor in the militancy of maritime labour. Until 1957 it played a central role in labour disputes.

Although the seamen's demand appears to have met with little success they foreshadowed the content of the demands by the SBKP in February. Following the seamen's call for action, that union announced that all of its members and all Indonesian employees of KPM would go on strike from the 15th February if KPM management did not meet their demands for better living conditions such as family allowances, special rations, and higher wages on parity with foreign employees. The Indonesian workers argued that their family members were forced to work in order to supplement the family income, and this was not the case for Dutch employees. Since special allowances in food other than rice were considered to be a necessity to broaden a worker's diet,⁴ the extras afforded the Dutch were seen to be especially iniquitous. At this stage workers were not measuring their situation against other Indonesian workers but against European workers, particularly the Dutch. Moreover, as the Dutch employees filled the more skilled positions and did not labour on the wharves the special allowance issue not only reinforced workers' feelings concerning race inequality, it also showed them their class position.

The actions of maritime workers and unions in January and February served notice on employers that workers were no longer quiescent nor, to the extent that they would not take militant action, only concerned with their security. As maritime workers became more organized over the 1950s their working-class consciousness, vis-à-vis European workers, developed. At the same time, with the increasingly chaotic conditions in the national waterfront businesses, and claims of corruption in the government shipping organization PELNI more prominent, maritime workers were able to extend this sense of class to their position against national economic and political elites.

Throughout 1950 there were strikes by harbour workers in Semarang and Makassar and militant action at the Tanjung Priok wharves also increased.⁵ The unloading of ships was held up and the 'Marshall Plan' rice supplies lay on the wharves.⁶ Sometimes workers went on strike, even though negotiations were being carried on

⁴ *BBC*, 8 February 1950.

⁵ Approximately 8,000 harbour workers were on strike.

⁶ The strikes included workers on the wharves, from the Custom Offices, fire brigade and other government departments. In Semarang, it was reported that strikers were receiving Rp.1 per day from their union while they were on strike. *BBC*, 9 March 1950.

between the union and the management. In March, for example, 800 workers at the Trio-ferry in Tanjung Priok went out for a day. Workers could, and did act against the wishes of their union. Wildcat strikes were a common occurrence and caused major disruption on the waterfront. Most were of short duration, but involved large numbers of workers—such as the half day strike, again in March, of approximately 1,000 workers at three lighterage companies. Further, in most of the cases workers continued their actions while management and trade union leaders—through the mediation of the Labour Ministry, were negotiating.⁷ For the workers, the pace of the negotiations was clearly too slow. Negotiations were often deadlocked because management refused to negotiate while the workers were on strike, and workers refused to return to work until a basic agreement had been reached.⁸ It is also evident that there were times when management thought agreement was secured only to have further action threatened or taken. Often this involved spontaneous action on the part of workers, other times unions ‘called out’ workers. Intransigence? Sometimes, perhaps. But the early agitation and ‘intransigence’ of maritime labour cannot be divorced from the framework of the existing workplace relationship with its roots in the colonial work relationship.

The wildcat actions and further threats of strikes did achieve success for workers. Following two days of negotiations a joint communique between the union and the KPM, outlining plans for the setting up of a pension fund; the granting of annual vacations; and wage increases retrospective to February 1, was issued. On April 3, in an indication of worker dissatisfaction with the agreement, a sudden strike paralysed all activity at Tanjung Priok harbour and ships were prevented from sailing. The employers claimed they were “completely in the dark” as to the reason for the action. Not so, however, a correspondent from *Aneta* who reported from the *Unie-Kampong* of “rumours of unknown persons spreading the news to organize a strike immediately.”⁹ Whether this was true or not, it appears that the strike happened without the instigation of the union for it had given no notice of an intent to strike. Later, the SBKP issued a statement which said the strike was a protest because worker’s demands, despite various discussions and a seeming agreement were not resolved. According to the SBKP the strike was called because the companies had not wished to negotiate over earlier demands, which included a seven hour work day, a minimum wage of f3 for labour and f5 for foremen, free rice for themselves and their family members, and other social

⁷ *Aneta*, 30 March 1950.

⁸ *BBC*, 9 March 1950.

⁹ *Aneta*, 4 April 1950.

provisions.¹⁰ Eight thousand five hundred harbour workers from the four largest companies, and 500 from the ferry services took part in this strike.¹¹

It was at this time that the Labour Ministry announced that the shipping and lighterage companies had indicated a willingness to the Ministry to consider the whole labour situation in Tanjung Priok harbour, together with the conditions in *Unie-Kampong*. The companies involved asked that negotiations start on April 4, which was the day after the strike, if possible. As a result of the employers' action some ships were able to leave port on schedule but, because of the strike, not completely loaded. On the luxury liner, Willem Ruys [Rotterdamse Lloyd], for example, baggage was taken aboard while cargo was left on the wharves. However, unions and workers enabled vital supplies—8,000 tons of rice from the United States to be unloaded from the ship, Steel Inventor. Whereas ECA goods had been previously held up on the wharves, during this strike, as a concession to political influence and to public opinion dockers agreed to unload ships carrying this cargo. The union stated that the workers realised the importance of ECA shipments to Indonesia.¹²

There appears to have been reason to believe that the strike was about to end. However, with further wildcat strikes and increased demands by the union, the strike spread to include other maritime labour such as warehouse staff and crane crews.¹³ The action, although not achieving many of the claims put forward, did win some new concessions from employers, and workers at Tanjung Priok finished their strike. Employers agreed to a forty three hour working week, with a daily wage of f3.5, including free meals.

Even with this increased militancy, the strikes at Tanjung Priok during this period were considerably small affairs compared to the on-going dock worker's strike at Belawan harbour [Sumatra] in January. This strike had entered its third week before employers and unions reached an agreement on January 23. A number of interesting points arise from consideration of this strike that may be extrapolated to cover Tanjung Priok workers. First, the prolonged disruption to shipping caused the employers to negotiate; second, the army and estate workers were involved in unloading cargoes, but the East Sumatra State Head was at pains to point out that the move was not aimed at breaking the strike; and third, messages of sympathy and promises of moral support were sent to the workers yet, workers at other harbours did not go out in sympathy with Belawan dockers even though many of the strikers belonged to the same unions. The

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *BBC*, 6 April 1950.

¹² *BBC*, 14 April 1950.

¹³ See *Aneta*, 5 April 1950. *Aneta*, 6 April 1950. *BBC*, 6 April 1950.

East Sumatran branch of the SBKP, for example, was one of the signatories to the tripartite agreement. In the Belawan strike it was not union competition, but the determination of the workers at the local level to continue their action that forced the employers to negotiate from a f5 per day 42 hour week initial demand; to the f4.50 per day 48 hour week first offer, to the final agreement of f4.75 for permanent labour; a *catu gratis* [free ration distribution]; half pay and half rice ration for the duration of the strike and a 44 hour week.¹⁴ The Belawan strike also highlighted differences between the *buruh kasar* and *buruh halus* workers in the harbour. The white-collar workers wanted to receive the ration distribution but the SBKP argued that only when they became members of the union would the union struggle on their behalf for the *catu gratis*.¹⁵

Mass dismissals took place on the waterfront as they did with most other workplaces. It was here that the representative role of the union became important for workers. The framework for negotiations between employer and unions provided by the Ministry of Labour, in effect, strengthened the unions hand.¹⁶ When the *Pasar Ikan* branch of the [now] SBPP, and *Aanneming MIJ Volker*, reached an agreement with the Office of Employment over the dismissal on 9 December of forty three workers, all the workers were reinstated. The only exception was those workers who had not presented for work before, and including, 8 December. They were considered to be “stopped work of their own accord”. In this way the company did not have to re-employ those workers who had been absent for various other reasons such as sickness. Those dismissed on the ninth were paid full pay for the time not working, with payment to go to the SBPP. In turn, the union was to distribute the payment to the workers concerned.¹⁷

For the union, an important outcome of the dispute was Volker's acknowledgment of SBPP as the representative organization for its workers. What was also important was the indication given by the Ministry of Labour of its preferred method for negotiations between the parties concerned over dismissals. The Ministry said that other workers were not on strike while the discussions were taking place because Volker owners had agreed to meet with the SBPP.¹⁸ It was a signal that as the power of labour unions increased and workers concomitantly grew more aware of their rights, some points of agreement were essential between government and employers. Such was the situation on the waterfront, by the end of December it was reported that freight handling conditions in all Indonesian ports had decreased in efficiency with a very slow turn-

¹⁴ *Aneta*, 13/17/19/21/22/24 January 1950.

¹⁵ Kementerian Perburuhan, *Situasi Perburuhan Dalam dan Luar Negeri* [November 1950].

¹⁶ Note: this was prior to the Law on Mass Dismissals in Private Enterprises. See Chapter I.

¹⁷ Kementerian Perburuhan, *Situasi Perburuhan Dalam dan Luar Negeri* [January 1951].

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

round of goods, and pilferage and looting of the cargo was common.¹⁹ We may perhaps be mindful here of the letter from the former officer of the Ocean Steamship Company [referred to in Chapter IV] on some of the social reasons for this pilfering and looting. Conditions in the *kampungs* from which the workforce was drawn were terrible. In early October the SBKP had sent a letter to the Harbour Director and the municipal authorities requesting that the practice of lessening the flow of water to the *kampungs* when a ship was docked in the harbour cease, and furthermore that the *kampungs* receive an increased supply of water for everyday use.²⁰

It was the strike in January of the new year [1951] by some 6,000 dock workers over the lack of agreement on a new log of claims, and their militancy over the rest of the year, which influenced the later announcement of the Emergency Law in October. For workers the initial outcome of this strike was good. They were to be paid their usual wage for the period of the strike and new wage rates were backdated to December 1. Both these measures were important wins. Given the low level of wages and the higher cost of living workers had no savings to tide them over strike periods, and unions were not yet sufficiently financed to provide strike pay. Backdating of the new rates also provided a few extra rupiah for the workers and their families. A gross minimum pay per month was set, with the new stipulation that current monthly wages could not be reduced.²¹ There was also an agreement on new family support conditions. These conditions, however, applied to permanent workers only. Contract workers had to be satisfied with a no reduction in pay clause, and a promise that after consideration, if necessary, their pay would be increased. Contract workers remained, therefore, the least protected. Even in the "in principle" agreement of bonuses for all workers, contract workers by the casual nature of their work could fall outside the terms of the agreement. In any event the application of the agreement to those working for the same business twenty days, at the least, in every month, ensured that many day wage workers missed out.²² The added proviso of "if results from business permit", was a loophole by which employers could justify rejection of bonuses.

¹⁹ 'Inefficient Dock Labour has Resulted in Slow Turn-Around in Indonesian Ports', *Foreign Trade* [10 March 1951], pp.390-391.

²⁰ Kementerian Perburuhan, *Situasi Perburuhan Dalam dan Luar Negeri* [October 1950].

²¹ This became Rp.120 per month.

²² Family support was at the base rate of Rp.100: 60 per cent for a worker's wife and 30 per cent for each child. Over the base rate: 30 per cent with a minimum of Rp.60 maximum of Rp.150 [wife]; for a child 15 per cent with a minimum of R.30 and a maximum of Rp.60 for as many as three children. Kementerian Perburuhan, *Situasi Perburuhan Dalam dan Luar Negeri* [May 1951], p.18. The Government was concerned because the week long strike affected production in some important items such as benzine, as a consequence, the Labour Inspector arranged a meeting between union representatives and the employers. The workers returned to work on January 15 and [according to their spokesman] as a sign of good faith reduced their list of claims to 5 paragraphs. *ibid.*

In concert with the Tanjung Priok strike actions continued in other harbours. A strike in Semarang on January 11 saw several unions join together in joint action. However, the *Kesatuan Aksi* [United Action] lead by M.T. Ritonga from the GBP—*Gabungan Buruh Pelabuhan*, later to be the *Federasi Buruh Maritim Indonesia* [FBMI] and KBSI affiliated, and Muljadi from the SBPP, was unable to secure any new conditions. Furthermore, as a presage of things to come nationally, Ritonga was detained during this action.²³ Militancy was not confined to dock workers only. Members of a clerical union, the PPDPP, staged a sit-down strike in demand of a promised pay rise which had not eventuated.²⁴ Once again, no assurances were forthcoming from employers.

We may conclude that this period of militancy on the part of maritime labour, along with the large strikes in the plantations, was a major causal factor in the announcement of the *Pusat Militer* in February. The prohibition on strikes in essential enterprises did, in fact, serve to lessen strike activity generally. Nevertheless, from May, when it was reported that 5,000 KPM sailors were set to strike,²⁵ through to July, with the appointment of the *Kuasa Pelabuhan* and the subsequent inflammatory press interview in August by the Chief of the Custom Duties and Excises [see Chapter IV], maritime workers' resentment over government action was profound. The perceived failure on the part of government to act on race discrimination in the workplace further deepened this resentment.

Penetapan upah dan gratifikasi adalah berdasarkan ras diskriminasi yang dijalankan sewenang-wenang...tidak diawasi dengan seksama oleh pemerintah. [the determination of wages and bonuses is based on race discrimination and continues without compunction...it is not supervised with any thoroughness by the government]²⁶

Communist activity was not the critical cause of maritime workers' actions during this period of militancy, but clearly for those in the SOBSI aligned SBPP, their militancy was not unconnected with the national resurgence of the PKI.²⁷ The 'incident' at Tanjung Priok in early August can be seen as a consequence of the increased proselytising activity

²³ *Antara*, 19 January 1951.

²⁴ Kementerian Perburuahan, *Situasi Perburuahan Dalam dan Luar Negeri* [May 1951].

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ 'Kongres SBPP', *Merah Putih* 2, 21 [March 1953].

²⁷ Cf. Mortimer who writes that after Madiun a reorganization of the party's network with "sections, sub-sections and Resort Committees established in provinces, residencies, districts and towns" had taken place. Party cadres encouraged unrest among rural and urban workers. Rex Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism Under Sukarno*, p.49

amongst urban workers of the PKI. It appears only to have involved a few hot heads not the wider maritime workforce. Notwithstanding this, the aftermath had serious consequences for maritime workers for the incident became the justification for the *razzias* of the Sukiman Government which lead to the Emergency Law restricting strikes in vital enterprises.²⁸ Maritime workers and their unions now had to win better conditions within the framework of the Emergency Law. How then did they go about strike action? The strike at the beginning of 1954 illuminates the methods.

'Raising' a strike

The prelude to the strike actions of 1954 was the general log of claims submitted in March of 1953—including wage raises of 50 per cent—which had been before the P4P for adjudication since October of that year. It was the drawn out nature of the commission process which exacerbated tensions. On 12 December, 1953 at the end of its seven day Plenary Session, the SBPP had accused the P4P of deliberately delaying a decision about the workers' dispute with the *Vereniging van Werkgevers de Haven van Indonesia*—VWHI [Indonesian Harbour Employers' Association] which represented twenty four shipping and harbour industries and the same number of local industries, because of politics. Anti-overtime strikes by Semarang tugboat crews, which had commenced in the November of 1953, and a strike by the independent SBTP Union in late December carried over into January of the new year. The SBTP workers pressured for a decision from the P4P, but both management and workers were informed that no decision would be forthcoming until the inquiry into workers claims was completed.²⁹ Their action widened on January 18 when workshop workers and drivers at the Head Office went out in solidarity. The strike lasted until the twenty first of the month without forcing any decision from the P4P, and strikers had also to forgo their wages for the strike days.³⁰ It is evident from the KPM files that the slowness of the P4P in handing down its decisions was viewed by management with some alarm because of the potential for further strike action. And this was a correct assessment.

In February, the SBPP warned that the delay by the P4P was further exacerbating the dispute between the tugboat crews and the employers, and if a solution was not forthcoming strike action covering 30,000 harbour workers in Jakarta, Semarang, Surabaya and Belawan would ensue in the following weeks.³¹ The first two

²⁸ The *Straits Times* headlined: '6 Reds killed in clash', and noted how 250 communists with red banner and sickle armlets, and bearing placards painted with the peace dove, attacked the military post and police station at the harbour. *Straits Times*, 7 August 1951

²⁹ Letter 9408 No.1002. 6 January 1954, Jakarta to Amsterdam, *Archief KPM*. The leadership of the SBTP included Johan H. Jacob [Chairman]; A. Rosidi [Secretary General], and Naufal.

³⁰ Excerpt Out of the Resume of Events, No.3, 18 January 1954, Jakarta to Amsterdam, *Archief KPM*.

³¹ *Harian Rakjat*, 2 February 1954.

weeks of January had seen constant action by the SBPP and *Harian Rakjat* to force the hand of the P4P, employers, and government members to a 'suitable' wage decision. Leading with the headline—'*Hawa panas dipelabuhan-pelabuhan besar Indonesia—Kesatuan Aksi Buruh akan diikuti 45,000 orang*'—the paper reported on the third of the meetings arranged with the Minister of Labour to discuss the dispute.³² The SBPP delegation to this meeting included Muljadi [the Second General Secretary of the SBPP Executive Board], Adisumarto, and members of the section for Labour Affairs in the Parliament. The slowness of the P4P adjudication process, wage rises and leave, social securities such as medical care, and the freedom to organize through a quick change to the Emergency Law were the principle concerns raised by the delegation. *Harian Rakjat* continued the pressure in its '*Wong Cjilik*' [The Little People] column. Condemning the former Prime Minister Natsir—and now Chairman of *Masjumi*—for his view that workers' use of the strike weapon was wrong, the column asked why strikes by workers should be *haram* [forbidden] when it was *halal* [proper] for the Dutch, English and American capitalists to take their profits out of Indonesia. In a more sarcastic tone it continued: "KLM, KPM and Borsumy must say thanks be to God that Indonesia has leaders like Natsir".³³

The language was strong but it symbolised the tension existing between the central bodies representing workers which was to hamper the large strike action of February. It was also at this time that Government regulation No.61/1954 on the transferral of harbour warehouses to national businesses was issued. In the preceding chapter it was noted how KPM was not loath to rid itself of these facilities because of industrial strife. An unintended consequence of the government action was the move by foreign companies to dismiss workers. Fearful of losing their employment workers sent a delegation to the Labour Minister who gave a promise to prevent dismissals where possible. This was obviously a difficult task. As national businessmen took over space along the wharves when contractual obligations of foreign firms were completed, preparations were made to receive those workers facing dismissal. Workers expressed concerns that the KPM would move to dismiss more workers after the new businesses had already hired, and then seek to excuse the dismissals as a consequence of the government take-over. Mindful of this possibility, the unions in a pragmatic move, set out to establish good relations with the Harbour Director, the Minister for Communications, and the national businessmen concerned.³⁴

³² 'The climate is hot in Indonesia's large harbours—the United Action of Workers will involve 45,000'. *Harian Rakjat*, 11 January 1954.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Another delegation of SBPP workers comprising Muljadi, Djiran, Muljono and Hardjono was sent to the Minister of Labour to discuss the union's complaints about the P4P process. The union argued that the 1954 wage level for workers was still based on a 1952 wage decision, and when this was juxtaposed with the dramatic increase in the cost of goods and the wage rises given to Dutch employees, harbour workers; non-increase in wages since 1952 was demonstrably unjust.³⁵ On the same day the 'Whispers' column on the front page of *Harian Rakjat* noted the wage rise for Dutch employees in the harbours.

Special arrangements concerning Dutch employees mean the Dutch enjoy a favourable exchange rate: people whisper this is the reason the Dutch feel quite at home in Indonesia.³⁶

The SBPP was not the only union leading strike action. At the beginning of February the KBSI aligned SB/KPM announced a three day strike, involving almost 5,000 workers, for the whole of Indonesia. The SB/KPM complaints about the P4P echoed those of the SBPP: that the P4P had already issued a recommendation to employers to increase sickness benefit to ten per cent of gross pay and, moreover, this benefit, which foreign workers enjoyed, had risen only twice since August 1952. Conversely cost-of-living rises had been much greater. The union announced workers would stop their strike when employers accepted the recommendation.³⁷ This strike involved only workers of the SB/KPM, and of those, only the administrative personnel at the Head Office of KPM and at Tanjung Priok. The technicians and dock workers belonging to SB/KPM were not on strike. Nonetheless, because the strikes affected office workers in at least twelve locations and involved large numbers of workers, the employers were sufficiently concerned to arrange a meeting to discuss the recommended ten per cent increase.³⁸ There may also have been some connection between the arrest at this time of a Dutchman, L.N. Jungschlaeger, and the strike action. The KPM reported to its Amsterdam office that there may have been political considerations in the strike because Jungschlaeger was the leader of the nautical service of the KPM, and had been head of the Netherlands Forces Intelligence Service—NEFIS in Jakarta.³⁹

At the beginning of February most of the strikes were of relatively short duration, ranging from one to three days and covered specific groups of workers only. It

³⁵ *Harian Rakjat*, 2 February 1954.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Harian Rakjat*, 1 February 1954.

³⁸ According to the Chairman of the Union 5,000 to 7,000 workers were taking part in the strike. 'Uitknipsel', P.I. Aneta, 468, 1 February 1954, *Archief KPM*.

³⁹ 'Uitknipsel', Dagblad 2 February 1954, *Archief KPM*.

was not united action. For instance, the SBTP would call its workers out on strike while the SB/KPM might go out at the same time but not in concert with the SBTP. During the early February protest action by the SBTP when dockers belonging to this union were on strike, those belonging to the SBPP worked as usual and loading and unloading continued. Conversely, in the Semarang harbour KPM business was at a virtual standstill because nearly all the personnel were members of the SB/KPM.⁴⁰

Yet, although other maritime workers did not participate in a physical way the method of mediation sometimes assured a mutuality of outcome. This is best illustrated by looking at the agency of the P4P during these early disputes. The P4P called together representatives of the unions concerned in the strikes—the SB/KPM and SBTP, as well as representatives from the SBPP and SBSI [who were not on strike], to meet with the full P4P committee and the Minister in order to discuss the general claims. Unions were not particularly happy at this summons. They charged that the P4P was changing its own working arrangements. The SBPP protested vigorously, arguing that in practice the arrangement meant workers only heard the Minister's explanation of the problem and the P4P decision. The union's view of the new arrangement was that P4P wanted to lead the unions and give directions for the discussions between worker and employers. To the SBPP this was proof of the P4P reluctance to make a decision and its desire to set only an absolute base for employer/worker discussions.

In effect, workers were appealing for an arbitrated decision which was, in fact, at odds with their criticism that P4P wanted to lead. The debate centred on the difference between binding and non-binding decisions [recommendations]. Workers argued that, in practice, employers did not comply with non-binding decisions: they provided an escape route and workers were either forced to return to negotiations with employers, or to turn once again to strike action. But there was little meeting ground between the unions and government over this point. The Labour Minister, Professor Abidin, condemned the unions for their rejection of the P4P decision where previously, he claimed, they had agreed to the recommendations.⁴¹

The broadening of the February strike was a direct consequence of workers' dissatisfaction with both the backdating provision and the recommendation aspect of the decision which was finally handed down by the P4P on January 30. According to the KPM: "everyone expected a binding decision [*bindende beslissing*] however it was only a recommendation [*aanbeveling*] to the employers and unions".⁴² The P4P recommended to employers that people on a monthly wage should receive a ten per cent increase on

⁴⁰ 'Uitknipsel', P.I. Aneta No.470, 3 February 1954, *Archief KPM*.

⁴¹ 'Uitknipsel', P.I. Aneta 4 February 1954, *Archief KPM*.

⁴² 'Vertrouwelijk', Letter P.Z.1013, 4 February 1954, Jakarta to Amsterdam, *Archief KPM*.

their gross income. The committee also expressed concern over the wage rate for casual day labourers and permanent day labourers and made recommendations to cover workers in Jakarta, Semarang, Makassar, Surabaya and Belawan. Workers in the first four harbours were to receive a rise of Rp.0.90 per day: Belawan daily workers were to receive Rp.0.75. Workers receiving an hourly wage were to have their wage rate adjusted pro rata with the Rp.0.90 rate. Surabaya workers had asked for an increase in transport money: it remained the same at Rp.1. The workers arguing, unsuccessfully, that Rp.1 represented the cost of transport in 1950, whereas transport from Tanjung Perak to Wonokromo where many of the workers lived, in comparison to 1950, had already risen 150 per cent.

The position of hourly and daily contract workers, the worst off group of workers, was only slightly improved. They were to receive increases above the minimum they presently received, to be equal with the minimum wage which was itself only a recommendation. Ship workers, both inter-insular and inter-ocean, were not mentioned. In any event, at this point sailors belonging to the SPSI had taken no action. *Harian Rakjat* claimed these "amusing recommendations" from a genuine list of claims, sprang from the committee's desire to set the base for future discussions as no decisions were made on the other claims by workers. For its part the Committee justified its position on the grounds that discussions between employers and workers would achieve better results than if a third side [P4P] was involved. Nonetheless, it stated it was prepared to make a decision if the two sides could not reach agreement.⁴³

What is clear is that the P4P recommendation method of mediation sometimes worked to the advantage of the workers despite their allegations to the contrary. In his explanation to the SBPP delegation Minister Abidin said harbour workers had an unsuitable base wage. According to the Minister some workers were receiving a base pay of between Rp.23 and Rp.40 a week as the result of negotiation from earlier recommendations of the P4P. These had not been recommended as the basis for workers' base pay, but for their gross. Manifestly, in the Minister's opinion, some workers had scored an advantage and there was necessity for change. To counter this criticism the unions played what can best be described as the 'national businesses card'. They asserted national businesses such as *Indonesia Veem*, *Pendawa Veem* and *Java Madura* had already agreed to an average daily and monthly wage rise: foreign capital should be prepared to pay the same and for this reason they would seek a decision from foreign owners in line with that achieved from the national businesses.⁴⁴ Similar

⁴³ In validating the recommendations from January 1 [a particular point of contention] the Minister also emphasised that each side could not threaten the other, and for every action of this nature the P4P would take a counter measure. *Harian Rakjat*, 1 February 1954.

⁴⁴ The recommended rates were: Rp.10.85 and an average monthly pay rise of 30 per cent, with the minimum to be Rp.100. *Harian Rakjat*, 1 February 1954. The official rate of exchange in 1954 was approximately Rp.11.47/\$US.1. *Statistical Pocket Book of Indonesia 1957*, p.177.

assertions had been made in January after the third meeting with the Labour Minister. It needs to be noted that the wage rates for national businesses were an agreement only, and further, that very few workers received the amounts claimed by the Minister. All sides were becoming adept at dissembling and bargaining their position.

Because the decision was a recommendation only and fell far short of workers' claims employers realized that the way was open for further strikes. Nevertheless, the recommendations were accepted by the KPM because in its view the recommended wage rise, considering it covered all workers, and had a short-term backdating period, was better than expected; acceptance of the recommendation would give employers a possible favourable tactical position in relations with the Government, even though there were as yet unresolved claims; and with regard to the wage claims employers could expect to pay more to the dock workers but less to the clerks because of the different food levels of these two groups of workers.⁴⁵

At the same time as employers confirmed their acceptance, unions, including the SB/KPM, the SBTP and the SBPP rejected the recommendations. Workers were not only after an increase in the basic wage, but cost-of-living allowances for all workers including the day wage workers; medical aid for families with the ability to choose a private doctor in emergencies; leave to be given to all workers as was their right and the decision not to be left to the agency heads of the firm; and above all parity with *import krachten* [overseas workers]. The unions spoke of injustice and denial of rights. For these reasons workers refused to negotiate with management, preferring to await measures from the Minister of Labour.⁴⁶ However, The Central Board of SB/KPM, sent telegrams to the Labour Minister and the Premier on February 5 to draw their attention to the length of the strike [five days], and indicating the union's willingness to conduct compromise negotiations in order to reach a solution on the wage level of local employees.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, a delegation from the independent SBTP, led by J.H. Jacob, had begun negotiations with the KPM management in line with the stipulation contained in the decision of the P4P for the settlement of the dispute. Earlier, at the end of a protest strike the SBTP had sent a delegation to the Labour Minister to seek an explanation of the

⁴⁵ This was a reference to the gross wage increase. When Central Office of Statistics food index figures were taken into account employers would pay out more to dock workers whose gross wages included a more substantial proportion of food allowances but a lower wage bill. 'Vertrouwelijk', Letter P.Z.1013, 4 February 1954, Jakarta to Amsterdam, *Archief KPM*.

⁴⁶ Overseas workers had received a rise in the cost of living allowance in August 1953 of Rp.700 over their basic salary of Rp.400 as well as other bonuses. Financial Economic News 4, 5 February 1954, Jakarta to Amsterdam, *Archief KPM*.

⁴⁷ P.I. Aneta, 5 February 1954, *Archief KPM*.

P4P decision, and it was on the basis of the Minister's explanation that the SBTP had put the new suggestions to KPM management.⁴⁸

Conversely, the attitude of the SBPP and some other unions was not conciliatory and more widespread action ensued. Initially, different central unions took unilateral action sometimes with the support of other centrals, other times without. SBPP, for instance, called a strike in the four large harbours—Tanjung Priok, Surabaya, Belawan and Semarang—on February 6. To co-ordinate the strike a *Kesatuan Aksi* [United Action] command was formed by the Jakarta branch. Those present at the formative meeting included representatives from PP/SBPP, SOBSI Jakarta Raya, SBPP Surabaya, SBPP Sections from KJCPL, SMN, KPM, NISHM, OCEAAN, NISE, *Veemcombinatie IBVV*, *Unie-Kampong*, *Droogdok Mij*, and the KPM Central Jakarta Branch of SBKB [the union of transport workers on the wharves, also SOBSI affiliated]. *SB/Borsumij Tanjung Priok* which was non-SOBSI was also present. With the exception of the delegate from the PSII, who gave his personal support only, all groups in attendance pledged solidarity with the SBPP action.

The representative from the influential and SOBSI affiliated mass organization, *Barisan Tani*—BTI [The Farmers' Union] promised to form a Support Committee, and to ask all political parties and mass organizations in Tanjung Priok to join. In an effort to secure broad community support the Jakarta branch of the SBPP invited all *lurahs* and *kampung* heads in the surroundings of Tanjung Priok to a meeting to give them an explanation of SBPP claims and projected actions. On February 8, in a move designed to take the edge off political opposition, the Jakarta Branch also sent a delegation to the civil administration and military authorities to inform them of the justice of worker's demands, and of the propriety of their actions. A delegation was sent to the national businesses operating in Tanjung Priok to advise them of the situation.⁴⁹ Through the women's organization of the SBPP, and through the *Gerwani* branch at Tanjung Priok, campaigns were started to bring together the wives of strikers and give them an explanation of the issues. The emphasis was on the importance of solidarity and of the necessity to help their husbands' struggle for better conditions. Small traders in Tanjung Priok were similarly targeted.⁵⁰

At this point in the strike the problem that bedevilled other industries, multiple unions, created tension and revealed the cracks in worker solidarity. The Executive

⁴⁸ The SBTP presented the following suggestions to the meeting: a wage increase of sixteen per cent for those workers not paid monthly with a minimum rise of Rp.2; a rise of ten per cent for monthly wage earners with a minimum rise of Rp.25; the increases to be backdated to 1 January, 1953. P.I. Aneta, 5 February 1954, *Archief KPM*.

⁴⁹ *Harian Rakjat*, 8 February 1954.

⁵⁰ *Harian Rakjat*, 15 February 1954.

Board of the SB/KPM put forward a demand for a wage rise of 75 per cent. The SBPP immediately went on the attack, if in somewhat moderate tones.

Solidarity and respect amongst striking KPM workers was necessary [it announced] in order to achieve results, and experience has shown that this requires a united front from workers.⁵¹

In other words, no wild claims.

But, in a rejection of unity of action both the SB/KPM and the SBTP had already separated themselves from *Kesatuan Aksi*. This drew sharp criticism from the SBPP.⁵² The push by the SBPP for unity of demands and its rejection would appear to give credence to union concerns that their bargaining position was weakened by multiple unions within the same industry. As the SBPP said workers shared a similar fate so united action would have strengthened their claims. Notwithstanding this, employer arguments that dealing with multiple unions disadvantaged them also had credence. In the early period of what was later to become quite concerted action on the part of the workers, employers were forced to deal with several central unions at once. Employers also had an added difficulty in that they were unable to reach agreement partly because of their inability to negotiate conditions which would have been binding on all employers.

With the deadlock in negotiations the SBPP once again used a supposed agreement with national businesses to pressure the P4P and the employers. It claimed that workers' demands over wages had already been met by national businesses. The pressure was unsuccessful. After a meeting between the SBPP and the *Hoofdbestuur* [Head Committee] of the VWHI in the office of KJCPL in Jakarta, employers said they rejected in principle a larger rise than the recommended ten per cent. Because of this deadlock the Central Board of the SBPP issued a statement to SBPP members, workers in general, and people's organizations to the effect that the attitude of VWHI was not conducive to reaching a decision. Therefore, it continued, all maritime workers and worker's unions in harbour and shipping would be requested to take part in combined action.⁵³

The effect of the SBPP calling its members out on strike was immediate: the Tanjung Priok harbour came to a complete standstill. SBPP workers from nine companies covering the docks, warehouses and workshops protested at the lack of any agreement with the VWHI. A series of rolling, sit-down strikes was staged—working

⁵¹ *Harian Rakjat*, 9 February 1954.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ The union said that an eight per cent increase had been given, and that daily workers [both casual and permanent] in Surabaya were receiving Rp.11 per day, and if they worked continuously for six days received seven days pay. *Harian Rakjat*, 10 February 1954.

one hour, striking for two sometimes four hours. On Thursday the eleventh, approximately 10,000 maritime workers from Tanjung Priok held two, two-hour sit-down strikes.⁵⁴ In Semarang the *perahus* stopped sailing because it was not considered worthwhile to have two, two hourly sit-down strikes.⁵⁵ The action at Tanjung Priok began at 9am with the raising of the red Workers' Flag and the Indonesian Flag, and both the beginning and end of the strike were signalled by the wailing of a ship's siren. Transport workers from the SBKB, SBKA and Serbaud unions on the waterfront [all SOBSI affiliated] announced their support for the SBPP workers. They urged unity of action against the "unjust and improper" recommendations of the P4P. As the members of other unions joined in the strike only five of the many ships in port could be worked; the others lay abandoned. However, government goods were not disturbed: the SBPP stating that workers recognised the importance of the smooth running of the civil and military administration for the *Kementerian Pertahanan*. Just as the employers had sought a tactical advantage by agreeing to the recommendations, the unions sought a similar advantage by enabling essential supplies for the army and the Department of Health through. For its part the VWHI complained that, even though it had accepted the decision of the P4P as an expression of trust in the highest board for the settlement of labour disputes, it had not as yet received the complete recommendations from the P4P.⁵⁶ In a further move the VWHI urged the use of SBII workers as strikebreakers and wanted them to work overtime until 11pm in order to clear some of the backlog of goods.

By Friday 12 as other maritime workers at Tanjung Priok such as those from the dry docks [approximately 1,300] joined in the sit-down strikes, and workers from the other three major harbours of Semarang, Surabaya and Belawan began their action, around 30,000 workers had taken part in the strikes. A meeting between SBPP and the Director *Drydock My Tandjungpriuk* ended in deadlock. The employers' plan to use 2,250 strikebreakers at Tanjung Priok failed when the *Kesatuan Aksi* leadership informed the employers that these workers would join in the action. In fact, quite apart from the division between the central unions about the suitability of strike action, the leadership of the SBII was itself divided over the use of strikebreakers. This can be gleaned from the conduct of the leaders. One of the leaders, Hasan Tjipto, made a speech in front of the workers meeting at the company supporting the action, while another, Kohar, went to the harbour to request work. This action was provocative and *mandors* were taken to the office of the Harbour Command and detained for around two hours to avoid trouble. For the same reason warehouses belonging to the four large companies were forced to shut.

⁵⁴ *Harian Rakjat*, 11 February 1954.

⁵⁵ 'Uitknipsel', P.I. Aneta, No.477, 11 February 1954, *Archief KPM*.

⁵⁶ 'Uitknipsel', P.I. Aneta, No.476, 10 February 1954. *Archief KPM*.

Then began a series of moves, and countermoves, by the workers and the employers. On Thursday morning approximately 4,500 *Unie-Kampong* workers were locked out. On Thursday evening they demanded their normal work, stating that if this was not forthcoming they wanted a guarantee of normal pay for the period they were locked out. Kohar applied for work after the lock-out, and since he was helped by directors [Andriensen and H.O.E. Ferror] from the Drydock Company, the workers saw the action as provocative. But the lock-out was overturned by the decision of the Harbour Master's that only those who were listed could work. This, in effect, meant the *Unie-Kampong* workers because they were the ones listed. In Semarang, in another attempt to weaken workers' resolve, the *Semarangsch Stoomboot-en Prauwen Veer* [SSPV] company, refused to give its workers their food allowance. Such was the atmosphere, however, that when workers challenged management at the company's office it was forced to give Rp.2 to every worker as exchange for their allowance.⁵⁷

Workers quite rightly saw these moves as an attempt to break the unity of action. Apparently this was the same reason that the *Organisasi Buruh Bandar Tandjung-Priuk* group, which was anti-strike action and which offered its members to the employers, was formed. To try and overcome the influence of the anti-strike movement the Executive Board of the SBPP met with the Executive Boards of the SB/KPM, SBTP and SPSI to urge them to work together in leading the strike action. The SBPP told the other unions that the broadening of the dispute was already a reality because the workers themselves were continuing to strike. The SBPP Board also sent a directive to all the branches ordering them "to be beware of the back-door loading/unloading of goods".⁵⁸ Workers received support for their stand from Werdjojo in his capacity as a parliamentary labour section and SOBSI member, and Head of *Serbuni*, Werdjojo, criticised the P4P decision of a recommended ten per cent, the length of time workers had to wait for the decision and warned that rejection of unity of action only enabled foreign owners to win.⁵⁹

The employers, nonetheless, continued to have talks with the separate unions. At the insistence of the Labour Ministry the Director of KPM and members of the SB/KPM and its federation the KBSI, met on February 9 to discuss new proposals put forward by the SB/KPM concerning the position of local and overseas employees. In a letter to Amsterdam, the Director of KPM Indonesia, D.F. de Koe, said the union had dropped its initial demands and presented new allowance proposals. De Koe told his Head Office that for tactical reasons he had agreed to take note of the new proposals,

⁵⁷ *Harian Rakjat*, 13 February 1954.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

otherwise it would appear to the Government that the KPM was unwilling to conduct further negotiations. He made it clear, however, that as a member of the VWHI it would be impossible for the KPM to complete a separate wage agreement that would have consequences for all the other VWHI members. "Further [he wrote] the new allowance proposals were, as expected, much higher than those recommended by the P4P and already accepted by employers as the basis for the increase". Noting that the strike had already been extended twice, first to February 12 and then to February 18, he informed his head office that the company had experienced a great deal of difficulty over the past weeks owing to the strike, especially on the west coast of Borneo [where the company was strongly represented], Semarang, Tjirebon, Bonggala, Gorontalo, Bengkulen, Kupang and many of the other agencies. Gudangs were overfull and ships were prevented from sailing. Although, some Sumatran harbours, while experiencing great difficulty, were continuing to operate, as were harbours in Celebes and the Molukkas. At some agencies partners of the Dutch employees were lending a hand to try and keep business operating.⁶⁰

According to De Koe once the SBPP workers became involved in the strike the situation in the harbours worsened. Apparently, prior to the involvement of the SBPP the biggest agencies, namely Tanjung Priok, Medan, Surabaya and Makassar had been minimally inconvenienced by the SB/KPM actions. "Now [De Koe wrote] at the Head Office in Jakarta eighty per cent of the personnel had not reported for work, and the nursing staff of the hospital were also threatening to strike". [Moreover] "strikes by the SB/KPM were fairly orderly and peaceful whereas the SBPP strikes were noisy, and people presenting for work were hindered". "The KPM had requested help from government authorities but it had little practical effect".⁶¹ The latter two points were a obvious reference to the use of strikebreakers and the detention of the *mandors*, both of which had been unsuccessful attempts by the employers to divide the workers. The letter noted a further meeting with the SBTP [also at the request of the Labour Ministry] concerning the deadlock in negotiations and stated: "However, as was expected there was not a favourable outcome considering we maintained the standpoint that we, like all the other members of the VWHI, had agreed to the P4P recommendations and would give nothing more".⁶²

Following the rolling strikes of February 10, 11, 12 and 13, the VWHI sent a letter to the Executive Board of the SBPP to the effect that it accepted the P4P recommendations but employers still maintained their objection to the wage rise. But, in

⁶⁰ Letter P.Z.1016, Jakarta to Amsterdam, *Archief KPM*.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

order to bring an end to the deadlock employers were prepared to increase the gross pay of monthly wage workers, in line with the VWHI's own interpretation of the P4P recommendations, by a minimum of ten per cent, that is, Rp.25 per month. SBPP workers, as had SB/KPM workers, rejected the offer. On behalf of the workers the union argued that those on the smallest wage were not achieving any parity with the better paid workers and, further, with this offer the employers once again were not considering hourly and daily wage workers. The SBPP wanted an increase of Rp.2 per day, and for the achievement of parity between maritime workers.

Since they felt that they had lowered their demands to meet their absolute minimum needs workers intended to increase the wave of strikes so that the four largest harbours would be further incapacitated.⁶³

Ships again lay idle in the harbours. In Tanjung Priok more than 29 ships were affected by the dry dock, warehouse, tugboat and dock workers strikes. Some ships were diverted to Singapore and others managed to leave the harbour without a tug. The M.S. Oranje was only able to sail for the Netherlands because the administrative workers of the Nederland Steamship Company, instead of stopping work at 8.30am, like the workers in the other Priok companies, stopped at 9.30am. Passengers had not completed boarding but the European personnel of the company finished the work.⁶⁴ Ships in the Semarang and Surabaya harbours were also unable to load or unload goods, and workers in Makassar had announced a strike for Monday.⁶⁵

Religious tension, the undercurrent in the difficulties between the SBII and the SBPP particularly, again surfaced. *Harian Rakjat* reported that a large, ostensibly anti-strike demonstration, organized by *Masjumi* and involving approximately 10,000 people, took place in Jakarta on Saturday the thirteenth. The newspaper claimed the demonstrators were not only workers from Jakarta [from Depok, Pasar Minggu and the surrounding areas], but also came from surrounding areas such as Serang and Bogor. It accused foreign-owned warehouse and other companies in Tanjung Priok of enabling the demonstration through ordering workers to join in and by paying them, even though they were absent from work. The paper made the bitter accusation that these same workers had not seen cause to join in the Tanjung Priok strikes with their fellow workers.⁶⁶ No evidence can be found that payment was made but true or not the accusation spoke of the divisions within the maritime unions. We may note that such 'calling up' of maritime

⁶³ *Harian Rakjat*, 15 February 1954.

⁶⁴ P.I. Aneta, No.479, 13 February 1954, *Archief KPM*.

⁶⁵ *Harian Rakjat*, 16 February 1954.

⁶⁶ *Harian Rakjat*, 15 February 1954.

workers for public demonstrations was not in itself an unusual action. The *Times of Indonesia* reported on the “truckloads of tough longshoremen from Tanjung Priok” outside parliament at the time of the ‘October 17 Affair’.⁶⁷

On the Monday [February 15] SOBSI became directly involved. Tjugito gave a press conference in support of the SBPP workers’ action. He urged all peoples’ groups, the government, non-SOBSI unions, and other central associations to join in unity of action with the already 30,000 workers from Tanjung Priok, Semarang, Surabaya and Belawan.⁶⁸ Tjugito announced that the workers would continue their strikes because of the unwillingness of the employers to negotiate, and their improper attitude which, he said, should not be permitted. [The VWHI had sent a letter to the SBPP re-confirming their acceptance of the P4P recommendations].⁶⁹

The harbour companies were clearly suffering. They had told producers to keep transporting their products to the harbours by truck or train to overcome stockpiling, and had hoped to continue trade through Makassar but this harbour was now experiencing difficulties because of the strike.⁷⁰ Workers, however, unloaded 80 tons of rice, coal belonging to the railways, and goods for the CPM [*Corps Polisi Militer*] and the Army.⁷¹ Once again unions and workers were seeking to secure a tactical advantage. At the Tanjung Priok and Semarang harbours national businesses were granted a dispensation on the strike order.⁷²

On Tuesday the sixteenth, one day after the public involvement of SOBSI, the strike was almost over. The news agency *Aneta* announced that the strikes in Tanjung Priok, Belawan, and Surabaya had ended; work in Semarang was still at a standstill while the workers in Makassar had begun *langzaamaan* [literally ‘easy going’] strike action. The unions had asked the *Commissie Enquête* [Investigation Committee], which for the previous seven months had been inquiring into the workers demands, to declare the recommendations to be a binding decision in accordance with its own standing orders.⁷³ On Thursday the eighteenth *Harian Rakjat* in its lead article:

⁶⁷ *Times of Indonesia*, 20 October 1952. On the October 17 Affair see Legge, *Sukarno*, pp.254–260.

⁶⁸ *Harian Rakjat*, 16 February 1954.

⁶⁹ P.I. *Aneta*, No.479, 13 February 1954, *Archief KPM*.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Harian Rakjat*, 16 February 1954.

⁷² P.I. *Aneta*, No.481, 16 February 1954, *Archief KPM*. The strike was having a detrimental effect on business: 12,000 chests of tea awaited shipment and 30 wagons of rubber at Tanjung Priok could not be moved.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Kesatuan aksi buruh pelabuhan pelajaran membawa hasil [Unity of action in the harbours and shipping brings success]

maintained that the P4P decision had been given to the Executive Board of the SBPP on the sixteenth. But it was only on the eighteenth that KPM in Jakarta sent a telegram to Amsterdam announcing the binding decision. An incoming telegram asked “what binding decision contain?”⁷⁴ It appears that the SBPP had earlier knowledge than did the VWHI as the content of the decision was printed in *Harian Rakjat* a day prior to the telegram to Amsterdam on Friday the nineteenth outlining the changes.⁷⁵

The text of the P4P decision contained both non-binding [*tidak mengikat*] and binding [*mengikat*] recommendations covering the SBPP, SB/KPM, SBTP and the *Front Aksi Buruh Pelabuhan Makassar*. The binding decisions were few but they were the most important and represented an improvement for the membership base of the SBPP. In the binding decisions wages were to be paid directly to daily and hourly workers—not through intermediaries such as *mandors*. A wage increase was to be given to daily, hourly, task workers, and monthly wage earners. Contract workers’ wages were to be reviewed in line with the above increases. Thus, as a consequence of the binding decision both the *Unie-Kampong* workers and the *badjos* were to have some improvement in their conditions at the wage level. Social security benefits for these groups of workers, however, were still only a recommendation. Moreover, the P4P recommended the withdrawal of some of the claims put forward by maritime labour. These concerned long-service leave, Sunday work, holidays and feast days for daily and casual workers, and some form of benefit for the time these workers spent not working so their status could be improved. In relation to the long-service leave claim the committee argued that workers employment was not of sufficient duration to warrant the leave.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Telegram KPM Djakarta to KPM Amsterdam [42] 18 February 1954, and Telegram KPM Amsterdam to Djakarta [70/42], *Archief KPM*.

⁷⁵ Telegram KPM Djakarta to KPM Amsterdam [44/70] 19 February 1954, *Archief KPM*.

⁷⁶ The binding decisions were as follows: Daily workers an increase of 16% with a minimum of Rp.1.50; for Belawan workers a minimum of Rp.1.25 per day; monthly workers an increase of ten per cent, with a minimum of Rp.30. The increases were backdated from January 1, 1954. The decision changed the proposal of January 30, for an increase of Rp.0.90 per day. There was also another provision that accidents at sea would be determined as per the Regulations on the 1940 ‘Convention on Accidents at Sea’. The non-binding decisions were as follows: an increase in the monthly minimum pay to be, at the least, Rp.100; where the minimum pay was already above this level it was to increase in balance. They were also to be valid from January 1, 1954, with the understanding, that in order to determine bonuses for 1953 which were based on the minimum pay, then the new minimum was the base and employers were obliged to institute the regulations over six months. Subsidies were not increased so there was to be no gross wage increase over and above that achieved by the wage rise itself. As the majority of workers were receiving minimums of Rp.25, Rp.50, and Rp.70 per month the Rp.100 monthly minimum wage was an important recommendation but a recommendation only. Further provisions in line with the decision P4P May 11, 1953, concerned overtime, yearly leave [all workers to receive yearly leave], the nursing of workers, together with sick-leave pay [in line with the decision of March 5 1953], the obligation of employers to give workers a months prior notice concerning the amount of their bonus so they could

The new recommendations were not included in the first KPM notification to Amsterdam, the employers preferring to concentrate on the ramifications of the binding decision. The SBPP announced that although workers' unity of action had achieved results "it refused to speculate on the possibility of further action after the P4P decision".⁷⁷ According to the dispute procedure 14 days after a P4P binding decision business must begin to put the conditions into effect. Non-binding recommendations were either to be accepted or rejected otherwise they were assumed to be rejected.

The following month the SBPP approved sections of the recommendations. At the same time it argued that others needed improvement and that

the SBPP would continue to press for the recommendation of a wage minimum of Rp.100 per month, and because the differences in minimum levels between European and Indonesian workers was very significant, workers would once again take recourse to unity of action. Any recommendations...as far as workers were concerned were considered minimum recommendations. Furthermore, the union has no intention of reviewing the long-service leave claim and wants six days straight work to be paid as seven, and pay for time spent writing for work. Workers options have to be kept open as too many issues remain unresolved. Wage parity remains a particular problem. Seamen's wages have not been increased and there are differences in scale between the lowest paid workers in different cities. As the VHWI has cut workers wages for the time of the strike the SBPP will continue to press for a meeting with businesses such as Droogdok Mij Tandjung Priok and Surabaya, and continue to press for a concrete decision concerning contract workers.⁷⁸

A number of general conclusions may be drawn from this detailed look at the processes involved in maritime workers' strike action for this period. First, it is impossible to separate the protest of the maritime workers from their poor working conditions. Although they were not always as united as the SBPP would have wished, the union worked to make them more aware of their class position. Therefore, what security workers had, such as *Unie-Kampong* housing, they were prepared to risk as they fought to win some concessions in their confrontation with, on the one hand, employers who resisted the changed circumstances and rejected wage justice for their Indonesian employees as too costly, and on the other, governments needing to create a predictable business environment for domestic and foreign owners. Second, different religious and political loyalties militated against the creation of one 'super' maritime

lodge their objections, special payments such as *Lebaran* [in line with the year 1952/1953] and recommendations on discussions concerning pensions so that these could be finalised by the end of the year. *Harian Rakjat*, 18 February 1954.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Harian Rakjat*, 27 February 1954.

union.⁷⁹ Third, given the vital industry environment in which workers and unions operated after the announcement of the Emergency Law, it is doubtful whether they could have taken different action other than their series of rolling stoppages. A prolonged shut down of the harbours over a period of weeks or months would have taken them into 'illegal waters' and increased government ire. Finally, workers, nonetheless, were able to gain some improvements in their conditions within this labour relations framework. Any redress of grievances was a win, however short of the justice they deserved.⁸⁰

Continuing action

The general conclusions drawn from the 1954 strike may be applied to the next three years prior to the forced 'sailing away' of the KPM fleet. This was a period full of disputes, minor mutinies, strikes and continuous demands for better working conditions, not only on the part of the SBPP, but also by the other unions. Actions which illustrated both the economic struggle of workers and the ideological nature of the turmoil on land and sea.⁸¹ The tension between unions went unabated. The SBPP complained of the splitting tactics of the KBKI and the KBSI, accusing the latter of a "betrayal of Poeradiredja" and of leading a "reactionary strike".⁸² During this time the SBPP broadened its organizational work, especially amongst the *badjos* and sailors, and as a result the militancy of these groups of workers increased. In November of 1956, for instance, there was a dispute before the ship the Waingapoe left for its journey from

⁷⁹ As there were unions who refused to join with the SBPP in this strike action, at other times the SBPP refused to join actions. For instance, the Semarang based Harbour and Shipping Workers' Union—*Perbuppsi* [*Persatuan Buruh Pelabuhan Pelajaran Seluruh Indonesia*—also led by Ritonga had continuous anti-overtime actions in January 1955 which the SBPP refused to support. "The SBPP concluded that the union did not join the anti-overwork action as overwork means a source of incomes[sic] for its members". *PIA*, 20 January 1955 and 28 January 1955. In yet another example of ideological difference a board member of the SB KPM was accused of wanting to *me-PSI-kan* [to make workers members of the PSI]. *Suara SBKA* [October 1954], p.12.

⁸⁰ After the strike, on May 25, the Minister of Labour issued a circular clarifying the execution of binding decisions in cases where there was non-compliance on the part of the employer. Penalties were in accordance with *UU Darurat* No. 16/1951 with the added stipulation in paragraph 3 that workers could request an executory title from the Court of Justice in Jakarta to be forwarded to the Court of Justice in the region of Jurisdiction for further jurisdiction. Paragraph 4, however, deemed it improper [my emphasis] for workers to take action against an employer for the execution of a binding decision. Any action on the part of workers which did not fulfil the three weeks cooling-off period after notification of the P4D would leave them liable to prosecution. Circular No. 4104 On The Execution of Binding P4P Decisions. Juridical Bureau, *Labour Legislation Republic of Indonesia 1945-1972* [Erlangga: Djakarta, 1972]. This Circular predated the May 28 'Act on Collective Labour Agreements'.

⁸¹ See the letter from the KBSI Action Committee on behalf of the SBPI re the intention to undertake a strike. To go through the 'lawful process' no less than twelve individuals/organizations, not including those belonging to the union concerned, had to be given prior notice. KBSI No. 15/PAP/55, 5 May 1955, *Arsip Nasional: Koleksi Arsip Kabinet Presiden R.I. 1950-1959 No.1475*. See also information in *Harian Rakjat*, 12, 13 September 1956; 2, 22 October 1956; 2, 11 November 1956, and issues of December 1957.

⁸² Letter to the TU International of Transport Workers in Vienna, 10 March 1956, *SUA File, 183/21/4*.

Pinang to Makassar. The *badjos* demanded that the ship put in at Surabaya on the way but the Captain refused. The *badjos* then demanded that they be allowed to leave the ship, but the case was taken up by the court and the judge refused to let them leave. When they arrived in Makassar the *badjos*, according to the KPM report, left the ship quietly. The report concluded: "its a pity that we allow this but if we want to make profits we cannot tolerant violations of discipline".⁸³ In another case involving *badjos* the workers were dismissed because they established a SBPP section on board a KPM ship. With union intercession they were returned to work on another ship.⁸⁴

The SBPP's appeal was always to the less educated, lower-level worker who seemingly had stronger grievances than other groups. The union recognized that it needed to increase the level of cadre education of this group, and it started to train its branches to be less broad in their demands in order to increase the chance of a successful outcome. To become, in effect, more pragmatic.⁸⁵ The union also sought to educate the contract workers in the ways of collective agreements. This was thought necessary because "in agreements, after a long struggle, some branches failed to include working conditions and social insurances".⁸⁶ Other than the *badjo*, approximately only a quarter of the KPM sailors were members of the SBPP. The majority of those organized belonged to the SPSI. To facilitate its work amongst seamen the SBPP established a contact point for seamen activists and SBPP local branch representatives in Tanjung Priok. The union made a decision not to directly attack the SPSI, but to work on its membership by inviting seamen to meetings to discuss their conditions. One such meeting was held on March/April of 1956, and from its report, the union appeared well satisfied with the results of this type of education towards greater organization of seamen. A similar meeting was held by the SBPP branch, 'Lido' section, of Tanjung Priok with sailors from the KPM Valentijn and five other ships.⁸⁷ As the SBPP grew stronger the KPM worried about the increasing influence and disruption on its sea personnel from the union's activities.⁸⁸ But the SBPP continued to expand its membership in spite of attempts to weaken it amongst its strongest base—the *Unie-Kampong*. And, sometimes, as in the action of support by SPSI seamen for five dismissed SBPP crew members on

⁸³ 1733/No.593, 15 January 1957, *Archief KPM*.

⁸⁴ Laporan Umum, *Kapal Tudjuh* [1956], p.8.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.9-19.

⁸⁶ Letter to the TU International of Transport Workers in Vienna 10 March 1956, *SUA File*, 183/21/4.

⁸⁷ See *Kapal Tudjuh* 4 [1956], p.21. This was again a drawing on history. The Lido private hotel in North Sydney, Australia, had been a meeting place for Indonesian exiles.

⁸⁸ See, 'Uittreksel', No.109, 23 January 1956, and 'Uittreksel', Indonesian Nieuwsbulletin 16 July 1956, *Archief KPM*.

the same ship, the broader maritime culture overcame union enmity. This event happened when the SBPP members were dismissed for pasting up copies of *Kapal Tudjuh* on board the ship. Sixty eight SPSI members threatened to strike unless the others were reinstated and the SBPP sailors returned to work on the ship.⁸⁹

As part of the continuing struggle, when a P4P decision was not satisfactory the SBPP continued to call up support for its position. Because of foreign ownership it could, and did, accuse the P4P of favouring the foreign capitalists.⁹⁰ Some groups of dock workers were able to negotiate better conditions than those enjoyed by the broader mass of dockers, thereby adding another nuance to divisions within the workforce. An agreement between the SBPP workers and their employer—the Droogdok My Tanjung Priok, provides a good example. As well as determined hours of work and wages, the agreement covered sickness, accident, annual leave and holidays, and the acknowledgment that the workers could form a union, hold meetings and receive dispensation for absence on union work, with full pay.⁹¹

However, general overall improvements were made. In a letter to E.V. Elliott, the Federal Secretary of the Seamen's Union of Australia, Subianto wrote of "the victories over the past month [but] we cannot say that we have done our tasks always correctly". Subianto's letter reveals that monthly wage earners, seamen aboard inter-ocean vessels and dockyard workers in enterprises affiliated to the VWHI all received wage increases. The dockyard workers received an increase of between ten and twenty per cent. For those working the whole six day week one extra day's wage was given—that is seven days pay for six days work. Some of the employers also gave dispensation and full wages for workers to carry out their union activities. The SBPP had also demanded the building of a mosque in each enterprise with the cost financed by the employers, in order that Muslim dockers and seamen, the majority, could fulfil their religious duties. According to Subianto's report on union activities a government ruling obliged the Dutch employers of the dockyard companies to meet this demand.⁹²

Therefore, we may conclude from the union's own information that in the decade prior to the take over of the KPM and other Dutch enterprises in December 1957,

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p.8.

⁹⁰ See the series of letters to the President from the DPP SBPP, SOBSI and Serbuni in *Arsip Nasional: Koleksi Arsip Kabinet Presiden 1950–1959*. Nos. 1475. 1485. 1488.

⁹¹ Laporan Umum, *Kapal Tudjuh* [1956], pp.9–10. Other unions were also active. The KPM Section of the KBKI pushed for bonus and ration distribution for KPM white-collar workers. The union also protested the discrimination "which exists in every field" between the Indonesian and Dutch employees of the company in conditions; and the "bringing of employees from the Netherlands for work which can be carried out by Indonesians". See the letters from the KBKI/KPM concerning these matters to the Government 17 June, 1956; the Director KPM in Djakarta, 2, 9, 10, 20 July, 1956, and to the Minister of Labour, 18 July 1956. *Archief KPM*.

⁹² Letter to E.V. Elliott 10 November 1955, *SUA File*, E183/21/4.

maritime workers were able to win improvements in their conditions. Most of the actions were taken in accordance with the guidelines of the regulations, but they were larger in number and scope, more strident and antagonistic than actions of the railway workers generally. When they stepped too far outside the 'guidelines' they, like other workers, suffered. At the beginning of 1957, in a period of heightened race antagonism because of the West Irian issue, workers expected greater support from the Government, even here they felt they were unfairly treated. Such was the case over the refusal of companies to dock at Surabaya and their instruction to those ships already berthed to leave. The SBPP protested that its members were detained and under court examination for their strike action, whereas the VWHI could continue to frustrate the wishes of the people.

Jang sangat mengherankan bagi kaum buruh, kalau kepada pimpinan-pimpinan SBPP, Pemerintah bisa setjara tjepat dan tegas mengambil tindakan, tetapi kepada modal asing seperti [VWHI] jang dengan sadar melakukan tindakan pengatjauan dan pelanggaran hukum, tidak/belum diambil tindakan apa-apa. [It is a cause of great amazement for workers when the Government can take quick and firm measures against the SBPP, but to foreign capitalists such as the VWHI who knowingly implement disturbance and violate the law, it has not taken any action].⁹³

Yet, within the restrictions placed on their activity and the detention of many the politics of the day demanded workers' involvement. On November 6, the instruction to establish a *Badan Kerdja Sama Buruh dan Militer* was issued in order that "workers as a functional group should assist and cooperate with the Government in its efforts to solve national problems".⁹⁴ Workers were a needed 'vanguard'. The role of maritime workers and their unions in the lowering of the KPM flag confirms this point. In early December workers had taken part in a twenty four hour government approved strike, hoisting both the Indonesian and Red Worker's Flag on the KPM building. After the initial take over by the trade unions the management of the KPM was taken into government [Army] hands. Ships were boarded by guards and a severe warning was given to the Dutch officers and crews to obey the orders from Indonesians. On December 7, the assets of all Dutch companies in the harbours were nationalized.⁹⁵

⁹³ SBPP, Seksi Stroohoeden Veem No.6/S.O./EXT/11/57, 12 February 1957. *Arsip Nasional: Arsip Kabinet Presiden R.I. 1950-1959 No. 1485.*

⁹⁴ Hawkins, *Indonesia*, p.133. On the place of 'functional groups' in Indonesian society at this time, see David Reeve's authoritative account: *Golkar of Indonesia: An Alternative to the Party System.*

⁹⁵ *LTIF*, 4, 5, 7 December 1957.

Dark skinned workers sit on their heels beside sheds which are also idle and silent...it is the end of an era⁹⁶

For thousands of maritime workers the lowering of the KPM flag meant forced unemployment. "Workers were left without a company to work for".⁹⁷ For those in work the relationship changed. The Indonesian Maritime Bureau was established with trade union, government and nationalised maritime businesses' representatives. The SBPP initially demanded that the trade union representation on the new labour/management bodies should reflect those with the majority of the overall union membership. In the warning that "discrimination against unions or other organizations' members should be prevented", it was expressing its fear over a possible limitation of its role within the Army/management/labour axis.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the union found a place on the committees. It was active in two cooperative bodies representing workers: one for government workers for ten unions of government and nationalised enterprises and the other for thirty four unions of foreign enterprises. The SBPP seemed well pleased with these arrangements. In a speech to the Seamen's Union of Australia Convention in September 1958, Subianto announced that in "every ship and every maritime enterprise a coordinating committee had been set up which included representatives of all unions in the ship and factory irrespective of the number of members".⁹⁹ To the First All Pacific Dockworkers Conference in Tokyo—'Solidarity Beyond the Ocean'—of the following year the union reported on the changes in working conditions: wages had risen approximately twenty per cent for ship and shore workers, and about thirty per cent for those sailing overseas; workers at the *Unie-Kampong* were now paid directly by their employer and dockers had received an allowance increase, an average of two kilogram of rice, one half a bottle of beer and one packet of cigarettes per day as well as their wage rise; dockers with one years service could have twelve days holiday per year but casual workers none; there was still no old age pension for dockers, and only those workers with thirty to fifty years of service were eligible for a security allowance equivalent to twenty five per cent of their wage.¹⁰⁰

For unemployed maritime workers the situation was grim. SOBSI and the SBPP pressured the government to give former KPM workers not employed by PELNI the same rights and wages stipulated under the PELNI rules of labour; to give priority to

⁹⁶ 'Tragic Exodus from Java: Food Prices Soar While Stocks Waste at the Docks', *LTIF*, 19 December 1957.

⁹⁷ Rocamora, "Nationalism in Search of Ideology", p.406.

⁹⁸ National Council of SOBSI, Trade Union Activities, *SUA File*, E183/21/4.

⁹⁹ Speech by Subianto to Seamen's Union of Australia Convention September 1958, *SUA File*, S390.

¹⁰⁰ 'Solidarity Beyond the Ocean', *Report of the First All Pacific and Asian Dockworkers Conference, Tokyo May 11-13, 1959*.

these former workers in manning ships newly ordered or bought by the Government, and priority when government agencies/enterprises needed workers [sailors, technicians, administrative personnel] until they found new employment. Further, assurance was also demanded that KPM workers still employed should retain the same rights and level of wages determined under their former employment.¹⁰¹ Some relief was provided when the Government agreed to pay former KPM workers until the middle of 1959. However, the decrease in the total capacity of the large harbours ensured that tens of thousands of maritime workers remained unemployed. In Tanjung Priok 5,000 out of approximately 15,000 dockers were unemployed: many other workers could not find enough full time work to support themselves and their families. In a letter to their Australian maritime comrades the SBPP wrote that the figures for the small harbours were worse. In Cirebon, for example, only 500 out of 3,000 thousand workers were employed and the other harbours, although still in operation, were in effect “dead harbours” because of the number of workers without a job.¹⁰² For those in employ off shore there were torn loyalties. Indonesian stewards and cabin attendants still sailed on Dutch ships but after the breach in diplomatic relations between Indonesian and Holland in September of 1960, 220 Indonesians employed by the Royal Nederland Steamship Company left their ship [and their work] in Singapore. One of the workers had been with the company for twenty years: “he was sad to leave but his country came first”. “Holding aloft a large portrait of President Sukarno, the men marched to cries of *Merdeka* to the Indonesian Consulate”.¹⁰³

Times had changed for maritime workers. The colonial power which had long been the focus of their complaints had gone but the operation of the *Bumil* was effective in that it kept the stronger unions under ‘control’ while, at the same time, allowing some space for the smaller unions to operate.¹⁰⁴ Even with the improvements for those in work maritime workers still had grievances, for gains could not keep pace with food prices. However, with martial law in place it was now difficult to undertake strong militant action and actions became more subdued. Subianto reported in 1960 that the Tanjung Priok section of the union had organized a ‘Walking Placard Action’ against employers who would not meet demands for bonuses. All workers involved wore placards crosswise over their shoulders on entering work. There was no strike action when a national

¹⁰¹ National Council of SOBSI News in Brief, Trade Union Activities: Dock Workers, *SUA File*, E183/21/4.

¹⁰² Harsono to the Seamen’s Union of Australia, *SUA File*, E183/21/4. On the number of ex-KPM workers unemployed cf. Hindley, *The Communist Party*, p.149.

¹⁰³ *LTIF*, 30 September 1960.

¹⁰⁴ Hawkins, *Indonesia*, p.134.

employer absconded leaving workers without their wages. What was the point? Instead, the SBPP organized its local branches to collect funds from amongst those in work.¹⁰⁵

These were actions different in scope and nature than that undertaken against their former employer, the KPM. The union was clearly constrained. Achmad Sumadi, the Assistant General Secretary of the SBPP in his report to the Second All Pacific Dockworkers Conference in Tokyo in 1961, acknowledged this constraint:

It is easy to understand...that in the circumstances of armed rebellion that martial law has been imposed throughout the nation. It is now in many parts lifted but still in force in the harbours...It is difficult to carry out any demands to back the demands for the improvement of the conditions of dock workers...in many ports we are able to force the private maritime enterprises to raise wages and some new year extra payment are being realised in conformity with the demands of the union.¹⁰⁶

By 1961, with the decasualization of some parts of the dockyards due to the state enterprises regulation on regular wages, conditions and pensions for workers after they had served a certain number of years, changes in the recruitment process of dock workers had commenced. This had been a focal complaint of not only Indonesian maritime unions but also of the worldwide "maritime culture".¹⁰⁷ It is instructive to note here that dockers in London and Australia were still without pension rights in 1960. In 1961 only in France, Germany, the United States, Holland, Japan and the socialist countries did dock workers receive pension entitlement.¹⁰⁸ On the important questions of permanent work for Indonesian dockers and new work for the unemployed docker, research by Donald Blake during the period has shown that the decasualization process was partial and uneven. The Surabaya harbour had instituted a labour system "which gave promise of effective measures of decasualization [and] the previously existing unskilled dock labour surplus had been rather noticeably reduced as a result of increasing employment opportunities elsewhere". On the other hand, in Tanjung Priok the Port Authority Labour Board resisted calls for the creation of a 'pool' of unattached workers to be made available to the companies when the gangs of regular workers were shorthanded. The reasons

¹⁰⁵ SOBSI, Trade Union Activities, *SUA File, E183/21/4*.

¹⁰⁶ *Report to the Second All Pacific and Asian Dockworkers Conference, Tokyo June 15-17, 1961*. Martial law was revoked on 1 May, 1963, but the *London Times* reported the signs were there in November 1962 when: "in a recent ceremony at the port of Tandjungpriok...the port's naval commander installed 'supreme port authority control bodies'". *LTIF*, November 1962. Later, a general management body for the harbours—BPU Pelabuhan—under the Directorship of Kusnoroto was formed.

¹⁰⁷ *Report of the Second All Pacific and Asian Dockworkers Conference*. On the wage regulations pertaining to the former Dutch businesses in the maritime industry see, R.H. de Haas Engel, 'Peraturan Gadji baru dalam Perusahaan-perusahaan bekas Belanda, pp.3-10.

¹⁰⁸ *SUA File, S390*.

given were that "housing, health and sanitary facilities would have to be provided to members of the pool and that employment security would have to be guaranteed by the Government agency responsible for the pool".¹⁰⁹ To add to their difficulties, by 1963—after the lifting of martial law—maritime labour was in competition for work with veterans and demobilized military personnel.¹¹⁰

At the end of October 1963, Indonesia hosted the Third All Pacific and Asian Dockworkers Conference. In his welcoming address to the delegates, the then Minister of Labour, Ahem Erningpradja, said:

The Indonesian workers...are united within one Joint Secretariat in which the workers whose ideologies are national, moslem or marxist sit together to solve national problems.

This was an overly optimistic assessment of the situation by the Minister. Although Subianto, in his speech on behalf of the SBPP delegates, told the conference

no small number of our members represent the SBPP in the maritime enterprise councils [where] the main task of the workers representatives is to promote initiatives to step up production with daring determination to cope with the economic difficulties by standing on our own feet,¹¹¹

the union, in fact, was continuing its campaign against its ideological opponents in the other maritime unions. It accused the SBPT and SBII of being "*anti-nasakom, anti-manipolis and anti-communist*".¹¹² Certainly they were the latter. The non-communist unions could not be at ease with the actions of the SBPP. Amongst the overseas delegations who had attended the SBPP's Congress in Jakarta in February 1962, were those from the Soviet Union and the TU International. At the closing reception of the six day Congress, at which Aidit spoke, were representatives from the Cuban, People's Republic of China and German Democratic Republic embassies. Sudiono, the newly elected President of the SBPP offered "the profound gratitude of the Indonesian seamen and dock workers to the Socialist and the whole progressive world for their fraternal support..."¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Donald J. Blake, *Indonesian Labor Productivity Monograph* [Lembaga Penyelidikan Ekonomi dan Masyarakat Fakultas Ekonomi Universitas Indonesia: Djakarta, 1962], pp.47–48.

¹¹⁰ *The Indonesian Herald*, 30 January 1963. Minister of Basic Industries, Chaerul Saleh, warned at a shipyards ceremony that "veterans and other personnel could not continue to be treated as a separate and favoured group of the community". *ibid*.

¹¹¹ *Report and Resolutions of the Third All Pacific and Asian Dockworkers Conference, Djakarta October 4–9, 1963*.

¹¹² *Harian Rakjat*, 21 July 1964.

¹¹³ SOBSI, Letter to Foreign Friends 15 February 1962, *SUA File, N38/304*.

The SBPP entered 1965 literally carrying its ideology: placards with 'Give Hari Raya Subsidy to workers of state enterprises'; 'Cancel the directive of Adam Malik on the price of rice'; 'Implement Dekon'; 'Don't privatise PN's'; 'Death to Corruptors', were a common sight as maritime workers became part of the constant stream of delegations to ministers and other dignitaries.¹¹⁴ The Army was accused of being '*buruh phobi*'. According to the union's account, 86 workers had been "arbitrarily" dismissed by Lieutenant Colonel Achmad Dipo when a dispute arose over the transfer of a gang of workers. Sahala of the SBPP claimed this was an action reminiscent of the "colonialists and the bureaucratic capitalists many of whom were in the Department of Sea Communications".¹¹⁵ Such disputes were not isolated events without context but, as with the accusations of the SBKA against the PBKA in the months before the events of 30 September, were connected to the years of bitter disputes and tensions with other rival unions and the Army. They gave the lie to Ahem's assurance to the Dockworkers International Conference of Indonesian worker solidarity.¹¹⁶ The union's accusation that through Achmad Dipo's order the Army was seeking to weaken and split the union was justified. Workers and union leaders were still being detained for their activities and the authorities had given wage rises and promotion to members of the SBPP thought to be most active in the dispute over the transfer.¹¹⁷ What price worker solidarity in the existing economic conditions? The SBPP seemed to understand this and its ire was directed, not at the workers concerned, but at those seeking to create divisions between its members. The Department of Sea Communication was headed at this time by Major General Ali Sadikin, who was to play a decisive role in the coming demise of the SBPP

Conclusion

Maritime unions celebrated National Seamen's Day in September, 1965 with a twenty six slogan manifesto including: "With the five talismans of the revolution we launch a revolutionary offensive in the field of maritime affairs"; 'Indonesian seamen are united...'; 'Purge the BPS and banned parties from the maritime field'; 'Long Live the Exalted Captain Bung Karno'.¹¹⁸ None of these could save the SBPP and the end came quickly. Reflecting, as it had for the SBKA, the 'vital industry' status of the workforce.

¹¹⁴ For example, to Chaerul Saleh and to the American Ambassador, Jones. *Harian Rakjat*, 1 January 1965.

¹¹⁵ '*Buruh phobi*' di PN Dok dan kapal Tg. Priok', *Harian Rakjat*, 9 March 1965.

¹¹⁶ *Report and Resolutions of the Third All Pacific and Asian Dockworkers Conference, Djakarta October 4-9, 1963.*

¹¹⁷ *Harian Rakjat*, 16 March 1965 and *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *USE*, 8 September 1965.

On October 1, a state of emergency was declared in the Tanjung Priok/Pasar Ikan area.¹¹⁹ The activities of the SBPP and of all its branches throughout Indonesia were frozen on October 17 "because there was proof of its activities to hamper, disturb and endanger production and distribution in the maritime field". All officials absenting themselves from work for seven successive days after 30 September without valid reason were relieved from their posts and declared "non-active".¹²⁰ Dock workers in East Java went on strike after this announcement and the detention of their leadership. They returned to work at gun point.¹²¹

At the beginning of November no less than 1,370 workers under the jurisdiction of the Department of Sea Communications had been suspended: "suspected of being involved in the '30 September' affair". And Ali Sadikin announced that "the possibility exists that the above figures will be increased, as the mop-up efforts against individuals involved in the 'treason affair' continues".¹²² Further, those workers whose production 'went down' were considered to have "assisted directly or indirectly the 'September 30 Movement'". In reporting this statement *The Indonesian Herald* commented that this was no idle warning as Sadikin had dismissed 625 workers at warehouses in Tanjung Priok because their production had declined.¹²³

In their quest for improved conditions maritime workers had been courageous and often spontaneous in their actions. Their leaders were accommodationist and sometimes pragmatic and most certainly part of the ideational politics of the day. But there is little doubt that the radicalism which Nelson saw as inherent in maritime sub-culture was in the Indonesian case constrained by the no-strike clause in the Emergency Law, and the later 1957 and 1963 Laws which maintained the vital industry status of the workforce. Were they less courageous than their comrades on the *Zeven Provinciën*? Simply, we may say, different times, for different men. Efforts by the Seamen's Union of Australia in October 1965, and again in February of 1966 to find the whereabouts of Subianto elicited no response. In reply to a contact letter in 1967 from the Chairman of a newly established, government sponsored seamen's union [*Kesatuan Warga Pelaut Indonesia*], E.V. Elliott replied that it was clear from the letter that correspondence and previous records of the SUA/SBPP had been destroyed, and to this day

¹¹⁹ USE, 6 October 1965.

¹²⁰ *The Indonesian Herald*, 22 October 1965.

¹²¹ American Embassy Djakarta, Telegram to the Department of State October 23 1965. *Asia and the Pacific National Security Files*.

¹²² USE, 3 November 1965.

¹²³ *The Indonesian Herald*, 10 October 1965.

we have no news of what happened to the 70,000 strong SBPP, its officials and members...so it is with mixed feelings we again take up correspondence with the Indonesian Seamen's Union. We want close relations with our brother seamen; if we can assist in bettering their conditions, working and social, we will do all in our power. At the same time we are most anxious to hear news of our old colleagues.¹²⁴

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¹²⁴ Telegram Elliott to Subianto 1 October 1965. *SUA File, E183/21/3*. Telegram to the Indonesian Ambassador in Australia 25 February 1966. *SUA File, N38/304*. *Seamen's Journal* [December 1967]. The letter was signed by F. Tacazily, Navy Capt. Nrp. 2084/P [Chairman] and stated that the new Secretary General was P. Pangumbahas. *ibid*.

Chapter VI

Separate But Equal?

Introduction

The formulation by the new Republic of legislation specifically designed to affect the conditions of women wage earners, and the impact of that legislation on women's working conditions are the central concerns of this chapter. It is an attempt to 'peel away' the relationship of working-class women—more particularly wage earners—with the State and organized labour. In their work on women's role in international factory production Elson and Pearson have argued that any investigation of the conditions of working women should first centre on the relations by which they were integrated into wage labour, rather than on their being "left out" of wage labour.¹ This is a good starting point. It is therefore necessary, as it was with the railway and maritime workers, to look to the historical development of women's wage labour in the colonial labour relationship. It will be argued in this chapter that the dominant ideas on gender roles within Indonesian society, signifying as they did the 'relationships of power' between men and women, influenced both the framers of the legislation and organized labour, and therefore had a defining influence on the lives of Indonesian women workers during the period under study.

Although the major focus of the chapter is women in the modern/formal sector of the economy and their numbers, in turn, are seen to be comparatively smaller to rural workers,² an historical overview of women's work brings forth a blurring of the definitional boundaries between terms such as wage earner/paid work, rural/urban, and formal/informal. We have observed in Chapter I how many wage earners might whilst working draw income from the informal sector to supplement their income. This was especially true for the work of women. It is clear that there was a historical multi-dimensional nature to the work of Indonesian women and, as a consequence, that their participation in the labour force was widespread. However, our major concern in this study lies not with actual numbers, but is, instead, a search for insights into the ideas

¹ D. Elson and R. Pearson, 'The Subordination of Women and the Internationalisation of Factory Production', in K. Young et al [eds.], *Women's Subordination in International Perspective* [CSE Books: London, 1981], p.19.

² See Chapter I for the figures on urban worker. The rural workforce figures were 20,557,452 males, and 7,853,302 females. Nationally, the percentage of females aged ten years and over in the different sectors was: farming 62.4%; industry 8.7%; trade 10%; services 15.3%; other 3.6%. *Sensus Penduduk 1961*. In 1961 a "rough appraisal" by the Minister for People's Industries [*Perindustrian Rakyat*], Dr. Soeharto, placed women as one third of all industrial workers. *Trisula* 3 [March 1961], pp.20-21.

which held sway in this period of Indonesian history about the nature, the importance, the questioned 'propriety' and the role of women's work.

Women, wage work, and legislation during the colonial era

The historical literature provides us with information on the entry of Indonesian women, firstly into wage labour associated with agriculture, and secondly into industrial wage labour associated with the by-products of agricultural production. Early research undertaken by Dr. G.H. van der Kolff into labour relations in colonial Indonesia, examined the shifting pattern of the labour relationship between men and women and noted the "social differentiation" which could come from the introduction of cash transactions into agrarian societies faced, at the same time, with population increase and land scarcity.³ The labour relationship constituted a mixture of the traditional *sambatan* system—involving payment in kind for one's labour—and wage payment. Although its application was not universal, this combination of *sambatan* and cash as reward for labour between employer and employee remained a feature of the post-independence labour relationship in the industrial as well as other sectors of the economy.⁴ The study also gave an insight into the changes in gender and class relations which came with the increase in "monetary transactions".⁵ It should be pointed out that there were inter-area differences in the region studied by Van der Kolff, and although these are important to dispel 'fixed in time and space' notions about the labour relationship it is unnecessary to go into details here about the differences. For Java, at least, the generalisations concerning the effects of cash transactions, and gender and class relations stand. In Jakarta, for example, as late as 1959 women farmers still experienced discrimination: women planted *padi* from 8am to 12 noon for Rp.7.50 without food, males received Rp.15, including one meal, for the same period.⁶

³ Dr. G. H. van der Kolff, *The Historical Development of the Labour Relationships in a Remote Corner of Java as they apply to the Cultivation of Rice* [National Council of the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies of the Institute of Pacific Relations, 1936]. Van der Kolff observed that the relationships involved in the working, planting and weeding of rice land were subject to change with the advent of cash payment.

⁴ Three examples serve to illustrate the point. In 1950 estate labourers working for the Deli Planters Association received rice, maize, fish and coconut oil in addition to their wage. The goods were free of charge. *Antara*, 1950. In a P4P decision—No.P4/M/57/5911—concerning Sarbupri workers on a Java plantation, male and female workers were to receive daily rice rations. Professor M. Suhardi, *Putusan-Putusan P4 Pusat*, p.34. In 1962 PERBUM workers received food rations as part of a negotiated labour agreement. National Council of SOBSI, International Department, Letters from SOBSI to foreign friends [Djakarta, February 15, 1962]. *SUA Files*. N38/304.

⁵ van der Kolff, *The Historical Development*, p.23.

⁶ *Api Kartini* [1959] nn. p.4. The official exchange rate for the years 1958–1963 was approximately Rp.45.28/\$US1.00. *Statistical Pocket Book of Indonesia 1963*, p.226. Bearing in mind the caution on the sensitivity of exchange rates mentioned in Chapter I fn.15 of this study, this conversion rate should be noted for the wage rates given elsewhere in this Chapter.

From the Coolie Budget Commission we find that the lowest paid group of wage earners were the field labourers and “men earned almost 1.5 times as much per hour as females. The highest paid wage earners composed the factory labourers, supervisors and skilled labour and the difference in wages between male and female was “relatively much larger”, with wages for women factory workers “only slightly or not at all higher than those [women] who worked in the fields”. While men worked marginally longer days the hourly rates were lower for women. In addition, wives worked more days on average than men because of their unpaid labour.⁷ In the 1930 occupational census 34.4 per cent [48.5 per cent of all the males and 20.6 per cent of all the females] “were gainfully employed”, with the majority engaged in agriculture; approximately 10 per cent employed in industry, the majority of these in small and home-based industries.⁸

The census numbers did not include the large numbers of women engaged in unpaid labour, either in the home, on the family’s plot of land, or in family cottage or small-scale industries. This under-enumeration of working women “has been relatively consistent over the years” in Indonesian census records.⁹ The figures, however, do give some guide to the extent of women’s participation in wage labour, and to the increase in their participation which had its impetus in the “dramatic changes in all sectors of the economy” during the nineteenth century which “took place against the background of an expanding colonial state...and the ongoing expansion of Western enterprise”.¹⁰

In his seminal work on Indonesia Wertheim has commented that the colonial plantations had “negligible” social services because of the abundance of labour and women performed the greater part of the seasonal work “including the strenuous work at the centrifuges in the sugar factories”. During the working-season this work had mostly to be performed night and day in shifts. The working day often amounted to twelve

⁷ *Coolie Budget Commission, Living Conditions of Plantation Workers and Peasants on Java in 1939–1940* [Translated by Robert van Neil, Modern Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University: Ithaca, 1956], pp.69-70.

⁸ Virginia Thompson, *Labor Problems in Southeast Asia* [Yale University Press: New York, 1947], p.117. This total does not include Europeans, Chinese or the Arab population. See also *Bank Indonesia Report 1952-1953*, p.176. p.176. In the census 2,105,529 were listed as industrial workers: 628,272 of whom were women. *Ekonomi dan Keuangan* 10 [1957], p.85.

⁹ Benjamin White, ‘Economic diversification and agrarian change in rural Java, 1900-1990’, in Paul Alexander et al [eds.], *In the Shadow of Agriculture: Non-farm activities in the Javanese economy, past and present* [Royal Tropical Institute: Amsterdam, 1991], p.52 and fn.5. See also Hazel Moir’s analysis of the 1971 Indonesian census. Moir identifies the rate of female access to non-primary occupations and stresses the importance of recognising the contribution of both female and male unpaid labour; particularly as non-recognition “perpetuates a tradition of undervaluing the contribution of women’s work”. Hazel Moir, ‘Female Access to Non-Primary Occupations in Indonesia’, in Lenore Manderson, Gail Pearson [eds.], *Class, Ideology and Women in Asian Societies* [Asian Research Service: Hong Kong, 1987], p.178.

¹⁰ Peter Boomgaard, ‘The non-agricultural side of an agricultural economy Java, 1500-1900’, in Paul Alexander et al [eds.], *In the Shadow of Agriculture: Non-farm activities in the Javanese economy, past and present* [Royal Tropical Institute: Amsterdam, 1991], p.29

hours, and this working might often be at night for a whole week".¹¹ In research on colonial wage rates De Kat Angelino has confirmed the more than just subsidiary role of women's work.

[On] the tea estates the women coolies engaged in such work as weeding and also the women working in the tea factories are practically speaking permanent help who have become more or less free from the village occupations...the women coolies...are dependent for their living on the estate. If they miss a single day's work, they lose absolutely necessary earnings.¹²

The active pursuit of an industrialisation programme by the Colonial Government in the decade before the war drew larger numbers of women into industrial wage work. Between 1930-1940 the number of factories, excluding small or home industries and those connected with agricultural industries, increased by approximately 71.7 per cent;¹³ and in the years between 1935 and 1939 the number of workers engaged in factory production tripled.¹⁴ The largest number of workers were employed in the food, metal and textile [weaving] industries.¹⁵ The onset of World War II accelerated this industrial expansion and in 1940 alone 500 new factories providing employment for some 25,000 workers were established.¹⁶ In 1938 unskilled factory labour earned around f0.35 to f0.40 per day and an eight hour working day was common for industry. There was no general system of paid vacations, family allowances or social insurance [except workers compensation] which provided an assured supplement to wages, although some employers did make voluntary grants to their workers. Wages and salaries varied according to racial groups, skills, location of the enterprise,¹⁷ and gender.

The better paid European workers, for example, were found in printing establishments, electric power stations and various machinery plants. Conversely, the lowest paid workers were found in the textile plants which used a high proportion of female labour. In the batik industries males received more for a working day ranging between seven and a half to eleven hours than did females for a slightly shorter working day of eight to nine and a half hours, the lowest rate for males was still higher than the female rate. On this calculation women had to work a longer day than male-workers to

¹¹ W. F. Wertheim, *Indonesian Society in Transition*, p.249.

¹² P. de Kat Angelino, *Some Remarks on the Wages Paid in the Netherlands Indies* [Batavia, 1936], p.7.

¹³ ILO, 'Labor Conditions in the Netherlands Indies', *Monthly Labor Review* 58 [May 1944], p.980.

¹⁴ Thompson, *Labor Problems*, p.120.

¹⁵ 'Labor Conditions', *Monthly Labor Review*, p.971.

¹⁶ Thompson, *Labor Problems*, p.138.

¹⁷ 'Labor Conditions,' *Monthly Labor Review*, pp.971-984.

receive the lowest wage paid to males. Bakeries, rice mills, candy, tile and pottery factories reported similar wage differentials for equal length working days. Only in the cigar factories were wage ranges similar for males and females, although the unskilled category, into which large numbers of women fell, were paid lower wages. There were no uniform overtime rates, but in workplaces where overtime was paid women, for example, such as the rubber estates women usually received less.

There was a similar differential in the unskilled rates in the manufacturing industries. Here, women received the same rate as children. Similarly in the tea plantations in the Buitenzorg Residency, in the harvesting and preparation of cinchona bark in West Java, and in the manufacture of palm oil and other products on Sumatra's east coast minimum, as well as other rates, tended to be higher for males than for females for the same hard work.¹⁸ In secondary industry women numbered approximately one quarter of all the workers engaged in factory production. In tobacco factories they were 39 per cent of all the workers, and in the textile industries 34 per cent. Overall, where a comparison could be made between male and female wage rates women invariably received less.¹⁹

There was a dearth of legal protection offered all industrial workers under the Colonial Government. There was, however, legislation restricting the employment of women and children, and an important duty of the Labour Inspectorate in Java and Madura was to oversee the regulations concerning these two groups of workers. The 1926 regulations prohibited the employment of children in any enterprise between 8pm and 5am. Nor could they be employed in some specified pursuits, including work in factories. Women were specifically prohibited from working between the hours of 10pm and 5am, except for certain industries and enterprises which had special industrial needs as provided for by a decree of the Governor General.²⁰ This meant that women as a general rule were prohibited from night work, but could be employed to suit industry needs. In 1939, for instance, 69 per cent of the sugar factories employed women on the seasonal night shifts.²¹ Under Ordinance No.647/1928 restricted hours were from 10pm until 5am in enclosed places of work, or workplaces using engines or machines. In unenclosed places such as plantations; or in hospitals, educational institutions or

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.985-986.

¹⁹ Thompson, *Labor Problems*, p.149.

²⁰ 'Labor Conditions', *Monthly Labor Review*, p.987.

²¹ Thompson, *Labor Problems*, p.149. With the declaration of martial law in 1940 emergency measures giving the Government special powers for the mobilization of human and material resources were promulgated. The Industrial Cooperation Act of 1940 authorized the government to make stipulations on pay scales, and in 1941 new rules were established for the employment of native or foreign Asiatic labour. Hours of work were limited to nine in any twenty four but no wage standards were prescribed. 'Labor Conditions', *Monthly Labor Review*, p.987.

poorhouses, or where work was undertaken by members of one family women were not so restricted.²² The colonial legislation also allowed for maternity leave rest thirty days before and forty days after confinement or miscarriage, but this was only applicable to non-aboriginal native and alien Oriental women of the outer provinces who were employed under contract [under penal sanctions] in agricultural or industrial undertakings. The reason why this was so specified was native women of the province were employed without a contract and usually as casual workers.²³

Elsbeth Locher-Scholten has written of the “non-interest” displayed in the actual condition of Indonesian women by those debating the colonial legislation concerning night work, whether they represented the Western or the orientalist view. She has asserted that the consequence of this was a compromise bill “between Western opinions about a woman’s place and the economic demands of employers”.²⁴ This compromise allowed four hours more of night-work for women than was permissible in Europe at that time. All the discussants in the 1925 Volksraad debate on the abolition of female night labour in industry were male and Locher-Scholten has concluded that “it is to the higher social classes that we should look for any influences of colonial ideology concerning women. During the colonial period it went over the heads of the Indonesian working-class”.²⁵ That this was a compromise bill can be judged by contrasting Netherlands law which seldom authorised overtime employment for women with household responsibilities. According to the ILO the law was “particularly strict also on provisions for weekly rest and on hours of work for women”. World wide the protection of [the] morals [of women workers] “inspired a great many regulations that dealt with living-in-conditions and the arrangement of workplaces”.²⁶

We have noted in Chapter I how desperation and privation was the lot of Indonesians generally during the Japanese occupation. Although there is little comparative information on male/female wage differentials available, research by Sato shows that when the Malang Residency set a minimum wage level of f0.40 for urban areas in 1944, the rate for women was 80 per cent of this amount. The minimum level

²² *TMP* 11 [March 1954], pp.13-14.

²³ Coolies Ordinance 1931-1936, 1, 5, 15 and 21. Women and Children [Night Work], Ordinance No.13, 17 December, 1925 sections 2[3]. See ILO, *The Law and Women’s Work*, Studies and Reports Series 1 Employment of Women and Children No.4 [Geneva, 1939], pp.47-48,94.

²⁴ Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, ‘Female Labour in Twentieth Century Java: European notions-Indonesian practice’, in Locher-Scholten, Anke Niehof [eds.], *Indonesian Women in Focus* [Foris: Dordrecht, 1987], p.80.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.93. The first female member to the Volksraad Council was appointed in 1935. Indonesian women were never elected to the Board. *ibid.*, p.99. fn.1.

²⁶ Women and Children [Night Work] Ordinance No.13, 17 December 1925 sections 2 and 3. p.124. ILO, *The Law and Women’s Work*, 1939, pp. 218, 343.

was calculated on the cost-of-living per day for a family of five—the total calculated expenditure equalling that of the minimum level.²⁷ Since large numbers of male workers were coercively mobilized for overseas work there can be an assumption of many households headed by a female worker, where 80 per cent of male wage rates would be inadequate for daily living.

Legislation for women workers in independent Indonesia

There is little doubt that many in the new nation had hoped for an end to the historic anomalies in wages and conditions between men and women workers. The Constitutional guarantee of equality for women and provisions of the Accident and Labour Laws were thought to be a means to this end.²⁸ In theory, the waged formal sector was the sector protected by legislation, but it is argued here that the “negative proscriptive” articles dealing with women's work in the Labour Law acted as a brake on constitutional equality. In her book—*International Labour Conventions and National Law*—Virginia Leary has drawn a useful distinction between “negative proscriptive”, “protective”, and “promotional” legislation.²⁹ It is a distinction which enables a finer analysis of those aspects of the legislation directed specifically at women. In the Labour Law Article 7[1] was an example of a negative proscriptive article; article 13[1] [see below] an example of protective regulation. Promotional legislation which sets “objectives of a more general character, such as equal remuneration for men and women workers”,³⁰ was not part of the new legislation but came later with the ratification of ILO Convention No.100 on equal pay. Discussion on this convention follows after that on the Labour Law.

The Articles in the Labour Law specifically concerned with women were as follows:³¹

Article 7[1] stated women could not work in the evening except where work, because of its nature, place and condition, should be performed by women [for example, hospital work] The evening was defined as falling between 6pm and 6am;³² [2] allowed for

²⁷ Sato, *War, nationalism and peasants*, pp.167–168. Cf. also Sukanti Suryochondoro, *Potret Pergerakan Wanita di Indonesia* [C.V. Rajawali: Jakarta, 1984].

²⁸ Article 27 of the 1945 Constitution guaranteed equal rights before the law to all citizens.

²⁹ See Virginia A. Leary, *International Labour Conventions and National Law: The Effectiveness of Automatic Incorporation into National Legal Systems* [Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague, 1982].

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.8.

³¹ *Peraturan Perburuahan dan Peraturan Administrasi Perburuahan, and Labour Legislation Republic of Indonesia 1945–1972*.

³² The hours were different to those regulated under the colonial ordinance, but were in line with the European ‘standard’ of that time.

exemptions to 1 in instances where the employment of women cannot be avoided in connection with the public interest or welfare; [3] exemptions allowed for in [2] to be determined by Government Regulation together with the conditions to guard the health and morality of women workers so excepted.

Article 8[1] women could not work in mines, underground or other places where minerals and other materials are extracted from the earth: [2] provided for exemptions where women had to descend underground but did not perform manual work.³³

Article 9[1] women could not perform work which was dangerous for their health and safety, or work which because of its nature, place, and condition presented a danger to their morality. The accompanying *Penjelasan* [explanation] stated that articles 7, 8, and 9 placed limits on the type of work which women could undertake because in the judgement of the Government women [were] physically weaker and [needed] to have their health and morality guarded.

Article 13[1] women were not obliged to work on the first and second day of menstruation; [2] a rest of one and a half months before giving birth and one and a half months after confinement or miscarriage; [3] the rest time before giving birth could be extended to three months if a medical certificate states it is necessary in order to guard the woman's health; [4] during work-time women workers still breastfeeding to be given time to suckle their child.

A regulation in 1951 added to article 13[1]. It determined that full pay should be given to the worker for the period of leave provided for in the Act, that the employer was considered not to know the menstruation condition of his female worker if the female worker concerned did not inform him about this condition, and that women wishing to exercise their rights under the maternity provisions must apply at least ten days before the leave was to commence. [This was not to apply to female workers having a miscarriage]. Applications for maternity leave had to be accompanied by a doctor's certificate or certification by a midwife. If it were not possible to have authorization from a doctor or midwife an official of the Civil Service having at least the rank of Assistant Wedana could certify an application. If leave was granted in accordance with the provisions, full pay was to be given for the period of leave. A Regulation in 1952 provided for support to bodies prepared to make arrangements for women workers' hostels/dormitories, workers'

³³ ILO Convention No.45 on the placing of limits on women working underground was ratified during the colonial era. The new legislation drew on articles 1, 2 and 3 of this convention for article 8 of the Labour Act. Article 2 of Convention 45 states no female, whatever her age, shall be employed on underground work in any mine. Article 3 states national laws or regulations may exempt from the above prohibition: [a] females holding positions of management who do not perform manual work; [b] females employed in health and welfare services; [c] females who, in the course of their studies, spend a period of training in the underground part of a mine and [d] any other females who may occasionally have to enter the underground parts of a mine for the purpose of a non-manual occupation.

clinics, pregnancy clinics [either for workers or the wives of workers], child care, and kindergartens for workers' children.³⁴

Female civil servants had their own regulation on maternity provisions: a rest period of three months on full pay after the birth of a child on condition of one year's service, with a further one and a half month's extension to be given if a doctor's letter stated the need for the mother's health to be safeguarded, which organized labour and women's groups argued were better than those for woman wage earners in private employment. These were forward looking provisions yet, even so, there were restrictions contained in the regulation, such as the provision prescribing "marriage by proper means", and the clause closing off the promotion opportunities and the chance for permanent status for married women, which worked against women. Thus, when the issue of the anomalies in maternity leave between the provisions for female civil servants and private workers was taken up later by women's groups and organized labour, the regulation in its entirety was not considered an appropriate yardstick.³⁵

Since only some of the articles of the Labour Act were enacted in government regulations in theory, at least as far as the strictly legal position of the provisions was concerned, the former colonial legal provisions applied.³⁶ Articles 7 and 9 of the Labour Act concerned with the limits on women's work and the safeguarding of their morality, were not legally in force. Tedjasukmana has argued that in his opinion since these provisions were not declared in force, the relevant provisions of the Colonial Ordinance of 1925 on the employment of women and on child labour, remained valid.³⁷ Yet he also argues that although the labour "protection" provisions were not enacted at the time they were, nevertheless, no longer controversial.³⁸ As the maternity provisions had already been enacted whereas the limitations [proscriptive] clauses had not, it is clear that in Tedjasukmana's opinion the limitations on the labour of young persons and women were included under the rubric of "protection". Women and children were thus bracketed together. Child labour and night work for women were [and remain] qualitatively different issues—or should have been had not ideas on gender roles and of the need to

³⁴ See *Peraturan Perburuhan dan Peraturan Administrasi Perburuhan*. This regulation also provided for support for the arrangement of holiday, sporting and other welfare measures designed to help workers generally. In 1956, a new decree [PP8/1956] covered subsidies for welfare agencies supporting workers.

³⁵ National Council of SOBSI, November 17, 1959. *SUA File, E183/21/4*. The provisions were contained in PP No.51/1953.

³⁶ Without validation by Government Regulation the provisions were said to be dormant. Until 1965 only four government regulations had been enacted in connection with the Labour Law: PP No.7/1948 ; PP No.12/1950; PP No.13/1950; PP No.13/1950. Of these only PP No.7 concerned provisions pertaining to women workers. In 1951, Nos 7, 12, and 13 were superseded by PP No.4/1951.

³⁷ Iskandar Tedjasukmana, "The Development of Labor Policy", pp.441–446.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.419–420.

protect the morality of women intervened. Tedjasukmana's comment that the realities of child labour and night work for women were such that care had to be taken with implementation was acknowledgment of the reality of women's workforce participation.

Questions on the impact of special legislation

As early as 1929 an ILO report on legislation relating to women workers had argued that "protective legislation phrased in terms of safeguarding the weak and defenceless, crystallizes a sense of women's inferiority".³⁹ Nonetheless, even where there was recognition that restrictive legislation might have undesirable effects on women's employment opportunities it was still promoted. At the 1950 ILO Asian Regional Conference, the Indian Government member proposed the adoption of a resolution on the protection of women and young persons which read:

[Whereas] the strict enforcement of legislation for the protection of women and young persons might have the undesirable effect of reducing employment possibilities for women and young persons in workplaces covered by the law and of either excluding them from the employment market or driving them to seek employment in unregulated workplaces where conditions of work are invariably worse;

[Whereas] nonetheless it is essential that the conditions of employment of women and young persons should be carefully regulated...

The Conference requests the Governing Body to instruct the International Labour Office to undertake a detailed study of this problem...⁴⁰

The proposer of the resolution affirmed that "protection" was the desirable goal. Therefore [he said] his intent was not "*to lower standards*" [my emphasis], but merely to study the effects of such legislation. Both worker and employer members at the conference wanted the first paragraph of the preamble deleted, with the worker delegates warning that the resolution might be "interpreted as encouraging a lowering of standards for women and young persons". It is worthy of note that although twenty countries were represented at the conference only two women delegates were present, both from industrialized countries, France and the United Kingdom, and both holding government positions. None of the worker members were women.⁴¹ The phrasing of the Indonesian national laws may have been more emotive, but the language of resolutions concerning

³⁹ Taken from a report by the ILO in 1929 and cited in *Signs* 7, 2 [Winter 1981], p.499.

⁴⁰ ILO, *Asian Regional Conference in Ceylon January 1950 Record of Proceedings* [Geneva 1951], p.232. A number of members, including the Government members of Australia, Ceylon and Viet Nam, supported the resolution in its entirety. The resolution was adopted by the Conference at its eighth sitting, without amendment, by 15 votes to 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

women's employment coming from forums such as the Asian Regional Conference was still about regulation of women's labour based on their perceived "in need of protection". Clearly, a distinction was not made between protective laws, which allowed women better conditions within their choice of work [those giving maternity benefits for instance], and proscriptive laws which militated against women's choice of work.

It has been argued that because a "patriarchal alliance exists between capital owners, managers, and working-class men against women",⁴² proscriptive legislation becomes a patriarchal means to exclude women from jobs. Patriarchal attitudes were clearly present in the Indonesian legislation. The bracketing together of children and women as in need of protection, and the proscribing for the latter that which was surely necessary for the former ensuring that the difference between female and male workers based on a perceived 'weakness' was, as the ILO had argued, crystallized.

To see this as a patriarchal conspiracy would require the subsumption of the cross-cutting and critical influences of class, religious tradition and the dominant ideas concerning gender within the society as factors having an influence on the conditions and position of women in the labour force. If, in this period there existed a patriarchal conspiracy which ensured, through legislation, lesser conditions and work opportunities for women, how then to explain the convergence of the views of many middle and upper-class women with the male middle-, upper- and working-class views about working women? In the following chapter it will be seen that as certain women's groups extended their mobilization efforts to include rural and urban working-class women, and began to struggle for better conditions for working-class women, they nonetheless wanted 'protection' in the form of limitation on when, and where, women worked, in line with dominant ideas about the proper role of women because of their 'natural' characteristics. The influence of these cross-cutting ties was so strong that it was equally true these views were held by working-class women. It was not merely men against women, but received social and cultural ideas which were in play.

Ratification of ILO Convention 100

The other important legislative measure relating to women workers was the ratification of the ILO Convention on equal pay in 1959.

Each member [country] shall, by means appropriate to the methods in operation for determining rates of remuneration, promote and, in so far as it is consistent with such methods, ensure the application to all workers of the principle of remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value.⁴³

⁴² *Signs* 7, 2 [Winter 1981], p.499

⁴³ Juridical Bureau Department of Manpower, *Manpower Regulations in Indonesia: Guide for Foreign Investors* 1969, p.82

In Article 1[b] of the convention the term “equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value” refers to rates of remuneration established without discrimination based on sex: Article 3[3] states:

the differential rates between workers which correspond, without regard to sex, to differences, as determined by such objective appraisal, in the work to be performed shall not be considered as being contrary to the principle of equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal value.

Within the meaning of article 3[3] can be found the ‘loophole’ for denying women equal pay—the valuation of women's work as of lesser importance. It has been argued that this is the reason why governments like and are willing to ratify the convention.⁴⁴ The placing of a lesser value on women's work, the denial of equal opportunity in work, and for work, are the reasons why legislated equal pay cannot be seen as the panacea for improvement in the working conditions of women. Unquestionably equal pay legislation is a necessary condition for a start to improvement in the working conditions of women, but it is not a sufficient condition. The aim here is to register the major problems in the working conditions of women wage earners which legislation presented the possibility of solving. Whether change was effected by the provisions in the Labour Law and ratification of the convention on equal pay will be examined below.

In their background study to the United Kingdom Equal Pay Act of 1970, Paterson and Armstrong have noted that any attempt to compare average earnings between female and male workers presents difficulties: comparisons between base rates can be misleading because many workers [of both sexes] may be paid above the basic minimum; varying amount of shift and overtime work may be performed; and the opportunity to benefit from bonus schemes may be substantially different. Despite these varying factors they concluded that generally the differentials in the basic rate of pay favoured men. They commented, that even in an industrialized country such as the United Kingdom differences in the basic rate for men and women have greater importance for women, since “the margin between the basic rate and average earnings is much higher for men than for women”.⁴⁵

On the more specific legal question of what constitutes equal pay Paterson and Armstrong assert that equal pay for equal work is a more “simplistic approach” than, for example, equal pay for work of equal value. For this reason it is an approach which

⁴⁴ Peter Paterson and Michael Armstrong, *An Employers Guide to Equal Pay* [Kogan Page: London, 1972].

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.10.

governments and employers like because it is a more limited concept, cheaper to implement, and

less likely to be misinterpreted than the equal value approach. Equal pay for equal work strictly interpreted ...would mean that pay would only be the same for work which consist[ed] of activities and tasks that [were] exactly similar, demand[ed] the same level of skills and effort and [which was] performed in identical conditions.⁴⁶

Such an interpretation therefore has important consequences for women's working conditions. Rarely would women ever achieve equal pay; and where work had become a 'bearer of gender', that is, traditionally regarded as 'women's work', even though it be more skilled than other work performed by men, it would attract a lower rate of pay.⁴⁷ The general applicability of the conclusions from the study by Paterson and Armstrong to the conditions of Indonesian women wage earners during the 1950s and 1960s will be assessed later in this chapter.

Women and wage labour

With the exception of some International Labour Organization reports [which are referred to below], Western writing of the immediate pre-war and post-independence periods concerning the conditions of Indonesian women workers noted the generally lower wage rates of women, but without discussion of the implications, or analysing the reasons, other than in some cases to place the differences in the context of the subsidiary role of women's work, and therefore, to be expected. The thought that there might be gender-based reasons, and built-in class-based assumptions behind the notion of the subsidiary role of women's work was not canvassed. According to Cora Vreede-de Stuers in her work on the struggles of Indonesian women, the figures for women's workforce participation during the 1950s supported the view that Indonesian women were becoming "steadily more labour minded".⁴⁸ Vreede-de Stuers, however, did not make comment on the "deepening" of their inequality within this broader participation even though she "travelled all over the archipelago, in the process seeing with my own eyes the difficulties facing working women". To aid her in interpreting her personal experiences she preferred "to deepen the contacts which [I] could easily have in intellectual circles". On her own admission she did not speak to

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.25.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Cora Vreede-de Stuers, *The Indonesian Woman: Struggles and Achievements* [Mouton and Co: The Hague, 1960], p.17.

the innumerable unknown women—the minor civil servants, the country women, the labourers in factories and shops—who have been emancipated without any apparent link with the organized movement.⁴⁹

But for whom and where did they work, these “emancipated” women not spoken to by Vreede-de Stuers? What was the nature of their emancipation? An analysis of statistical and pictorial representation of the period confirms Vreede-de Stuers’ assessment of the broadening of women’s participation, but it also highlights the differences between women and men in that participation.

As in Asian countries generally, women were wage earners in cottage industries where the producing unit could range from the proprietor and family members; to others with a few paid workers; to others where a hundred or more workers could be employed—many of these working from home for piece rates and paid by merchants or middlemen, working in exploitative conditions, and out of reach of any legislative provisions.⁵⁰ Notwithstanding this, for Indonesia there remains enough statistical data from surveys and reports, and pictorial evidence from newspapers and journals, to allow some conclusions to be drawn about the occupations and conditions of women wage earners after independence.

A 1958 Indonesia wide ILO survey of medium and large manufacturing undertakings for the Indonesian Government, revealed the tobacco industry to be the largest employer of women, with the wearing apparel, textile and food industries also employing considerable numbers of women—47.1, 40.2 and 34.4 per cent respectively.⁵¹ An examination of newspaper and journal photographs of factory production in the early 1950s, both in cities and rural areas, has shown women working on the production line in workplaces as diverse as cigarette, margarine, soap, and toothpaste factories, and rubber mills and printing establishments. As in the colonial economy the largest proportion of women wage earners was to be found in the primary sector, as tea pickers on the plantations, for instance, or in the rice mills, or sugar and rubber factories. Apart from the primary sector, women were engaged in labouring work across a wide spectrum of occupations. They were to be found in the transportation industry, and in factories associated with the manufacturing industry. In the latter they were concentrated in certain industries, often within certain tasks.⁵² Weaving factories such as those in Pasuruan [the

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ ILO, *Problems of Wage Policy in Asian Countries*, Studies and Report New Series 43 [1956].

⁵¹ ILO, *Report to the Government of Indonesia on Social Security*, p.19. Figures were compiled by the ILO from the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics data.

⁵² ILO, ‘Women’s Employment in Asian Countries’, *International Labor Review Reports and Inquiries* LXVIII 3 [September 1953], p.310. In industry in Asian countries generally, women were largely employed in the unskilled occupations in the old established industries such as textiles.

Nebritex factory], or Tegal [The Java Textile Company], were large employers of women, and in the sugar factories in East Java the majority of the workers were female.

From the pictorial evidence we can see that at many of the workplaces where there was a production line—such as in the rubber mills and cigarette factories—women appeared to be in the majority, were mostly in ‘traditional’ dress with few visible safety/health measures. At a few more modern workplaces, such as a Denta toothpaste factory in Jakarta, the production line workers [all women] were dressed in uniforms.⁵³ The range of women’s tasks in factory work could be seen in an *agar-agar* [gelatin] factory in Surabaya employing around 140 labourers and a few laboratory assistants. Women were pictured doing both inside and outside work: sorting the washed seaweed and drying it in the sun; purifying the seaweed [washing it in large tubs]; putting it into baskets after the washing process and trundling the gelatin bricks outside to dry. Heavy work. Men and women worked side by side in some of these tasks. In many other factories, usually where there was a production line of sorts, women alone worked.⁵⁴ A number of points can be made about the structure of labour relations in the workplaces where women were employed. First, women often worked alongside men performing the same work; second, in occupations which required vocational/technical training, as in the printing establishments, women were relegated to the unskilled section; and third, many of the tasks within an occupation category, such as the sheet feeders on the rubber production line or the brick sorters at the gelatin factory, had clearly become tasks which only women performed.

The general shortage of skilled workers and the great disparity between the skilled and unskilled wage rates was noted in Chapter I. Women’s historic limited access to education, and to vocational skills training, meant they were concentrated in this unskilled section, with very little opportunity to advance their position. This was particularly true when women sought work in the towns and cities where more skills were generally demanded. It also partially explains why so many women entered the informal sector in urban areas. Rural and urban women wage earners were similarly affected. Not only were the wage rates of women workers illustrative of their position at the lowest end of the wage labour force, they also indicated their comparable position to unskilled male

⁵³ *Indonesia* 3, 4 [1958], pp.22-24.

⁵⁴ Pictorial sources are: *TMP* 3 [July 1950], p.27. [working machines in a tin can factory in Bali]. *TMP* 4 [August 1950], p.30. [cigarette factory—cigar section]. *TMP* 9 [January 1951], p.23. [tea factory]. *TMP* 3/4/5 [July/August/September 1952], p.19. [factory production]. *TMP* 6 [October 1954], front page. [women tea pickers]. *TMP* 7 [November 1954], p.17. [factory production]. *TMP* 1 [May 1955], front page. [conveyor belt factory production]. *Indonesia* 3, 4 [1958], pp.22-24. [toothpaste factory]. *Indonesia* 3, 4 [1958], pp.13-16. [*agar-agar* factory]. *Indonesia* 4, 1 [1958], [as part of the process of sugarbag making: washing fibre and tying it into bundles]. By ‘traditional’ dress is meant the *kebaya*, *sarong* and the *selendang*: some workers are pictured wearing the *kerudung* headdress. In other factories there appears to be a mixture of traditional and western dress. In some workplaces, such as the modern toothpaste factory in Jakarta, women wore safety caps for hair covering. See Appendix II.

labour. In the West Java tea factories, for example, unskilled female labour received Rp.4.75 per day; male labour received Rp.5.75.⁵⁵ However, often the pay differential had little to do with a skilled classification, and more to do with the sexual division of labour. Those industries identified by the ILO report as employing a high proportion of women were at the lowest end of the industrial wage scale, with the low daily minimum wage of these industries reflecting a large pay differential of around twenty five per cent between men and women workers.⁵⁶

Thus, the empirical evidence of the period confirms that in certain occupations the division of work into skilled and less-skilled was often illusory. Even in tasks undertaken by both men and women, and classified as unskilled, women still received lower pay. Here, where work was clearly equal the subsidiary role of women's work became the justification for wage differentials.⁵⁷ It may be argued that gender both influenced the wage differentials between male and female for the same work and defined occupations, or tasks within an occupation, as women's work for which less remuneration could be offered. More job opportunities for women in the industries which were already large employers of women, or even a re-stratification of the existing tasks from unskilled to skilled, would not have affected their subordinate position in the wage scale because the work itself had become a "bearer of gender".⁵⁸

A wages survey undertaken by the ILO during the month of February 1956 is revealing of the low wages of a very high percentage of women workers.⁵⁹ The wage patterns of 21,934 female workers in some industry sub-groups where 100 or more females were employed were tabulated. The survey was restricted to businesses "providing their normal volume of employment, or paying wages to their regular workers". Businesses on short time, or "making extensive use of irregular pieceworkers were omitted".⁶⁰ Unfortunately the data does not allow for a cross comparison between

⁵⁵ Hawkins, 'Indonesia', p.109.

⁵⁶ United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Labor in Indonesia*, BLS Report 246, p.38.

⁵⁷ Often the method of payment itself discriminated against women. In piecework, for example, where in practice women and children joined in the process, payment was often specified to the head of the family and only the husband was paid. Nj. Sri Ambar, Perbaiki Tingkat Hidup Buruh Wanita dan Hapuskan Diskriminasi Disegala Bidang, *Seminar Nasional Buruh Wanita tanggal 11 Mei 1961* [Diterbitkan oleh Jajasan Karya Bakti, Djakarta, Nopember 1961]. The conference ran from the 11-14 May.

⁵⁸ D. Elson, R. Pearson, 'The Subordination of Women', p.26. Ester Boserup has argued that even when occupations are not so categorised the rigid stratification of workers as skilled or unskilled means that some forever remain second-class labour. While this is true for both men and women, recruitment for men is into both categories, recruitment for women usually into the unskilled. Ester Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development* [Gower: USA, 1986], p.141.

⁵⁹ ILO, *Report to the Government of Indonesia on Wage Policy*, pp.136-137.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.124.

male and female wages. Although the tabulation of female earnings covered some of the industry sub-groups surveyed for male earnings the tabulation was different. Female earnings were tabulated at those earning below Rp.225 and those earning above Rp.225 per month. That is, in two categories. Male earnings were tabulated in five. From the figures it is clear that large numbers of male wage earners were also earning under Rp.225 per month which represented the base amount required for the basic necessities. It is also clear that greater numbers of males earned over that amount than did females.⁶¹

By 1961, in many medium and small sized private businesses women workers still received a daily pay of between Rp.2 and Rp.4.⁶² In the North Sumatra plantations it was said pay discrimination took place by "crafty means". There, the wage level for young workers was set at 80 per cent of an adult male wage, but only widowed women were considered to be adult. Young women and married women, whatever their age, were included under the category of 'young workers'. There was criticism also that where women received equal pay they received it only at the lowest wage level, if not, then their wage was lower. At a seminar on women workers held in 1961 by Gerwani, one speaker instanced floor tile factories, where the carrying of tiles could be arduous, but where women received Rp.5.50 per day and men between Rp.6-7 per day for the same work. In rubber factories for the same work the wage was Rp.4.25 for women and Rp.4.75 for men. It was true, as a speaker declared at a seminar on women's working conditions arranged by SOBSI in 1961, that women were indeed "cheap to pay".⁶³

Women batik workers

All of the general difficulties under discussion for women wage earners of the period are confirmed by a 1958 study of the batik industry in Central Java.⁶⁴ Between

⁶¹ The official exchange rate for 1956 was approximately Rp.11.47/\$US.1. *Statistical Pocket Book of Indonesia 1957*, p.177.

⁶² Njono, "Djangan ada kaum buruh wanita jang ketinggalan menggempur imperialisme dan feodalisme". Pidato pada resepsi penutupan, *Seminar Nasional Buruh Wanita*.

⁶³ Nj. Sri Ambar, Perbaiki Tingkat Hidup Buruh Wanita, *Seminar Nasional Buruh Wanita*. In the plantations little had changed. In 1950, the Deli Planters Association's revised wage scheme for estate labourers gave males 135 cents, up from 105 cents, and females 105 cents, up from 95 cents. *Antara*, 1950.

⁶⁴ The information in this section is drawn from a report by Prof. Mr. Kertanegara, 'The Batik Industry in Central Java', *Ekonomi dan Keuangan Indonesia* [July 1958], and Boserup, *Women's Role*, pp.107-108. The report states that *batik* began as a handicraft when wives of the serving men of the King needed to earn money to supplement their husbands meagre incomes. Although in other sources there is general agreement that batik was practised as a form of meditation in Java they differ as to those involved and the commercial genesis of the craft. Perhaps the last word should be left to the authoritative voice of KRT Hardjonagoro who has written "because in former times batik was a vehicle for meditation...truly realized beings in the social fabric of the Javanese community all made batik—from queens to commoners. And it is almost *inconceivable* [my emphasis] that in those days batik had any significant commercial objectives". KRT Hardjonagoro, 'The Place of Batik in the History and Philosophy of Javanese Textiles: A Personal View', in Mattiabelle Gritlinger [ed.], *Indonesian Textiles* [Textile Museum: Washington DC. 1980], p.229.

1950-1955 the industry experienced a period of rapid growth and the number of enterprises increased by at least 100 per cent. Enterprise size varied between those employing twenty one or more printers and *tulis* [hand drawing] workers, to those employing eleven to twenty, to those employing less than eleven. The industry employed 43,000 full-time workers, half of them women, and 1 million part-timer workers, all of them women. In the full-time jobs men did the printing, blue-dyeing, brown-dyeing and finishing. The scraping, rewaxing and hand drawing of the cloth was done by women. The work was no easier than printing but because it was performed by women, and classified 'trained', not 'skilled', the wage rates were lower.⁶⁵ Cloth printers received between Rp.2.50 to Rp.4, with average daily earners of Rp.15. Blue dyeing, brown dyeing and finishing rates were slightly lower with average daily earnings of Rp.7.50 and Rp.10 respectively. The full-time workers received cash for meals and drinks, and medical services at the batik cooperative clinics. Not all of the scraping, rewaxing and hand drawing was undertaken at home. Under what was known as the *pengobeng* system a group of workers "practically lived within the plants", working day and night: they were all female and the managers were not obliged to feed them. For their work they received between Rp.0.75 and Rp.1.50 with an average daily wage of Rp.5. Conditions industry wide were unsanitary, while the simple social allowances available were applicable only to full-time workers.

For both full-time and part-time women workers in the batik industry the sexual division of labour had ensured their concentration at the 'less skilled' end of the workforce: they were thus pushed into the less protected, unorganized part of the labour force.⁶⁶ The lower rate paid for scraping and rewaxing—which was time consuming and skilled work—was compounded by the piece rate payment system. At the most, workers could only finish two pieces of cloth a day. Further, the part-time nature of the work of the greater majority of the women left them outside legislative benefits such as maternity benefits and accident insurance, and all were affected by the lack of such promotional measures as minimum wage legislation. The absence of minimum wage legislation

⁶⁵ Conditions for women home workers in the *batik* industry were also very unsatisfactory. Women had to buy fabrics and other materials necessary for their drawing at unfair prices and to sell their product through a middleman. *Trisula* 3 [March 1961], p.35. Takashi Shiraishi notes the division of labour in colonial workplaces—along both functional and sex lines—in which the stamping was done by men. Wages, he argues, because of the extra skill required in the stamping process, were three to four times higher. I disagree with this assessment of the 'skill' category. Printing required a great deal of skill, but so too did the *canting* work performed by women. Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion* [Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1990], p.26. fn.32. In the 1930-1931 report by De Kat Angelino into the colonial batik industry we can find the roots of the problems in the post-independence industry. See P. de Kat Angelino, *Rapport betreffende eene gehouden enquête naar de arbeidstoestanden in de Batikkerijen op Java en Madoera* [Weltevreden, 1930-1931].

⁶⁶ See Peter Boomgaard, 'Female Labour and Population Growth on Nineteenth-Century Java', *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 15, 2 [1981], p.16 on the breaking "of the female monopoly...[for batik production]...and then only as far as this last stage of textile production [was] concerned". This was the stage later defined as 'skilled'.

affected both male and female workers, but female workers were already subject to a wage differential because of gender.

The conclusion of a 1981 report on the working conditions of women workers in developing countries commissioned by the United Nations was surely applicable to Indonesian women workers in the 1950s and 1960s:

women [were] employed in a narrow range of low-income, low-skilled and low productivity jobs: in particular in sectors which were labour-intensive, sensitive to market fluctuations, with a low level of technology, poor working conditions and safety measures, and little security of employment. Their employment opportunities were less because fewer jobs [were] open to them.⁶⁷

Change through special legislation—proscription

Still, government continued to push the proscriptive part of the legislation as a protective measure for women workers. Concern was expressed by the Ministry of Labour as early as 1954 over the violations of the labour law proscriptions on night work. The intention was announced to enforce the legislation: "With pressure from the unions and the help of the Department for the Supervision of Labour women workers are beginning to be substituted by male workers."⁶⁸ The Ministry gave notice of some of the areas where women workers were to be replaced by males: operators for taxi services; waitresses [in bars and restaurants]; usherettes in cinemas and telephonists. It is interesting to note, however, that the Ministry was not unmindful of the difficulties and problems the legislation presented for women wage earners. On the one hand, employers complained that proscriptive legislation on night work made women less employable than men, while on the other, both unions and women's organizations protested the granting of exemptions because night work for women was "not proper for this time". For its part, the Ministry commented that women were *still working at night because they wanted to* [my emphasis] and work and other fields were unavailable to them.

Sensitivity to the plight of women wage earners was displayed when the Ministry observed that the problem of women and night work was part of a broader problem with the prevailing economic conditions, where prohibition [of women] would see them unemployed when their wages were much needed by their families.⁶⁹ According to a statement from the Ministry, it was for this reason that the Department would make allowances for industries wishing to use women for night work as long as employers

⁶⁷ Cited in Mary Boseveld, 'Women and Industrial Development', in Mary Boseveld [ed.], *Women and Industrialization in Developing Countries*, [United Nations: New York, 1981], Part three, Selected papers, p.50.

⁶⁸ *TMP* 11 [March 1954], pp.13-14.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

gave guarantees they would “guard” women’s health, take the women to and from factories, and arrange for pick up and return to their homes. Under these ‘guidelines’ businesses such as weaving, sugar and fibre factories, and some coconut factories were able to employ women for some night work. The Ministry announced that exemptions to the law were also granted because women were desirable for milling times in sugar factories as they were “more patient and thorough” than male workers.⁷⁰ Therefore, in practice, as Boseveld has argued on a more general level “regulations [were] frequently circumvented and even quashed if sufficient demand [arose] for cheap labour”.⁷¹ We may therefore conclude that continuities existed between the exemptions granted under the Colonial Government and those granted by the Department of Labour Supervision.⁷²

That the granting of exemptions to the prohibition on night work was not entirely altruistic becomes clear when the exemptions granted to new national businesses are examined. Here political considerations weighed heavily. For instance, in 1954 a sock factory employing approximately 150 women—the majority of whom were unmarried, and maintaining an *asrama* close to the factory was one such exception. Even though the Ministry itself found conditions in the *asrama* were *sub-standard* [my emphasis], with a promise from the owner that this was an “emergency only” situation, factory operation was allowed to continue because the women were ‘protected’ in the *asrama*. On the other hand, batik and piece-work businesses [making powder boxes for example] which also operated in the evening, and which continued to operate because the women wanted to work and they lived close to the factory, were warned by the department to stop employing women at night or face court proceedings.⁷³ It is useful here to return to the research on the batik industry. The proscription on women’s night work was clearly not applicable under the *pengobeng* system because the work had been categorised as women’s work, and their ‘morality’ was safeguarded by living in. But what of their health? While all workers were affected by the unsanitary plant conditions, the women under the *pengobeng* system suffered particularly. This issue appeared to slip by the notice of the authorities.

It may be argued that the granting of exemptions had a mixture of ideological, altruistic and practical reasons: the shading of the altruistic and practical into the ideological serving only to highlight the tensions in the legislation. On the one hand, the

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Mary Boseveld, ‘Women and Industrial Development’, p.50.

⁷² The legislation produced under both the colonial and post-independence governments [including the exclusion clauses] was in line with the ILO conventions on night work for women. ILO Conventions 41 and 89 Night Work [Women] [Revised], 1934 and 1948. Leary, *International Labour*, pp.8, 183. In 1939, 57 out of the 84 sugar factories in Java employed women during the night. P.S. Narasimhan, ‘A Review of Labour Legislation in Southeast East Asia II’, *India Quarterly* IV, 2 [April/June, 1948], pp.165–178.

⁷³ *TMP*, 11 [March 1954], pp.13-14.

future was seen as one where women would not work at night time because of concern over the propriety of such work for women; their jobs could be taken by men. If they worked, a special regulation was needed to protect their 'natural characteristics'. On the other hand, the families of women wage earners needed their income, and their 'womanly skills' of patience and thoroughness could be utilised by the State during industry peak times. It can further be argued that the concern with morality, while having undeniable cultural implications, was also part of a world wide concern during the 1950s with the 'morality' of the working-class. This may have indeed been the case, but dominant ideas based on class views and religious prescription about gender roles within the society were well felt in the legislation and in the exemptions granted.⁷⁴

By allowing exemptions to the proscriptive acts in the legislation for work or tasks which women would 'normally' undertake, such as nursing for example, governments both colluded in and confirmed established notions about a sexual division of labour based on gender. Moreover, exclusion of women in need from certain occupations in the waged formal sector out of concern for their morality, often forced them to seek alternative means of obtaining money, most generally in the informal sector: but also in prostitution where they were certainly in situations which could be dangerous both to their health and 'morality'.⁷⁵ The very situation that the proponents of proscriptive legislation had cited as reason for regulating women's labour. Since, as has been noted, exception clauses also defined times when women could be brought into the night workforce for other, specific, purposes, often in relation to seasonal work loads, women wage earners became a large reserve labour force for the State: limited through gender ideology to time and place of work but able, at the State's behest, to be used and expelled when necessary.

Apart from the danger to their morality, the legislation was concerned with the danger to women's health and safety. Rather than placing restrictions on the employment of women in certain occupations on the grounds of the unsuitability of particular work, a better method would have been to "lay down conditions that would have rendered these occupations innocuous to them without limiting their opportunities of employment", to provide a working environment which was adequate for both women and men.⁷⁶ Often,

⁷⁴ For a wider discussion of this point, see Lenore Manderson and Gail Pearson, 'Perspectives on Class, Ideology and Women in Asian Societies', in Pearson and Manderson [eds.], *Class, Ideology and Women in Asian Societies* [Asian Research Service: Hong Kong, 1987].

⁷⁵ See John Ingleton, 'Prostitution in Colonial Java', in David P. Chandler, M. C. Ricklefs [eds.], *Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Indonesia: Essays in Honour of Professor J. D. Legge* [Monash University: Clayton, 1986], pp.123-140, for a discussion of the incidence and spread of prostitution during the period of Dutch rule. See, also, Chapter VII to note the continuities between the colonial period and post-independence women's groups agitation over this 'problem'.

⁷⁶ 'Conditions of Employment of Women Workers in Asia', *International Labor Review* 70 [July-December 1954], p.548.

especially where unskilled manual work was undertaken, work not inherently dangerous was carried out under unhealthy conditions. That is, there were certain occupations which were “physically harmful” to both women and men, and where both were in need of protection. This problem was compounded for women when certain factory work such as that under the *pengobeng* system in the batik industry—which had become part of the sexual division of labour—was assigned to them.⁷⁷

An assessment of the implications of legislation designed specifically for women workers to prohibit them from performing certain tasks, or entering certain occupations, may be approached from two different perspectives. From the first it can be argued that women are better off not performing night work, particularly under exploitative labour conditions. Since exclusion from night work allowed women time for their domestic duties exclusion appeared as an obvious benefit for women. It was a benefit which further validated the domestic role as belonging to women. From the second perspective the question may be posed: “whom did it benefit to prohibit women working at night; particularly when the exception clauses allowed women to work in occupations, or at tasks, usually performed by women?” The negative proscriptive legislation and the exemptions contained within the acts prevented women making as free a choice about their own work as it was possible to make given the general dire economic conditions of the times.⁷⁸

—protection

During the period from the inception of the legislation until 1965, women were sometimes able to force employer compliance with the law through arbitration. The process, however, was long and difficult and validation of the benefits did not appear to be widespread.⁷⁹ Employers often blamed government legislation for their own

⁷⁷ ILO, *Equality of Opportunity and Treatment for Women Workers Report VIII* [Geneva, 1975], pp.23, 548. Boomgaard in his work on nineteenth century Java warns against seeing the sexual division of labour as “timeless”, and of generalising across the archipelago. He argues changes in labour roles occurred with different influences and often at different times for various ethnic groups. Peter Boomgaard, ‘Female Labour and Population Growth on Nineteenth-Century Java’, *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 15, 2 [1981], p.13. Cf. Douglas, ‘Women’, on both these points. Women’s increasing participation in wage labour, and the legislation specific to them, were a continuum of those different ‘influences of change’ on the sexual division of labour.

⁷⁸ Later research, such as that undertaken by Ester Boserup in the mid-eighties, has shown this type of legislation also exerts a strong influence on the present and future patterns of women’s employment for it presents a “serious impediment to the employment of women in large-scale industries”. Boserup, *Women’s Role*, p.113. This is particularly true where multiple shift work has been introduced.

⁷⁹ *Pikiran Rakjat*, January 1953. In 1955 the P4P handed down a decision in favour of nine women *kretek* factory employees. The P4P found in favour of the women workers after the P4D could not solve a dispute between the workers and their employers board concerning their maternity leave. The dispute revolved around eight workers [in the judgement referred to as A] and one worker [referred to as B]. In the case of A the employers had argued that the women were not long enough employed to be entitled to leave under the law; in the case of B, whose daily wage was Rp.4.47, that they should only pay maternity leave based on Rp.3 per day because according to their reckoning this was the amount of her entitlement. *TMP* 6 [October 1955], pp.17-18.

discrimination against women workers. In a survey conducted by the ILO, employers complained that the labour law provisions imposed a heavy financial burden, some stating that they did not employ women because of the financial cost. Whereas some employers reported that "few women applied for menstrual leave" others claimed there was "considerable abuse" of the menstrual leave provisions. The ILO further reported that the maternity leave provisions were not always strictly applied as women workers were not "aware of their rights in this respect". It appears some employers provided no benefit, while others provided benefits below the standard set by legislation, "such as a lump sum unrelated in amount to the period of leave taken, or paid leave for a period which may be as short as one week".⁸⁰ The Ministry of Labour did express concern with the non-compliance by many enterprises with the regulations on menstruation and maternity leave. It claimed that inspections were undertaken in line with the provisions of the legislation and questions asked every time about release from work and pay for this period, but it was clear that leave was not always given. Sometimes, according to the ministry's report, the employer pleaded ignorance of the law.⁸¹ Under the law employers had an obligation if they knew of a women's pregnancy to give rest and pay entitlements. On the other hand, a woman also had an obligation under the law to tell her employer of her pregnancy. In practice, the woman worker was often too shy to say and this clearly presented a difficulty. A woman wishing to take maternity leave had also to notify her employer in writing and if the woman was not literate unions were allowed to mediate on her behalf.⁸²

Overall, their concentration at the lowest paid, unskilled, seasonal, industrial homework end of the labour force, where there was abundant labour oversupply, meant that women could be easily dismissed. Single and widowed female labour, still at the lowest wage scales, could replace them. Moreover, since a women worker had to pay a cost for confinement the full pay provision of the legislation somewhat lost its meaning. Women could, of course, choose the *kampung* midwife for confinement. This was at the lower cost scale and was culturally more acceptable to many women. Nonetheless there

⁸⁰ ILO, *Report to the Government of Indonesia on Social Security*, p.28. The maternity provisions in the legislation were assessed by the International Commission of Jurists in 1979 as "reasonably strong". See, Hans Thoolen [ed.], *Indonesia and the Rule of Law*, p.133. However, as late as 1982 an Indonesian Government handbook stated that: "maternity leave provisions may be used as an excuse for not assigning important and responsible tasks to female employees". See Department of Information Republic of Indonesia, *The Women of Indonesia* [Jakarta, 1987], p.40.

⁸¹ *TMP* 9/10 [January/February 1953]. See Article 13[1].

⁸² There was an anomaly in the legislation: it was not, as was the case in the regulation for women civil servants under PP. No.53/1951, complete in terms of a qualifying period.

was still a cost to be borne from a wage which often could not cover the everyday necessities.⁸³

Trade unions and women

All of the measures of governments to effect change in the labour relationship of women—proscription, protection and the ratification of the convention on equal pay—were supported by trade unions. How successful were they in their advocacy?

With the declaration of independence, when unionism was activated as a tool for the struggle for survival of the new nation and the BBI was formed in September 1945 [see Chapter I], a women's section of the group BBW [*Barisan Buruh Wanita*] was founded at the end of the same year. In 1946, the BBW became an autonomous section of the BBI with a brief to act as an educational and 'go-between' body. Because the political fight for survival was uppermost, the concerns of female workers were to be dealt with by the major union or the BBI in each region.⁸⁴ The Central BBW was itself part of *Kowani*, the umbrella organization for women's groups which had held its first congress in Madiun in June of the same year.⁸⁵ It was out of the organizations which replaced the BBI—and the politics involved in their establishment—that SOBSI was formed in November of 1946.⁸⁶ There was certainly awareness that the establishment of a women's section might be seen as somehow lessening the rights of women workers—by setting them apart from male worker concerns. An article in *Minggoean Merdeka* in July, 1946, gave an explanation of the reasons for the formation of the BBW.

Bagaimanakah kini kedoeoekannya boeroeh wanita? Dalam perdjoeangan boeroeh memang tak ada bedanja antara wanita dan laki-laki. Karena itoe, maka dalam perserikatan internasionalpoen tak ada perserikatan boeroeh wanita. Dan di Indonesia? Apakah dalam perdjoeangan boeroehnya ada perbedaan antara laki-laki dan perempoean? Tidak, sekali-kali tidak! Tetapi...mengapakah disini diadakan poela gaboengan boeroeh wanita?...B.B.I...dibentoeknja ialah, karena hasrat wanita sendiri...kedoeoekan boeroeh wanita di Indonesia, karena akibat djamam-djaman jang lampu, kini beloemlah sebagaimana dihendakinja...boeroeh wanita pada oemoemnja beloem mempoenjai kesedaran dan kesanggoenpan oetoeek toeroet

⁸³ Maternal and infant death rates were a real cause of concern during the period. In Java and Madura the crude rate of maternal deaths per 1,000 live and still births was 3.8; for infants the crude rate was 99.8 per 1,000 live births. Figures compiled by Statistical Department of the Ministry of Health. Cited in *International Labor Report on Social Security*, pp.9-10.

⁸⁴ *Ichtisar isi Pers 4* [21-27 February 1946].

⁸⁵ The First Congress of *Kowani* was held from 14-16 June, 1946. The work of *Kowani* is discussed in Chapter VII.

⁸⁶ See Chapter II of this study, fn.101, and Sandra, 'Development of the Indonesian Labour Movement', *TMP* 6 [October 1950], pp.33-36.

madjoe dengan saudara-saudaranya boeroeh laki-laki dalam lapangan politik. Oentoek membangkitkan kesedaran inilah, maka Barisan Boeroeh Wanita. [What is the position of women? In the struggle of workers there is no difference between women and men. Because of that in the international union movement there is no women's union. And in Indonesia? In the worker's struggle is there a difference between men and women? No! Never! Why then is there a women's group? The B.B.I. was formed because of the desire of women themselves. As a consequence of past times women workers in general do not have the consciousness and ability to go forward with their male comrades in the political field. The Barisan Boeroeh Wanita has been formed to raise their consciousness].⁸⁷

Figures issued by the Republican Ministry of Social Affairs in 1947 claimed almost two million members of SOBSI; female workers were listed as a Group with five branches and 600 members.⁸⁸ Until the latter part of the 1950s, when the general non-improvement in the working conditions of women forced the national male leadership of the union movement to focus on their poor conditions, and on principles such as equal pay, the stronger advocacy for women workers was carried on in much the same manner as that established during the revolution. That is, through the women's organizations such as *Kowani*, women's groups in workplaces or, depending on their commitment, through local trade unions. Yet, women were part of the union movement. We know from the first chapter that women joined in the early strikes at printing works in Jakarta. They also took part in many other actions. A brief strike of the hotel and restaurant workers union—the *SBHRT* in Jakarta, for example, demanded minimum wages of Rp.2.80 for women and Rp.3.50 for men.⁸⁹ On the other hand, striking workers at the Surabaya printing works demanded, and received, the same minimum wage for men and women—Rp.4.50 per day, as well as wages for the period of the strike.⁹⁰ We should note here, however, that an equal minimum wage did not mean equal wages for the same work. In the early years it was left to individual unions at the branch level to fight for women wage earners. Only very rarely did a union put equal pay for equal work amongst its demands, and then, only at the branch level. For example, in 1953, this demand was

⁸⁷ Sri Juliani, 'Perdjoeangan Boeroeh Wanita: Mengapa Indonesia haroes mempoenjainja?', *Minggoenan Merdeka* [13 Joeli, 1946].

⁸⁸ Cited in Charles Wolf, Jr. *The Indonesian Story: The Birth Growth and Structure of the Indonesian Republic* [The John Day Company: New York, 1948], p.69. The only specific trade union for women workers was the *Pekerdja Perempoean Indonesia* [Women Workers of Indonesia] which was founded before the Japanese occupation. This was an "association of business and professional women" rather than a trade union. Central Committee of Indonesian Independence Information Service 14 November 1946, 'Some Impressions of the Indonesian Labour Congress', *C.H. Campbell Deposit*, P81/45-46.

⁸⁹ *TMP* 12/1/2 [April/May/June 1951], p.81. Official exchange rate in 1951 was approximately Rp.3.81/\$US.1. *Statistical Pocket Book of Indonesia* 1957, p.177.

⁹⁰ Kementerian Perburuhan, *Situasi Perburuhan Dalam dan Luar Negeri* [August/September 1951], p.134.

put forward, along with other demands for improved conditions, by the Bandung branch of the *Serikat Buruh Tekstil*. The P4P handed down a decision in favour of the women workers at the factory concerned.⁹¹

In a report for the United Nations, Boseveld has written that trade unions worldwide are “more concerned that women be allocated work of less value and for which lower wages are paid [because] men prefer to retain for themselves the more attractive work with higher wages and they do so by showing active resistance to women in the trade unions and other organizations.”⁹²

Although the male-dominated leaderships of the labour federations were much slower in turning their attention to the concerns and conditions of women workers than were women’s organizations, from the source material available we can glean little evidence of an “active resistance” to women within the Indonesian trade union movement. Although, a strongly worded letter from a woman railway worker headed, ‘*Kami Menoetoe*’ [We Demand], questioned why it was still the thinking that the rights of women were more small than men. And why there was no woman representative on the SBKA Board.⁹³ It does appear that there was resistance to special industrial groupings for women—which had been advocated by women activists as a way of overcoming some of the cultural obstacles in the way of women joining unions—because they may have rivalled already existing trade union organizations. An observer at the 1952 National Council of SOBSI at which this issue was obviously raised, noted: “*Sarbupri* [the plantation worker’s union] was okay on the issue”.⁹⁴ Towards the end of the 1950s national political parties began to take a greater interest in the issues concerning women workers. In 1957, for instance, the PKI said that in order to broaden its base of women members it must take action to change the discrimination within the party towards women: to struggle for the right to work for women and for the right for women to choose their work; for the same rights to promotion and to equal pay, and for their maternity leave provisions. To do this women needed to be brought forward into political life as the party work on behalf of women was still weak.⁹⁵ In 1956, SOBSI had admitted that, in spite of the increase in the number of women in the leadership council, in “this one year period

⁹¹ *TMP* 9/10 [January/February 1953], p.59. The case was the *Serikat Buruh Tekstil* Versus N.V. Wevery Yoeng Ngi di Jakarta.

⁹² Mary Boseveld, ‘Women and Industrial Development’, p.52.

⁹³ Siti Besari, ‘Kami Menoetoe’, *Kereta Api* 42/43 [15–25 March 1947], p.12.

⁹⁴ Notes by Elliott of the Seamen’s Union of Australia after the National SOBSI Council 27/9–12/10, 1952, Djakarta, *SUA File*, E183/21/3.

⁹⁵ Sudisman, ‘Perluas Pengaruh Partai Dikalangan Massa Wanita’, *Bintang Merah* 5/6/7 [1957], pp.245–255. See also, Suharti Suwato, ‘Mendjelang konferensi nasional wanita’, *Bintang Merah* 9 [August 1957], pp.341–346.

[it] had been doing very little for women workers".⁹⁶ With the increased mobilization drive for membership in the mid-fifties—especially on the part of the left-orientated trade unions—women cadre were actively encouraged to recruit women members.

Under the SOBSI structure, in workplaces where there were only a small number of women workers they were represented by an appointed official. Unions where large numbers of women workers were organized formed Women's Sections, and then paralleled the SOBSI organization through a Women's Branch Section, Women's Section Regional and National Council, and a Women's Section on the Central Leadership of the Trade Unions. This arrangement came from a decision of the Third Session of the National Council of SOBSI, in September 1957, to look for ways to organize women workers. The appointed official or Women's Section—whichever was applicable, was to arrange general meetings for attendance by all women workers, and the 'conclusions' from such meetings were to be put to the SOBSI branches, regionals or National Council. The sections also had a "broader opportunity to connect with other mass organizations and work together with them". In this way the Women's Section, or official, could connect with *Gerwani* the mass organization for women. According to SOBSI this arrangement was the best method of ensuring that the special characteristics of women could be accommodated. However, this did not mean that women had separate trade unions. Clearly, within the SOBSI structure there had been dissension on the best means to mobilize women because SOBSI issued a special instruction—No.87/1958, on the organization of women workers. "Every woman worker who becomes a member of a trade union must be part of that union: that is, organized in the same way as men". In this way a woman railway worker, for instance, belonged first to the SBKA, then was represented by the appointed official or Women's Section of SOBSI. Moh. Munir, the Deputy Secretary General of SOBSI, in describing the structure, stated: [this] "needs to be clear so that there is *unanimity* [my emphasis] in the means of organizing women workers".⁹⁷

Few women, however, obtained leadership positions.⁹⁸ Prior to 1956 the Central leadership Council of SOBSI had one lone woman member. With the greater

⁹⁶ National Council of SOBSI Second Meeting 21–25 February, 1956, 'For Strengthening Unity and Improving the Living Conditions of Workers', Indonesian Trade Union News [January–April 1956], p.3. *SUA File, E183/21/40–43*.

⁹⁷ SOBSI, *Pedoman Penyelesaian Plan Organisasi Tahun 1958 hingga Kongres Nasional III SOBSI*, disampaikan oleh Moh. Munir, Wkl. Sekdjen I SOBSI kepada Sidang ke IV Dewan Nasional SOBSI tgl. 22 s/d 29 Desember, 1958.

⁹⁸ See, Suwarni Salyo S.H. Aspek-aspek sosiologis tentang Kedudukan Tenaga Kerdja Wanita dalam Masyarakat, in Yayasan Tenaga Kerdja Indonesia bersama-sama dengan Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, *Hasil Seminar Wanita dengan tema Meningkatkan Apresiasi dan Efisiensi Terhadap/Dari Tenaga Kerdja Wanita Indonesia di Tjiloto, 24–29 September, 1971*, p.26, where she argues that Indonesian men have an "ambivalent" attitude to the leadership of Indonesian women.

push for involvement of women this was increased to five: Setiati Surasto; Sri Ambar; Tuty; Rantizen; Emy Purwati.⁹⁹ In 1957 there were forty nine women cadres in the central and regional leadership committees of all the member unions.¹⁰⁰ By 1961 there were sixty six. Yet, even where workplace organization of women had been successful, for example, where women made up the majority of the union membership, the number in central leadership positions had remained small. This was recognised by Munir in his report to the National Council. There were four women out of the thirty nine central membership council of *Sarbupri*, where the membership was forty five per cent female; nine out of twenty nine in the cigarette worker's union with a membership sixty five per cent female, and three out of twenty one in the textile worker's union with a membership also sixty five per cent female.¹⁰¹ Yet, in all these unions there were many women activists.¹⁰² The report of the Third Plenary Session of *Sarbupri* recorded 488 women activists amongst the 935 basic organizations in the union—358 of these holding a position as secretary.¹⁰³ There was a similar situation at the leadership level with the non-SOBSI federations and unions. In the 1958 listing of the five major labour federation and their national affiliates, and of the major independent trade unions only one, the PGRI, had a woman office bearer—Sunardi.¹⁰⁴

—making gains

After organized labour began to agitate for better conditions for women workers at the national level gains were made in the implementation of the maternity provisions, increased wages and equal pay. But the improvements fell unevenly for women workers. In handicraft industries, which as we have noted were large employers of women, industrial relations were underdeveloped. Collective agreements were “for all practical purposes, non-existent”, and where workers were united in a labour union for the most

⁹⁹ In 1949, Siti Tudjimah was amongst the SOBSI delegation to the WFTU conference in Peking [Beijing] of that year. Other delegates were Njono [Chairman], Suhardiono [Secretary], Saloran, Kondro, Basuki, and Gondoprato. Aneta 10 November 1949 2e Nr.73, *Algemene Secretarie*. Setiati Surasto had been an activist in the *Pemuda Puteri Indonesia* and a member of the *Dewan Perwakilan Koja Sementara* for Jakarta formed on 15 March 1950.

¹⁰⁰ Hindley, *The Communist Party of Indonesia*, pp.208-209.

¹⁰¹ SOBSI, *Pedoman Penjelesaian Plan Organisasi Tahun 1958 hingga Kongres Nasional III SOBSI*. The SBRI had approximately 45,000 women members in 1963. *Api Kartini* [May/June 1963], p.16.

¹⁰² A visitor to the SOBSI branch office in Yogyakarta in late 1961 made the following observation: “the people we met, about 20 in number including a few ladies, were representatives of the local industrial unions in the area”. Nukaga Hideyoshi, *My Tour to Australia, Indonesia and Malaya* October 17–November 28, 1961 [*Holding NSW State Library Sydney Australia: UNCAT MSS Set 57. ITEM 14*]. The visitor also observed: “in a factory employing around 400 workers men received Rp.25.50 and women Rp.16.25 per day for the same heavy manual work”.

¹⁰³ Report National Council of SOBSI, November 17 1959, *SUA File, E183/21/4*.

¹⁰⁴ United States Department of Labor, *Directory of Labor Organisations Asia and Australasia* [1958].

part it was outside the plant, and comprised the better educated, skilled male workers.¹⁰⁵ In a speech to the 1961 SOBSI seminar on women workers, Sri Ambar, a *Gerwani* member and Head of the 'Women Worker's Bureau' in the National Council of SOBSI, observed that industrial wage earners and those in larger shops, especially in the cities, seemingly had a greater possibility of arranging working conditions than women working in small shops, or as household servants. But, she added, all women workers were in need of union protection.¹⁰⁶ A report by SOBSI on collective agreements in the private sector in 1960 illustrates the nature of the same privileged versus non-privileged group of women workers as that found amongst male wage earners. Because of a collective agreement the female workers in the Rice and Tapioca Workers' Trade Union—SEBBETSI—received menstruation leave, maternity or abortion leave of three month with full pay and free treatment with full pay for childbirth. The same conditions were given to female workers in the SBHRT union.¹⁰⁷

The cigarette industries, as they had been during the colonial era, were a major cause of concern. The *Harian Rakjat* newspaper commented in 1958 that the rights and social security in general of women workers in cigarette factories were not fulfilled, and workers must use the International Labour Day [1 May] to struggle more energetically to improve the life of women workers.¹⁰⁸ Over the last two years of the decade the *kretek* industries made general improvements in wage conditions for their women workers. The minimum daily wages in money for daily labourers in those *kretek* industries united under the GPPRI, showed a gradual rise until 1960 for men and women, but still maintaining the wage differential. By 1962 both women and men workers received Rp.12.50, and in 1963 Rp.39.50.¹⁰⁹ But wage rises were not always paid. On 4 July, 1961, a strike by cigarette workers at the Faroka factory in Malang [of 1,600 strikers 776 were women] closed the factory for ten days because of the failure of the factory to increase their pay as instructed by the Minister of Labour.

After the 1963 SOBSI conference, representatives of women workers from all over Indonesia gathered again to analyse the progress in the organizational field. At this conference Nj. Sukinah Sarmidi, leader of the SBRI in Malang, a member of the Executive Board and at that time still working as a *buruh rokok* of the union, presented her report on the conditions in the cigarette industry. Businesses [Sarmidi reported] were a mixture of foreign-owned and private Indonesian capital. In 1963, rollers in the small

¹⁰⁵ ILO, *Report to the Government of Indonesia on Wage Policy*, p.34.

¹⁰⁶ Sri Ambar, *Perbaiki Tingkat Hidup Buruh Wanita, Seminar Nasional Buruh Wanita*.

¹⁰⁷ Letters from SOBSI to Foreign Friends, *SUA File*, N/38/304.

¹⁰⁸ *Harian Rakjat*, 30 April 1958.

¹⁰⁹ See Biro Pusat Statistik, *Statistical Pocket Book of Indonesia for the years 1958-1963*.

private businesses could earn approximately Rp.23 per thousand—less Rp.6 for the cutters who were children and young workers. If a worker finished 3,000 cigarettes per day it was possible to earn a daily wage of Rp.51. However, in these factories the rollers worked in small, dark, humid rooms full of the tobacco and clove smell. In foreign-owned factories it was possible for workers to earn more per thousand, because of the conveyor belt operating system. The cost to workers of earning a larger wage was borne by their health—in fatigue and strain.¹¹⁰ The overall rises for the cigarette industry may seem high, but they may be put into better perspective if we note an approximate exchange rate in 1960 of Rp.150 for \$1.00.¹¹¹ If we also recall the problems with inflation—in 1963 rice alone cost more than Rp.60 per kilo, the actual buying power of workers' wages is clear.

Sometimes, specific issues concerning individual workers were taken up by all sides. The SOBSI affiliated textile industry union *Serikat Buruh Tekstil dan Pakaian* —SBTP—and the three other major federations the SBII, KBKI and KBSI, for example, protested at the treatment of a woman worker in a Bandung textile factory after the owner stripped her during a search for yarn which had gone missing from the factory. Nothing was found on the worker and the unions sent a letter of protest to the local police urging those in power to deport the culprit.¹¹² The business, *Tenun Hoa An*, was Chinese owned so there may also have been an undercurrent of racial tension involved in the incident.

—equal pay

It was the greater determination on the part of the political left to place issues concerning women workers onto the political agenda which led to the ratification of the ILO convention on equal pay. The *Buruh Rokok* union, for instance, took a decision at their second congress to urge the Government to ratify Convention No.100 because of the discrimination in pay between female and male workers in two factories in central Java.¹¹³ A woman writer to the *Sarbupri* magazine—*Warta Sarbupri*—called for all women workers to have the right to equal pay as did women plantation workers. She also reminded women that this was simply a beginning. Difficulties were still placed in the

¹¹⁰ *Api Kartini* [May/June 1963], p.16. The conference was held at the SBKA building. See the work of Ratna Saptari, 'The differentiation of a rural industrial labour force: gender segregation in East Java's kretek cigarette industry, 1920-1990', in Paul Alexander et al [eds.], *In the Shadow*, pp.127-150, for an appraisal of conditions in the kretek industry.

¹¹¹ Chris Manning, 'Structural Change and Industrial Relations during the Soeharto Period: An Approaching Crisis?', *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 29, 2 [August 1993], p.65. fn.17 citing Hawkins, 'Labor in Developing Countries', p.262.

¹¹² *Harian Rakjat*, 4 November 1957. The worker's name was Runi.

¹¹³ *Harian Rakjat*, 30 October 1956. The factories concerned were the Faroka and Sempurna in Malang.

way of women achieving their menstruation leave, equal pension rights, and rights to promotion and vocational training. "*Susahkah ada mandor wanita?*" [Are there any female supervisors?] she asked.¹¹⁴ It was only women workers in the stronger unions such as *Sarbupri* which were able to formalize agreements who benefited.

Even though at the time many activists for improved conditions for women workers applauded the ratification of the convention as confirmation of government 'good intent', the evidence indicates that although gains were made in some industries overall achievement of the principle was difficult indeed. However, it is not suggested that Indonesia was alone amongst nations in the failure to meet objectives on equal pay. As late as 1975, discussions in the European session of the ILO on equal pay and Convention 100 revealed that there was still international concern over the failure of many nations to accept even in principle the notion of equal pay. At the session

it was emphasised that the principle of equality of opportunity and treatment for women workers should be reflected not only at the formal level, but likewise at the level of practical reality...in connection with recruitment, promotion, conditions of work and remuneration, access to vocational training and contractual capacity.¹¹⁵

It is clear that without a belief in the fundamental principle of equal pay, ratification of the convention is not sufficient to bring about a change in conditions since application of the principle does not automatically follow ratification.¹¹⁶ In 1960, the United Nations published a special pamphlet on equal pay for men and women, and of the summaries of the steps taken in 70 countries to give effect to the ILO Convention and Recommendation of 1951.¹¹⁷ Thirty four governments had ratified this ILO Convention, with India, Indonesia and the Philippines being the only countries in South and Southeast Asia on the list. There are over a dozen Western countries which do not appear, including the United States and the United Kingdom. From this Ward has concluded that:

failure to ratify [did] not imply rejection of either the principle or its application since equal pay for equal work [was] more common in some of the non-ratifying countries.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ 'Hak wanita sebagai buruh harus dipenuhi', *Warta Sarbupri* 1[1958], p.4.

¹¹⁵ ILO, *Equality of Opportunity*, p.21.

¹¹⁶ This point is developed by Barbara Ward in 'Men, Women and Change: an essay in understanding social roles in South and South-East Asia', in Barbara Ward [ed.], *Women in the New Asia* [UNESCO: Paris, 1965], pp.13-99. see also Nani Soewondo, *Kedudukan Wanita dalam Hukum dan Masyarakat* [Timun Mas: Djakarta, 1967], p.299 for confirmation of this point with regard to Indonesia.

¹¹⁷ Pamphlet E/CN/6/341/Rev.I]. Cited in Ward, 'Men, Women and Change'.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.53. For confirmation of this point see the study by Paterson and Armstrong on the UK Equal Pay Act which came into force in 1971. Up to this point [in the UK] there were about nine million working women, with more than one million of this number receiving equal pay, on average, the basic rate for women was about 80 per cent of men's rates. Paterson and Armstrong, *An Employers Guide*, p.9.

Surveying the women wage earners of Jakarta

In 1951, the Ministry of Labour established a committee—The *Panitia Sosial Buruh Wanita*—to examine working conditions in the Greater Jakarta area. This was government recognition of the particular difficulties faced by urban women workers. Members of this committee were drawn from the leadership of various women's organizations.¹¹⁹ It is disappointing that no evidence whatsoever could be found of the committee's work or deliberations, but it would be reasonable to conclude that the developing and strengthening advocacy over the decade and into the 1960s for better working conditions for women in the congresses, seminars and speeches of the women's organizations [which are dealt with in the following chapter] was a consequence of its findings. However, two surveys undertaken during the period: one a family budget survey by Dr. A. Stolp, the other, a report by the *Lembaga Makanan Rakyat* for the Ministry of Health, provide us with some specific information on women wage earners.¹²⁰ Mention should also be made of the number of research projects undertaken. It is doubtful whether this was simply a reflection of closeness to the centre, superior research facilities and a more educated research team for similar pilot projects were carried out in smaller urban areas, such as Bandung and Sukabumi. An even greater number of research projects were undertaken in rural areas. As the latter was reflective of the superior numbers of workers engaged in agriculture, the Jakarta surveys reflected concerns with the problems associated with the urbanisation process taking place in the city.

From the 1953 report by Dr. Stolp we are able to gain some insight into the reasons why women worked.¹²¹ Over the period from March 15 to May 20, 1953, Stolp surveyed 461 families who fulfilled the research conditions: workers on the smallest wage in 53 selected private businesses in Jakarta. For the survey a family was defined as the male head of household and his wife, with or without children living in the same house: unmarried male or female workers were not included in the survey. Thus women wage earners were only surveyed in the role of subsidiary earners to the family income. The survey allowed for four categories of additional income—that is income apart from

¹¹⁹ The committee was headed by Setiati Surasto; Secretary, Nj. Hanafi; committee members were Nj. Memet from the Ministry of Social Affairs, Nj. Suwirjo and Nj. S. Hadikusumo. Also sitting on the committee were Dr. Suwarno [from the *Jawatan Kesehatan Kota*—Department of City Health] and Soeprabowo from the Ministry of Labour. *TMP* 12 [April 1956]. PMP No.448/51 of 26 June. The committee was installed on 30 June 1951.

¹²⁰ Dr. A. Stolp, *Penyelidikan Tjara Penghidupan Buruh yang Mendapat Upah Terrendah Diperusahaan-perusahaan Partikelir di Djakarta, 15 March–20 Mei 1953*. Kementerian Kesehatan, *Kedadaan sosial-ekonomis, makanan dan kesehatan buruh-buruh di Djakarta 1957*.

¹²¹ The information in the following section is taken from Stolp, *Penyelidikan Tjara Penghidupan*, pp.1–10. The official exchange rate in 1953 was approximately Rp.11.44/\$US.1. *Statistical Pocket Book of Indonesia 1957*, p.177.

the money wage. Of the four categories two related to extra work by the male breadwinner, and two showed the weekly contribution by wives from either casual or permanent work wage work. The greater number of wage earning wives was found in factory work; the next as domestic servants; the remaining as sewers, or in *asrama* and hospital work.

Wage work only was enumerated, but many other income earning activities were listed. Of the wage earning wives, 56 had income from permanent work, 15 from casual wage work. Most of this latter group was engaged in selling, primarily of cigarettes. The women's wages ranged between as little as Rp.2.50 and as much as Rp.62.50. The highest figure appears to relate to hospital work but the type of such work was not recorded. We know from the survey that the greatest number of working wives were in factory work, but we learn nothing about their working conditions, their hours of work, access to benefits and so on. For this reason we are unable to make comparisons across occupations. The domestic servants were clearly at the lowest end of the wage scale, but whether they received food as a means of compensation for lower pay was not elicited.¹²²

The impression of the interviewers was both *personal wish and the opportunity to work* [my emphasis] were the factors which determined the undertaking of extra work. The influence of the coming *Lebaran* on the need, or the desire to earn extra income, was not apparent from the responses of either female or male workers. According to the report, not one worker suggested that, besides his/her permanent work, other work was undertaken for use for the *Lebaran*. Yet, we know from Ministry of Labour reports for 1951 that demands by workers in Jakarta for bonus payments, to be paid before the May 1, or *Hari Lebaran* holidays, were approximately twenty per cent of all demands put forward by workers and their unions.¹²³ Our lack of knowledge from the survey on whether the workers received a *Lebaran* bonus from their employer leads to a certain ambiguity about the conclusions concerning the *Lebaran*. Nor was any connection found between the amount of a worker's pay from day to day and the inclination to take other work for extra income. The report concluded, however, that should a worker desire to earn extra income, the opportunities for adding to wage income were not extensive in Jakarta. The survey also revealed that there were many more female workers where family income was below Rp.57.50 than there were in wage earning families receiving income above that amount. Of the 461 families, 306 had weekly incomes below Rp.57.50: in those families 50 of the 56 permanent female wage earners and 13 of the 15

¹²² For discussion of the poor conditions of domestic servants see Nj. S. Soedibio Arsoatmodjo, *Wanita: Rumahtangga dan Anak-anak* [Badan Penerbit Kristen: Djakarta, 1970], pp. 27-28.

¹²³ Kementerian Perburuhan, *Situasi Perburuhan Dalam dan Luar Negeri* [August/September, 1951].

casual workers were to be found.¹²⁴ We do not learn what proportion of the family income was provided by wives of the lower paid workers; was it, for instance, more than their husbands? Because the family was defined as male breadwinner with wife under the same roof we do not know how many women were breadwinners where the subsidiary role of their wage simply did not come into play. In the Ministry of Health survey 180 workers were interviewed: 36 females and 144 males. All were *buruh kasar* [manual, unskilled workers] working in various enterprises all over Jakarta. The number of women wage earners interviewed was thus twenty per cent of the sample.¹²⁵ Nonetheless, despite the wealth of valuable material on workers' income and health generally, the statistical surveys were a disappointment for anyone seeking more specific information about women wage earners.

We have already noted the conditions in the batik industries in Central Java. In Jakarta, batik enterprises were also large employers of women in the manufacturing sector. The poor conditions in the industry and the failure of many enterprises to abide by safety and other conditions for their women workers was acknowledged by the Labour Inspection Bureau. In its defence the Bureau noted that there were approximately 3,000 batik businesses in Jakarta and its surrounding environs and only two inspectors to oversee conditions.¹²⁶ There was, of course, a modern face of women's work in Jakarta where it appeared better physical conditions prevailed: the toothpaste factories and telephonist duties for example. Nonetheless, it is doubtful whether the beguilingly captioned photographs found in Vreede de Stuers' book on Indonesian working women reflected the workplace reality of the majority of women wage earners.¹²⁷ When 2,603 factories were inspected in 1955, 80 per cent were found to be guilty of infringements of the existing labour laws on accident prevention, working conditions and on special facilities and allowances for their women workers.¹²⁸ We may also recall that telephonist work was one of the areas where the Ministry of Labour hoped to replace women workers with male workers, in order to comply with the restriction in the Labour Law on night work for women.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ Stolp, *Tjara Penghidupan Penyelidikan*, pp.9-12.

¹²⁵ Kementerian Kesehatan, *Keadaan sosial-ekonomis, makanan dan kesehatan buruh-buruh*, p.669. According to the 1961 census figures women made up slightly more than twenty five per cent of those in employment in Jakarta and were engaged in a wide spectrum of wage work from construction to manufacturing. Biro Pusat Statistik, *Sensus Penduduk 1961 Republik Indonesia*.

¹²⁶ Kementerian Perburuhan, *Situasi Perburuhan Dalam dan Luar Negeri* [April 1951], p.4.

¹²⁷ See, for example, the caption—"she packs bright smiles"—in Vreede de Stuers, *The Indonesian Woman*, p.152.

¹²⁸ *Review of Indonesia* 2 [February 1955], p.3.

¹²⁹ *TMP*, No.11 [March 1954], pp.13-14.

Were there then any 'metropolitan advantages' for women wage earners given the general lack of social security benefits for all workers, and women wage earners' position at the lower end of the wage scale? In consultation with the International Labor Organization, a voluntary sickness insurance scheme was set up in 1957.¹³⁰ The success of such sickness benefit funds, however, was not guaranteed. Funding for the scheme was to come via government, employers and workers; workers were to pay a contribution of as much as one per cent from their wage to establish the necessary public clinics. Since this was in addition to the state wage tax, the overall financial cost imposed on the worker was high. With reference to the scheme the ILO noted that women workers carried a particularly high load of the cost imposed.¹³¹

The Jakarta Fund was designed for the textile and printing industries only.¹³² It was directed towards medium and small businesses which did not have sufficient social security support for their workers. Because the Government believed to compel these businesses to pay what would be a just and proper social security would mean a very heavy load for them, the regulation was aimed at securing social security without imposing too heavier a load on the employer. Both female and male workers were to be covered and, within the meaning of the legislation, the first legal husband/wife of the worker. Employers could insure, with their consent, workers who were normally employed for 20 days or more per month: casual workers were to be covered only for employment injury, and home-workers and family workers were excluded.¹³³ Certainly the architects of the scheme showed some sensitivity to the extra difficulties faced by women workers. It was believed that women would be better off under social insurance than in employer liability schemes where many employers choose to ignore the labour regulations, or to claim women were too expensive to employ. Therefore, an employer under the scheme whose workers were insured was relieved of liability under the Labour Law. Under the maternity provisions of the scheme the qualifying period of 26 weeks "insurable employment"¹³⁴ in the twelve calendar months prior to the birth meant that for

¹³⁰ PMP No.15/1957 [30 December].

¹³¹ 'Conditions of Employment', *International Labor Review*, p.545.

¹³² A similar scheme was already in operation in Bandung, the *Dana Sakit untuk Buruh* —D.S.U.B. [Worker's Sickness Benefit Fund]. However, this fund was experiencing difficulties because of a dispute between the fund's Board and doctors. The Fund's doctors were visiting the polyclinics only once a week, and nursing assistants were dispensing medicines and carrying out examinations. The workers were dissatisfied with the service. The Fund was also experiencing financial difficulties, as were similar Funds in Palembang and Kudus. The Kudus Fund covered workers in the cigarette industry in Kudus and was in financial straits because of a dispute between the participating employer's organization—The Kudus Cigarette Employers' Union—and the two participating unions' sickness benefits funds: the SBII, and the SOBSI affiliated SBRI. Kementerian Penerangan, *Kabinet Karya Triwulan III*, pp. 184-185.

¹³³ ILO, *Report to the Government of Indonesia on Social Security*, p.28.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.54.

many women, who were under the 20 days per month, insurance was non-existent.¹³⁵ As for the dock workers, casualization of their work was a major problem.

A survey by the Department of Social Affairs in Jakarta early in the 1950s had found that women workers especially felt “at the bottom” in the matter of security, and sometimes turned to prostitution in the evening to add to their income. Thirty per cent of prostitutes questioned by the department admitted to working during the day in factories or businesses.¹³⁶ A figure which would appear to confirm Stolp’s findings of the difficulty of finding additional sources of income through more ‘socially acceptable’ forms of wage work.¹³⁷ Organized labour continued to vocalize its concerns through special seminars devoted to the discussion of the conditions of women workers. Creches, kindergartens and the provision of dormitory accommodation were all on the agenda. It is indisputable that these were critical issues for working women. At the same time unions continued to push for implementation of the proscriptive measures in the law which confirmed the centrality of the domestic role for women.¹³⁸

After SOBSI’s Third National Congress in August of 1961 in the city of Solo, the federation formulated a nine paragraph program of demands concerning the rights and importance of women workers. In his opening and closing speeches to the seminar on women workers held in Jakarta in the following year, the Head of the National Council of SOBSI, Njono, laid the blame for the inequality in wages and the difference in social security rights between men and women, and between permanent workers and temporary day labour, as the outcome of the shape of labour relations in the colonial period.

Women are union members, faithfully pay their subscriptions and have the ability to be resolute and to create various forms of radical action. SOBSI was certain of the loyalty, tenacity and cleverness of its women cadres in working, studying, and advancing the movement shoulder to shoulder with all SOBSI cadre and union members to implement all the final determinations of the seminar.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Where a women was paid social insurance under the scheme the subsidy available was Rp.100.

¹³⁶ *Situasi Perburuhan Dalam dan Luar Negeri* [September 1950], p.6.

¹³⁷ In 1954, the municipality established a social organization, the *Lembaga Sosial Kotapradja Djakarta Raya*. It aimed to help those in need—by moral and material means. The search for ways to “repress and prevent” prostitution continued to be a major concern of government, and of private welfare organizations throughout the decade. The organizations represented in the institute were *Perwari*, *Yayasan Putra Bahagia*, *Sin Ming Hui* and *Muhammadiyah*. The Liang Gie, *Sedjarah Pemerintahan Kota Djakarta*, p.1. See, *Pekan Gerakan Sosial*, Maret 1957, pp. 33-34 for the wording “socially acceptable”, and for more information on the work by various organizations in Jakarta.

¹³⁸ *TMP* [April/May/June 1951], pp.50-51.

¹³⁹ Njono, *Djangan ada kaum buruh wanita jang ketinggalan*, *Seminar Nasional Buruh Wanita*.

Njono called for greater political education to awaken and mobilize women, and for unions to become more active in agitating for the rights and importance of women workers as a means to removing the obstacles to improved conditions created by the forces of imperialism and feudalism.¹⁴⁰ It was, again, a rediscovery of the plight of women workers.

Even with the continual 'call to arms' the national leaderships of organized labour failed to achieve lasting widespread gains for women. Njono was correct in his assertion that the manner by which women had been integrated into wage labour during the colonial period had shaped their participation during the latter period. It was also true that many employers, particularly in the rural areas still operated the labour relationship in the old feudal pattern. In his closing speech to the seminar Njono promised that in the attack on feudalism and imperialism women workers would not be left behind, for the National Council recognised that in reality women workers had a heavier workload than males workers; along with their wage work went their household duties, cooking, and the difficulty of obtaining food under such economic times.¹⁴¹ But the forces of "imperialism and feudalism" could not take all the culpability. There were successes, but the failure of organized labour to move beyond the dominant ideologies underpinning the relationship between women and men in the colonial period, and in the present society, was also culpability.

Government rhetoric also looked elsewhere for the grim position of the vast majority of women workers:

[the] Message of Peoples' Suffering must include the millions of women who suffered under colonialism and fascism; who lived only to work hard, have children, without ever enjoying prosperity and happiness as a result of their hard work.¹⁴²

Its political message, in spite of its aim to raise the technical level of tools used by women both at work and in the household so that they might be freed for more leisure time, was that the education of children and improvements in the quality of life for the family belonged to women.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Njono, *Dorong Lebih Maju Kegiatan Serikat-Buruh untuk Hak-Hak Kepentingan Buruh Wanita*, Pidato Sambutan pada pembukaan, *Seminar Nasional Buruh Wanita*.

¹⁴¹ Njono, *Djangan ada kaum buruh wanita jang ketinggalan*. The effect on women wage earners was indeed dire. Calculated on the government's cost-of-living for December 1959 and December 1960 and for the month of February 1961, women workers buying power was no more than 30 per cent of the cost-of-living. *Sri Ambar, Perbaiki Tingkat Hidup Buruh Wanita*.

¹⁴² *Trisula* 3 [March 1961], pp.20-21.

¹⁴³ *Trisula* [March 1961], p.24.

Memang, didalam keluarga pria adalah kepala keluarga, tetapi jangan dilupakan bahwa leherlah yang menggerakkan kepala. Wanita adalah ibarat leher dari pada keluarga, leher dari masyarakat yang biasanya di kepala oleh pria. [Indeed, in the family the men is head, but do not forget that it is the neck which moves the head. Women are like the neck of the family and the neck of society which is normally headed by men.]¹⁴⁴

Conclusion

The manner of their integration into wage labour had a critical affect on women's working conditions. And the roots of the integration were to be found, as they were for the railway and maritime workers, in the colonial labour relationship. Women had wide participation in the labour force, yet they were consistently under remunerated for their efforts. Neither legislation, nor the efforts of governments and organized labour provided a solution for the poorer position of women wage earners vis-à-vis their male comrades.¹⁴⁵ Issues such as the rejection of married women for work, or their dismissal when pregnant, and the unfairness of pay discrimination continued to be raised by many in the union leadership, and in government. As early as 1955, a writer in the Ministry of Labour journal had concluded protective laws did nothing to make women's conditions better and unions offered more chance to achieve 'protection' for women workers. For its part, organized labour continued to press government for the implementation of the 'protective' legislative measures, and for greater commitment to the principle of equal pay.¹⁴⁶ Seemingly a partnership to promote the rights of working women should have existed between the two. Women had a much lauded political emancipation, but the failure to distinguish between 'protection' of women and promotion of women worked against true emancipation for women in the workforce.¹⁴⁷ All of the efforts of the State

¹⁴⁴ H. Soemarno Sasroatmodjo, 'Mengabadi Dalam Keadaan Yang Sukar', *Karya Jaya: Kenang Kenangan Lima Kepala Daerah Jakarta 1945-1966*, p.255.

¹⁴⁵ Of course, Indonesia was not alone in this. Industrialised countries have similar hurdles for their female workers to overcome. Paterson and Armstrong have described the same, seemingly 'equality pathway' for women in the engineering industry in the United Kingdom. [It is] "guaranteed by Regulation, but in that industry, as in many others, many male jobs carried out by women have since been allowed by default to be classified as 'work commonly performed by women in industry' and thus paid at a lower rate". Paterson and Armstrong, *An Employer's Guide*, p.26.

¹⁴⁶ See Njoto, Pidato Pengantar Untuk Rentjang Perubahan Program PKI, *Program PKI disahkan oleh Kongres Nasional ke-VI PKI* [Depagitprop CC PKI: Djakarta, 1959]. Mempertahankan dan Memperluas Hak-Hak Kaum Buruh Dilapangan Politik, Ekonomi, Sosial dan Kebudajaan, *Laporan Umum Sentral Biro kepada Sidang Keempat Dewan Nasional SOBSI*, disampaikan oleh Njono, Sekretaris Djenderal DN SOBSI, 1959. Setiati Surasto [Wakil Ketua IV D.N. SOBSI], Peranan Buruh Wanita dalam Pembangunan Nasional Semesta Berentjana', *Seminar Nasional Buruh Wanita*.

¹⁴⁷ See, *TMP* 11 [March 1955]. An informative account of the attitudes of the late President Sukarno on the role of Indonesian women in political life is given by Colin Brown, 'Sukarno on the role of Women in the Nationalist Movement', *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 15, 1 [1981], pp.68-92.

through legislation, and all of the stated aims and efforts on the part of various governments and organized labour through programmes designed to ‘protect’ and ‘uplift’ the position of working women, were influenced by rhetoric, both explicitly and implicitly, espousing “separate but equal”. In reality this meant the exact opposite—separate and unequal—which continued to mean inferior working conditions and lower wages.

The focus of this chapter has been the relationship of women wage earners with governments and organized labour. It has been argued that in order to gain insights into the attitudes towards and the concerns about working women, it was critical to look to this male dominated relationship. It is, nonetheless, not of itself sufficient. There was another important side to the equation—the women’s groups whose actions and concerns are to be explored in the following chapter. In their advocacy for women, activists within the women’s organizations drew on the history of Kartini. It is a not too tenuous link to say, that for women activists Kartini represented their VSTP, or *Zeven Provinciën*.¹⁴⁸

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¹⁴⁸ For Kartini’s thoughts see, *Letters From Kartini: An Indonesian Feminist, 1900–1904* [Monash Asia Institute, Monash University: Clayton, 1992]. Translated and introduced by Joost Cote.

Chapter VII

By Women For Women

During a heart to heart talk with the women of Tjilatjap, Central Java, Minister of Social Affairs Rusiah Sardjono explained the symbol of Women's Day to them. The white "melati" flower with the green leaves represent the force of small flower's smell which will draw attention to it, although it is almost hidden among the shrubs.

This must be the role of women in Indonesia, she said. To play an important although modest role in the achievement of a just and prosperous society, in accordance with President Sukarno's message delivered on Dec. 15 during the Social Day celebrations.

...And the inspiring example of women like Kartini, Dewi Sartika and Walandau who did much for developing the status of their sisters must be followed. After the inclusion [sic] of the armed revolution women no longer had to carry weapons, but they must shoulder other social and development burdens, the Minister said.

Since the Indonesian independence women may join in complete social life. They can become judges, attorneys, doctors, engineers and anything they set their hearts upon...¹

Introduction

Social distinctions based on race, ethnicity, age, status and class were part of the everyday working lives of Indonesian men and women.² Religion and regional differences were also crucially important influences. Gender distinctions—granted their mutability over time—added an extra dimension to women's lives. While these gender distinctions may have had their genesis in historic, cultural constructions, European derived ideas of gender during the colonial experience also exerted an influence on activist middle- and upper-class women and, as well, on their male comrades and the state in its instrumental legislative role for the whole society. The history of the pattern of gender relations in Indonesia accords with the argument of Joan Wallach Scott that: "gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and is a primary way of signifying relationships of power".³ For this reason,

¹ 'Min. Rusiah on Women's Role: Sacrifices Still Demanded For Social Welfare', *The Indonesian Herald*, 11 January 1963.

² As we have noted in the preceding chapters race distinctions became less sharp after the takeover of large Dutch holdings in 1957.

³ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* [Columbia University Press: New York, 1988], p.42.

therefore, there is a need "to examine gender concretely and in context and to consider it a historical phenomenon, produced, reproduced, and then transformed in different situations and over time."⁴ Scott's thesis on gender relations provides a methodology for the analysis of both the actions and assumptions of women's organizations [as we have analyzed those of the State and organized labour] in their respective relationships with women wage earners.

As Lloyd Kramer has observed: "historians who re-think the categories of historical understanding are likely to find a great many submerged voices that contest their historical desire for unified...unambiguous meaning".⁵ This chapter is an attempt to fill in some of the 'silences' in the representations of gender in the period from 1945-1965. It concerns the role played by more activist and more privileged women in the representations of gender that were to impact on working-class women. It makes no claim to be the full history of any one group. It is also Java and urban centric in that the emphasis is placed on the views of the urban based central leaderships of the more activist and influential women's organizations. Rather, it is an attempt to look at the issues which women's groups concentrated on, and the measures ventured by them to make changes in women's lives. In particular, to the efforts to seek improvements in conditions for working women.

Continuity

It is clear that in the history of the struggle for emancipation of Indonesian women, from Kartini's time, through the revolution for independence, and through the years of Constitutional and Guided Democracy there occurred a "continuation in the observations and goals" of the women's movement.⁶ There was concern expressed over all aspects of women's lives: particularly in relation to marriage, home, and women's 'duties': and also over the conditions of women workers. We can trace the historical roots of the desire of many in the movement to ensure improvement in the working conditions of women to the submissions made to the colonial inquiry into *The Declining Welfare of the Native Population of Java and Madura*. Together with the abolition of

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.6. See also William H. Sewell, 'Review Essays', *History and Theory* 29, 1 [1990], pp.71-82 for a review and agreement with Scott's argument.

⁵ Lloyd S. Kramer, 'Literature, Criticism, and Historical Imagination: The Literary Challenge of Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra', in Lynn Hunt [ed.], *The New Cultural History* [University of California Press: Berkeley, 1989], p.103.

⁶ Jean Taylor, Introduction, in Jean Taylor [ed.], *Women Creating Indonesia: The First Fifty Years* [Monash University: Clayton] Forthcoming. Cf. Christine Doran who argues: "although the idea of an Indonesian women's movement [was] an abstraction because there were different groups with varying aims and motives [amongst the groups there were] a number of common preoccupations and a basic consensus about needed reforms". Christine Doran, 'The Indonesian Women's Movement', in Christine Doran [ed.] *Indonesian Politics: A Reader* [Centre for South-East Asian Politics James Cook University: North Queensland, 1987]. p.97.

child marriages and the question of monogamy, submissions were made on the need for female education, vocational training, and the regulation of female labour in factories. Submissions concerning vocational training were mostly aligned with prevailing ideas about gender roles: a woman could become, for example, a midwife, typist, home economist. One more progressive submission: that is, moving 'outside' the more generally accepted ideas on gender roles was that of R. Dewi Sartika. She proposed that "women should earn equal wages with men for equal work done".⁷

Women workers in the batik industries, and cigarette and tea factories were not forgotten by the early women activists. The report by De Kat Angelino on the bad conditions in the batik industry caught the attention of the *Perikatan Perkumpulan Isteri Indonesia*—PPII [Indonesian Wives' Association].⁸ In 1930 the association arranged a meeting in Lasem [East Java], the centre of the batik industry, to make women batik workers more aware of their poor conditions for, according to the PPII, they "were slaves who could not break free". A committee to help Indonesian women workers was formed—*Komite Penolong Boeroeh Perempoean Indonesia*. The concerns raised were not only over unsuitable pay, but over the violations of "chastity" and "decency" which were said to have taken place in the factories.⁹

Independence

Cora Vreede de Stuers has written that the strength of the pre-independence women's movement was to define a more inclusive notion of Indonesian woman, one that sought to overcome "narrow regionalism".¹⁰ After independence it became apparent that women's groups had a political 'voice' they were willing to use to bring issues concerning all women into the public forum. As they sought to build on the impetus to make changes in the traditional structure of Indonesian society flowing from the revolution, they focused on the same issues that had so concerned the women making submissions to the colonial inquiry years earlier. In so doing women's organizations

⁷ See, *Onderzoek naar de mindere welvaart der Inlandsche bevolking op Java en Madoera*. IXb3 Verheffing van de Inlandsche Vrouw [Drukkerij, Batavia, 1914]. See also, Cora Vreede-de Stuers, *The Indonesian Woman*, pp.174-175. Raden Dewi Sartika was born in West Java in 1884 and died in 1947. She was designated a 'Hero of the Revolution' by Presidential Decision in 1961. [S.K. Presiden R.I. No.590/1961]. For more on Dewi Sartika's achievements see the 'Biographical Notes' in Vreede-de Stuers and *Ensiklopedi Nasional Indonesia*, V14, pp.427-428.

⁸ See De Kat Angelino, *Rapport betreffende eene gehouden enquête*.

⁹ Sri Mangunsarkoro, *Riwajat Pergerakan Wanita Indonesia* [Wanita Rakjat: Jogjakarta, 1946]. np.

¹⁰ Cora Vreede-de Stuers, *The Indonesian Woman*, p.16. Vreede-de Stuers was herself a member of the Women's International Club in Jakarta. The club—which the wives of Indonesian cabinet members could join—forbade the propagating of political views at meetings.

were earlier, and more visible and vocal in expressing concern about working women than were the male dominated labour federations.

At first, attention was focused on the practices of polygamy and forced marriages and the consequences of both of these on women's lives, later, to the conditions of women workers. For women's organizations this focus was not without its tensions: externally with various cabinet members, political leaders and trade union leadership; and internally, within and across women's groups, for it brought into question the dominant ideological attitudes about women and their 'proper role' within Indonesian society. At the national level, politicised more privileged Indonesian women spoke for working-class women. Therefore, in looking at the position of working-class women the views of this small group of elite women are too important to ignore. They mediated—reflective of political and ideological tensions and of class views—through the magazines of their organizations the ideal for working women: the material conditions, the social duties, the societal goals. Mediation through women's magazines is not of course the whole story, but it is a singularly important strand when we try to assess what change was effected in women's working conditions through the advocacy of these activist women.

In looking at the efforts of those women from different backgrounds who tried to do something concrete about the material and social conditions of Indonesian women generally, it becomes clear that the concern of the politically educated women was imbued with the same ideological overtones as that of male power holders. Even though it was to the latter group that women directed their criticisms. In order to understand the national political 'visibility' of many middle- and upper-class Indonesian women, and the 'invisibility' of working-class women we have, metaphorically, to sort the wheat of the rhetoric of equality from the chaff of the reality.¹¹

The women's organizations

The *Partai Wanita Rakjat* [Women of the People] founded in 1945, was non-party affiliated, and the only political party run entirely by women. Its aim was to pay special attention to the fate of widows, divorcees, women workers and women farmers, and to try to influence the existing general attitude concerning women so that women's

¹¹ For an idea of the political 'visibility' of women see: 'Daftar Djabatan-Djabatan Penting yang Dewasa ini Dipegang oleh Wanita di Negara Indonesia', *Madjalah Kedudukan Wanita Indonesia* 1 [April 1959], p.15. However, the article noted that women still suffered political inequality. "In Java as late as 1959 the position of *Kepala Desa* [village head] was closed to women because *Staatsblad* No.212/1907 forbidding women from obtaining this position was still validated. Three women had been chosen as *Kepala Desa* in Central Java but were unable to take up the positions". "It was thought that the old regulation should have been automatically cancelled". *ibid*, pp.14, 29. In contrast, in South Sumatra and Minahasa some women occupied the position of sub-district head [*camat*]. Note: An account of the killings which took place after September 30: 'Counter-Revolutionary Cruelty in Indonesia Especially in East Java', in Robert Cribb [ed.], *The Indonesian Killings 1965-1966*, Chapter VII, pp.170-176, tells of the murder of two women *lurahs*.

freedom would be accepted as a normal, rather than unusual step. The Head of the party, Sri Mangunsarkoro, was at the same time in the leadership of *Perwari* [*Persatuan Wanita Republik Indonesia*]. The principles and aims of the two were the same, but it was felt the political arena gave another opportunity to struggle for women.¹² Amongst other measures in its constitution and association rules the *Partai Wanita Rakjat* urged that:

*menghapuskan pandangan umum terhadap wanita sebagai suatu benda atau milik laki-laki. [the general attitude that women are an inanimate object or possession of men must be wiped out]*¹³

An examination of the early constitutions and association rules of some thirty organizations grouped under the umbrella of the *Kongres Wanita Indonesia* [*Kowani*] at the beginning of the 1950s reveals in many a commitment to an improvement in the fate of working women: whether they be *buruh tani* [women farmers or agricultural workers]; *buruh kasar* [other working-class women: labourers, factory workers etc], or *pegawai negeri*.¹⁴ Generally, where concerns were expressed over discrimination in mobility within a professional occupation, such as the medical profession, or the higher echelons of the bureaucracy, these were separately stated, and were different in content to those expressed for working-class women in industry or agriculture. In the latter, the general concern was in widening employment opportunities, rather than mobility within the workforce. For this reason the following sampling of the aims of women's organizations for working women is better differentiated as aims for working-class women. It is necessary to note here that the groups named are a sampling only of the myriad women's organizations founded post-independence, amongst which there were organizations of professional women: associations of wives of professional men, *Aisjijah*, the *Wanita Taman Siswa*, Christian Women Associations, and a Chinese Women Association,

¹² Sri Mangunsarkoro was born in 1905 in Madiun. Amongst her many activities during the colonial era was her leadership of the body for the Protection of Indonesian Women within Marriage. see *Orang-Orang Indonesia jang Terkemoeka*, pp. 475–476. *Perwari* was established in Klaten, Java, in December 1945 from the fusion of *Persatuan Wanita Indonesia* [*Perwani*], founded 17 August 1945, and *Wanita Negara Indonesia* [*Wani*], founded October 1945. Soebagijo. I.N. S.K. *Trimurti Wanita Pengabdian Bangsa*, p.138. The First Head of the organization was Nj. S. Sutarnan and the Deputy Nj. Rasuna Said. Rasuna Said died in 1965. She was designated a 'Hero of the Revolution' in 1974. see also Nani Soewondo S.H. *Kedudukan Wanita Indonesia dalam Hukum dan Masyarakat* [Ghalia: Indonesia, 1984], pp.194–196.

¹³ Kementerian Penerangan, *Gerakan Wanita Indonesia?* no. title. [Jakarta 1952]. See, also, Vreede-de Stuers, *The Indonesian Woman*, p.122.

¹⁴ The information on the women's organizations is taken from the compilation of the constitutions and association rules of the organizations published by the Kementerian Penerangan [Jakarta 1952]. *Kowani* was established at a women's associations conference in Solo [24–26 February, 1946] which was attended by representatives of *Perwari*, *Pemuda Putri Indonesia*, *Aisjijah*, *Persatuan Wanita Kristen Indonesia* and *Wanita Katolik Indonesia*. Sujatin Kartowijono, *Perkembangan Pergerakan Wanita Indonesia* [Yayasan Idayu: Jakarta, 1982], p.11. Sujatin has rejected the later suggestion that *Kowani* had party political affiliations at the time of its foundation. By the third *Kowani* Congress in 1955, 45 women's groups were members of the umbrella organization. For details of Sujatin's work during the colonial era see *Orang-Orang Indonesia jang Terkemoeka*, p.475.

which was the women's section of the *Sin Ming Hui* with the same constitution and rules.¹⁵

Kowani's constitution called for the right to suitable work for all women, conditions of work and pay which were just, and pay and contracts to be the same for work which was the same.¹⁶ The aim of *Kowani* was to solve the problems of the women "left behind". It believed, however, that only efforts "by women for women" could achieve this goal.¹⁷ The fourth *Kowani* Congress in 1948 established a section for labour affairs headed by S. K. Trimurti—the Minister responsible for the new Republic's labour legislation. Through the separate organizations in *Kowani* a broad scope of interests was articulated. In general, marriage laws, the marriage of children, illiteracy and the need for education were the dominant issues. But organizations did differ and the concerns of working women were not forgotten.

The first conference of *Perwari*, which was held in 1946, established association rules which instructed all branches to have a social economic section, with one of the sub-sections to be concerned with labour. In the central organization there were three women dealing with marriage laws, and one woman—Nj. Memet Tanumidaja, who was later to be part of the committee of inquiry into the conditions of women workers in Jakarta—directing both the social and labour sections. With regard to labour matters, the aims of the organization ranged from the provision of housing, to rooms for nursing mothers at their places of work. For its members, *Perwari* planned to provide vocational guidance information, with a weighing up of the pros and cons of every profession, and to give information to members on the new fields of work, such as policing, immigration official, supervisor of women's labour matters, physical education instructor, and reception manager which were opening for women. It would appear from this that the new employment opportunities which *Perwari* was promoting were for women with some degree of education, although, to increase the opportunities for members to seek their livelihood in cooperatives, an aim more geared to the needs of working-class women, was also an important goal. *Perwari* was officially a non-party political organization. The constitution declared *Perwari* members could only belong to political parties with the same aims as *Perwari*, and that the women on the Central Leadership could not be on a leadership body of a political party nor head another women's association. Nonetheless, dissent and tension existed within the movement because of the association of most members with political parties.¹⁸

¹⁵ For more on these groups, see Sukanti Suryochondro, *Potret Pergerakan Wanita Indonesia*. passim. and *Sejarah Setengah Abad Kesatuan Pergerakan Wanita Indonesia* [Balai Pustaka: Jakarta, 1986], passim.

¹⁶ *Madjalah Kedudukan Wanita Indonesia* 1 [21 April 1959].

¹⁷ 'Kongres Wanita Indonesia 9', *IPPHOS Report* [1 May 1954], p.624.

¹⁸ Vreede-de Stuers, *The Indonesian Woman*, p.122.

The constitution of *Wanita Demokrat Indonesia* [the Women's Section of the PNI]¹⁹ had the broad objective of economic independence for women and the people in general. The social aim of the West Java based *Parkiwa*, under the leadership of Emma Poeradiredja and Nj. Wiraatmadja, was to improve the fate of *kaum buruh wanita* through the provision of child minding for as long as the mother worked, to arrange an advice bureau for women and to arrange a funeral fund. Illiterate women, according to *Parkiwa's* rules, "must, and want to, study". By 1952, after *Parkiwa* had broadened its base to cover the whole of Indonesia it had 3,050 members.²⁰ All of the organizations had a stipulated joining age—*Perwari's*, for example, was eighteen years, *Wanita Demokrat's* fifteen years—required an initial membership fee, and monthly contributions of a relatively small amount.

The goal of the Islamic organization, the *Muslimaat Sebagai Departemen Wanita Dari Masjumi* [The Women's Section of the Islamic Political Party, *Masjumi*]²¹—under the leadership of Sunarjo Mangunpuspito and Nj. Hafni Abu Hanifah—was to "carry" women workers, farmers and other women to the awareness of nation and state, to have a national government based on Islam, and to promote in women feelings of responsibility and awareness of their value as a person and woman.²¹ The Women's Section was an autonomous body within the party. On the other hand, the *Pergerakan Wanita Partai Sarekat Islam* [PW-PSII] did not have a separate constitution from that of its political party the PSII.²² The PW-PSII denounced the marriage of children, the trade in girls, prostitution and fornication, polygamy and divorce. But it asserted that improvements within marriage were to made within the precepts of Islam. After 1964, the organization was renamed *Gerwapsii* [*Gerakan Wanita PSII*]. Its constitution and rules covered the same concerns, but under the social section was added the interests of

¹⁹ *Wanita Demokrat*, established on 14 January 1951, changed its name in 1964 to *Gerakan Wanita Marhaenis*, then, in 1973, to *Pergerakan Wanita Nasional-Perwanas*. The first leader was Nj. M. Sudarman Hadikusumo, and Nj. Wilopo—the wife of Prime Minister Wilopo—was a Board member.

²⁰ The *Partai Kebangsaan Indonesia Bagian Wanita*—formed in 1949 as the women's section of *Parki* [see Chapter II this study]. *Pasi* [*Pasoendan Istri*] which had been founded in 1930 fused with *Parkiwa*. Pre-war *Pasi* had a special section in the Jatinegara branch to help unemployed women. *Buku Peringatan 30 Tahun Kesatuan Pergerakan Wanita Indonesia 22 Des. 1928–22 Des. 1958*, p.297. For details on the activism of Emma Poeradiredja during the colonial era, see *Orang-Orang Indonesia jang Terkemoea*, and Chapter III of this study on her position with the DKA, and her involvement in the KWKA. On the connection of many elite women such as Emma Poeradiredja and S.K. Trimurti with theosophical circles in colonial Indonesia see Iskandar Nugroho, "The Theosophical Educational Movement in Colonial Indonesia, 1900–1947" [Unpublished MA [Hons] thesis, University of New South Wales: Sydney, 1995].

²¹ For details on these two leaders see, *Orang-Orang Indonesia jang Terkemoea*, pp.475, 473 respectively.

²² *Madjalah PSII* 4 [December 1950]. The Head of the PW-PSII was Nj. Abikusno Tjokrosujoso. She was the wife of the trade union leader whom—as noted in Chapter I—called the government "*budgetloos, planloos and hopeloos*".

women farmers and the lowest level workers.²³ The rules of a later Islamic organization, the *Wanita Islam*, bade women to live simply and to aim for the prosperity of the household.²⁴

Special mention should be made of *Gerwis* [*Gerakan Wanita Sedar*], which was renamed *Gerwani* in 1954 when the organization sought a more “inclusive” focus.²⁵ By the middle of the decade when the organization began to mobilise at grass-roots level, it articulated a strong voice for the rights of women workers. The original *Gerwis* had a joining age of fifteen years. It proclaimed itself to be an educational and struggle organization which was non-party and for all religions and ethnic groups. From its formation, it agitated for the prevention of child marriages, prostitution and trade in women, and for the provision of kindergartens for working women. It was bound by its constitution to help trade unions in the struggle to protect women workers and to afford them rights during pregnancy and menstruation. Its organizing principle was to found itself at places of work, and residences surrounding businesses and offices where most women workers were found. Branches at workplaces had to have at least twenty five members and were directly connected with the main branch. The first congress in December 1951, for example, focused on marriage laws, and political concerns such as the question of Irian Jaya and the release of prisoners detained since the police actions in August of that year.²⁶ The constitution of the later *Gerwani* had a joining age of sixteen years and its organizing principle was the same, only now the smallest sub-branch sections could enrol as little as five women. In its role as a mass organization its goal was to cover the concerns of all women.

It has been asserted that *Gerwani* was non-party political and made up of independent women.²⁷ Certainly, there is ample evidence to suggest that as with male members of organizations which were aligned with the PKI, great numbers of women

²³ *Anggaran Dasar dan Anggaran Rumah Tangga Gerakan Wanita PSII*.

²⁴ *Anggaran Dasar dan Anggaran Rumah Tangga Wanita Islam* [Jogjakarta 29 April 1962].

²⁵ *Gerwis*, founded May 7, 1950, was a fusion of the groups *Gerakan Wanita Rakyat Indonesia*, Kediri; *Persatuan Wanita Sedar*, Surabaya; *Rukun Puteri Indonesia*, Semarang; *Persatuan Wanita Sedar*, Bandung. *Persatuan Wanita Murba*, Madura also gave support. The first Executive Board was elected at a meeting in Semarang [3-6 June 1950]. Tris Metty [Semarang], Umi Sardjono. [Surabaya], S.K. Trimurti and Sri Koesnapsiyah were the office bearers. The first *Gerwis* congress took place in Surabaya in December of 1951. Two articles by Saskia Wieringa: ‘Aborted Feminism in Indonesia: A History of Indonesian Socialist Feminism’, in Saskia Wieringa [ed.], *Women’s Struggles and Strategies* [Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, 1988], pp.69–89 and Saskia Wieringa, ‘Two Indonesian Women’s Organizations: Gerwani and the PKK’, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 25, 2 [1993], pp.17–28 give accounts of *Gerwani* activities. ‘Two Indonesian Women’s Organizations’, also has interviews with former *Gerwani* members. Both are excellent accounts.

²⁶ For further information on the aims of *Gerwis* see, *Pedoman Bekerja Gerwis 1950*, *Perpustakaan ‘45 B10/AR/75*. On the first congress, Soebagijo. I.N. S.K. Trimurti *Wanita Pengabd Bangsa*, p.199. For the events of August 1951, see Chapter I on national labour concerns.

²⁷ See Vreede-de Stuers, *The Indonesian Woman*.

were independent of actual party affiliation. But, increasingly, the organization itself became ideologically aligned to the PKI: it came to be seen as the women's wing of the party. Speeches and writings under the by-line of leading members of *Gerwani* were frequent in the PKI daily *Harian Rakjat*. In the newspaper appeals were made on the need for women to understand and become involved in politics, and the reprinting of articles on the general conditions of women and of women workers in communist countries was also frequent.²⁸ There were competing views to be heard within the organization but, as Saskia Wieringa has commented, by the time of the Fourth Congress in 1961, "the organization had grown to over a million members [and] those who wanted to steer *Gerwani* closer to the PKI had gained dominance".²⁹ With the move to the left of some organizations such as *Gerwani*, and the desire of others to abide by Islamic prescriptions on the role of women, tension was created across organizations. In turn, this brought problems for *Kowani*. Unity within the organization came under strain and the effectiveness of *Kowani*'s representative role for "all women" suffered.

Such tensions had their roots in the history of the pre-war women's movement. One of the objectives of the *Istri Sedar* organization, which had been founded in Bandung in March, 1930, under the leadership of Soewarni Djodjoseputro,³⁰ was to improve the working conditions of women. It was thought practical improvement in their paid work would give women the opportunity to become "better" mothers. *Istri Sedar* would not join the earliest umbrella association of women's groups, the *Perikatan Perkumpulan Perempuan Indonesia*—PPII—because it included some Islamic groups. *Istri Sedar* believed that the PPII would not take a position on the rights of women which conflicted with the tenets of the Islamic religion.³¹ Looking back on the colonial history of women's groups a writer in *The Voice of Free Indonesia* in 1946 had this to say:

In the years long history of the Women Movement [sic] it has never been possible to obtain unity...We were divided into two camps, the religious and the nationalist women movement [sic]...For the religious the chief purpose of life for the Indonesian Woman was: marriage, housekeeping, child rearing, devoutness towards God. The nationalist women organisations mutually differed widely as in choice and these nuances are deeper and more vivid than with the political movements of

²⁸ See, for example, *Pendidikan politik bagi wanita* [Political Education for Women]. This article was a reprinting [in the women's page] of Stalin's 1923 speech to the First Women Workers and Peasants' Congress. *Harian Rakjat*, 24 February 1954.

²⁹ Wieringa, 'Two Indonesian Women's Organizations', p.20. Cf. *Harian Rakjat*, 4 June 1965.

³⁰ Later to become Nj. Suwondo Pringgodigdo. For details of her education and activities in the colonial era see, *Orang-Orang Indonesia jang Terkemoea*, p.477.

³¹ The PPPI was founded in 1928. It was dissolved in 1930 when it became the PPII. This was replaced in 1935 by the *Badan Kongres Perempuan*. Nani Soewondo, S.H. *Kedudukan Wanita Indonesia Dalam Hukum* [1984], pp.198–202.

men...Stigmatized as a political organisation Istri Sedar suffered much from the P.I.D. during the first years of her existence...³²

The same tensions were evident between post-independence women's groups as they became part of what Feith and Castles have termed the "ideational" politics of the day.³³ Interestingly though, when women's organizations began to agitate more strongly on behalf of working women their rhetoric drew on the same linkage of improved working conditions to make "better mothers", as had the *Istri Sedar* organization in the 1930s. This was confirmation, in spite of the tensions, of the continuation in the observations and goals between pre- and post-independence women's groups.

Marriage laws

Many organizations gave constant and strong support to proposals for a new Marriage Law which would give women greater rights and security within their marriage.³⁴ There were calls for a revision of the current marriage rules based on *adat* and Islamic prescriptions which allowed only the husband the right of repudiation. These appeals for change were made by both religious and secular organizations, with the former appealing, as we have noted, for changes within the precepts of Islam. The government's issuance of a regulation allowing male civil servants to nominate more than one wife for his pension in event of his death [PP No.19/1952] became a rallying point for those organizations concerned with women's rights within marriage. Women's organizations believed that the introduction of the regulation was a setback for their attempts to promote the independence and development of women and would hamper the struggle for equal economic opportunities.³⁵ Many were vociferous and militant in their call for the repeal of the regulation and enlisted the aid of political parties and unions in the process. A letter from the cigarette union—the SBRI, to government officials, and to the Parliament in Jakarta noted that women made up 75 per cent of workers in the industry and the regulation would cause women and the community in general to suffer.

³² 'The Indonesian Woman and Her Struggle', *The Voice of Free Indonesia* 28 [August, 1946], p.10. A footnote in the article explained the P.I.D. as the Political Department Intelligence Service.

³³ Herbert Feith, Lance Castles [eds.] *Indonesian Political Thinking 1945-1965* [Cornell University: Ithaca, 1970]. Cf. Stephen A. Douglas, 'Women in Indonesian Politics', in Sylvia A. Chipp, Justin J. Green [eds.], *Asian Women in Transition* [Pennsylvania State University: United States, 1980], pp.152-181. On this point see, for example, 'Tjuplikan Pidato Nj. Hurustiati Subandrio pada pembukaan Kongres ke X Kowani di Istora', *Api Kartini* [September 1964], p.3.

³⁴ On the Marriage Laws current at that time for the various groups within the society see Soewondo, *Kedudukan Wanita Indonesia dalam Hukum* [1984]. Chapter IV, pp.41-118.

³⁵ *Varia* [10 October 1952], p.7.

The letter stated that the SBRI supported the demands of women's organizations and urged that the government quickly revoke the regulation.³⁶

Secular organizations such as *Wanita Demokrat* argued that the regulation could be seen as giving encouragement to the practice of polygamy and for this reason it "had shocked society, especially women". *Wanita Demokrat* called on women to reject the regulation and a delegation of women was sent to Prime Minister Wilopo in the hope that the Government could be influenced to withdraw the regulation.³⁷ In 1957, as a result of the protests by women, PP.19 was suspended in some provinces.³⁸ It remained, however, an issue of contention. In the *Quarter Century* celebrations of the women's movement taking place in Samarinda [East Kalimantan] a poster of *Perwari's*, condemning PP.19, could not be carried in the march because of protests from other women. As a consequence, *Perwari* withdrew its membership from the committee running the celebration.³⁹ The prevention of early marriage, forced marriage, polygamy and the position of women within marriage remained a major concern of most women's organizations throughout the period under study.⁴⁰ This was indeed a questioning of dominant ideological assumptions about women's role. Given the diversity of views across and within the organizations it took considerable adroitness for women's organizations to present their demands for changes over issues such as the marriage laws. Their persistence on these issues provides a testament to their commitment. It is perhaps

³⁶ SBRI, Resolusi tentang Dihapuskannya Peraturan Pemerintah No.19. Malang, 24 Agustus 1953. *Arsip Nasional: Koleksi Arsip Presiden R.I. 1950-1959. No.1475.*

³⁷ 'Tidak Mau dimadu' [We don't want to be co-wives], *Varia* [15 June 1952], p.15. see also *Varia* [10 October 1952], p.7. In response to the constant pressure from women's organizations a *Panitia Penyelidikan Hukum Perkawinan* [Committee to Investigate the Marriage Law] was established. The committee's brief was to investigate a new Marriage Law from all points of view, including the *Pantjasila* approach. A new Marriage Law was not announced until 1974 [UU 1/1974].

³⁸ *Review of Indonesia* 4, 7 [July 1957], p.31.

³⁹ *Buku Peringatan 30 Tahun*, p.90.

⁴⁰ See, Meluaskan Aksi-Aksi untuk Memperkuat Tuntutan Hak-Hak Wanita-Anak-Anak dan Perdamaian, *Laporan Nj. Umi Sardjono atasnama DPP Harian Gerwani dalam Sidang Pleno Gerwani ke-III pada tanggal 16 s/d 19 Djuni 1956*, p.15 Umi Sardjono was one of the members from *Gerwani* elected to the DPR after the 1955 elections. The others were Nj. Mudigdio, Nj. Suharti, Nj. Sudari Rachman and Nj. Ch. Salawati. For particular examples of the suffering of women through forced marriage and from rape see p.15 of the *Laporan*. In 1957, *Gerwani* undertook actions to defend a young girl named Maisuri whom the local customary council had pressed into marriage with a much older man. *Review of Indonesia* 4, 7 [July 1957]. Mortimer has written that: "Gerwani members were particularly disapproving of Sukarno's marriages and sexual behaviour". Rex Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism*, p.89 [fn.19]. Wieringa also records how Sujatin "received many anonymous letters and was threatened with death by staunch followers of Sukarno" for her stand against polygamy. Wieringa, 'Aborted Feminism in Indonesia', p.88. [fn.18].

necessary to add that for many individual, elite activist women, these issues also represented their own lives.⁴¹

Gender roles

Francis Gouda has asserted that:

during the excitement and fervour of the anti-colonial struggle after 1945, when life and death were very real, the invented cultural grammar of the self-proclaimed independent nation did try to leave behind the gendered discourses of European colonialism in order to construct a novel political language that no longer unwittingly reinforced the stereotypes of women as inherently subordinate and compliant.⁴²

While this might be linguistically true, for as Gouda states: “Bahasa Indonesia...is mostly a gender neutral language”, the political lexicon of the post-independence period with its notions of what was ‘proper’, ‘fitting’, ‘womanly’ for women, and the ‘duty’ of women within the family, expressed deeply held values of the patriarchal societies from which it came. It was these same values which were the reference point for many of the leaders of the women’s movement. This does not mean that some of the ideological assumptions about a women’s place were not challenged. They were. But the challenge was uneven within the organizations and across organizations—be they secular or religious.

The Catholic Workers Union wanted its social development courses for women taught within the spirit of Catholicism and eastern traditions. The booklet on the aims of the union stated that women workers had their own special *panggilan* [calling] as wife, helper to her husband, educator of her children and *pengemudi* [controller] of the household.⁴³ Women leaders of the PW-PSII, on the other hand, encouraged their cadre to become the vanguard in the fight against the traditional views amongst men that the role of women was to be compliant, thus making their role slavery or servitude. Women were exhorted not to remain passive, or be afraid to air their views in the fight against

⁴¹ This was the view expressed by Hurustiati Subandrio when she said: “In Indonesia polygamy is allowed by customary law as well as Muslim law...amongst the working classes, women have a more independent position, and polygamy is not to be found there. [I]t is evident that only a small group of men make use of the polygamy law and this small group is composed of well-to-do men, or aristocrats”. Hurustiati Subandrio, ‘The Changing Social Position of Women in the East’, in *Eastern and Western World: Selected Readings* [W. Van Hoeve Ltd: The Hague, 1953], p.120. Foreword by S. Hofstra. See also Hildred Geertz, *The Javanese Family: A Study of Kinship and Socialization* [The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc: United States, 1961], p.131 for a discussion of the difficulties *priyayi* women endured when their husbands took a mistress. See also Hurustiati Subandrio, ‘The Changing Social Position of Women in the East’, pp.120-121, and Cora Vreede-de Stuers, *The Indonesian Woman*, passim, where both stress the vital importance for revision of the marriage laws.

⁴² Frances Gouda, ‘The Gendered Rhetoric of Colonialism and Anti-Colonialism in Twentieth Century Indonesia’, *Indonesia* 55 [April 1993], p.22.

⁴³ *Tuntunan Bagi Kader Buruh Pantjasila Seksi Wanita*, p.5.

injustice. At the same time they were cautioned to heed their duties as wife, mother and citizen.⁴⁴ The PW-PSII sought to make women politicised through teaching on party aims and principles, the rights of women as citizens and members of society, the development of the state, the economy, and the need to struggle for women representatives in the *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*—DPR [Indonesian Parliament].⁴⁵ As the stories recounted in Appendix II attest, in times of such radical change religion provided for many women “an important element of continuity” in their lives.⁴⁶

The ideological incorporation of a woman’s rights as a citizen with her ‘duties’ as wife and mother was the consistent factor across organizations with a religious foundation, such as the PW-PSII, and secular organizations such as the more middle-class *Perwari* and *Wanita Demokrat*, notwithstanding the tensions caused between organizations by the PSII’s stronger adherence to Islamic prescriptions.⁴⁷ As for *Gerwani*, Saskia Wieringa is correct to argue as she does that “*Gerwani* consistently undermined the existing construction of womanhood.” It, too, threw out the challenge to passivity, compliance and servitude.

In the central leadership positions of women’s organizations were to be found educated women—some with university education—who had come from a background in student organizations, student movements, and political debates and discussions”. In these activities “a great deal of...thinking was spent on political issues, on the national independence movement, on social progress and on development”.⁴⁸ Their education had enabled politicised and intellectual women to move beyond the world view of their mothers. This led many to question the patriarchal attitudes of a society where—

⁴⁴ *Madjalah PSII* 3 [10 November 1950].

⁴⁵ *Madjalah PSII* 4 [December 1950], pp.11–13.

⁴⁶ Erika Lünemann, ‘Agama Apa? Religious Ways of Coping with Social Change’, in Helmut, Buchholt, Ulrich, Mai. [eds.], *Continuity, Change and Aspirations: Social and Cultural Life in Minahasa Indonesia* [Institute of South East Asian Studies: Singapore, 1994], p.29.

⁴⁷ Rocamora has commented [that] “as a whole, *Wanita Demokrat* never developed any individual sources of support. Its leadership and most of its membership were drawn from among the wives and daughters of party members”. Rocamora, “Nationalism in Search of Ideology”, p.151.

⁴⁸ Hurustiati Subandrio, ‘The Respective Roles of Men and Women in Indonesia’, in Barbara Ward [ed.], *Women in the New Asia: The Changing Role of Men and Women in South and Southeast Asia* [UNESCO: Paris, 1965], pp.233–234. Subandrio had a higher degree. She was President of the Central Board of the Young Indonesian Women’s Organization in 1946; a member of the Provisional Indonesian Parliament from February of that year until leaving the country in 1947; in 1964, Dr. Subandrio was Head Coordinator of *Kowani*. Wieringa observes that as Subandrio moved *Kowani* to the left, the organization became polarized. ‘Two Indonesian Women’s Organizations’, p.20. Cf. Stephen Douglas, ‘Women in Indonesian Politics’, p.168. Subandrio was also the wife of Dr. Subandrio: Foreign Minister [1957-1966] and Deputy Prime Minister [1963-1966].

educational rights for females are made good use of...the only restrictions being economic when the education of boys is assessed as more important if choices have to be made. Indonesia is still essentially a man's world where men still perform the most important roles outside the home.⁴⁹

This was clear recognition of one of the obstacles in the way of a greater involvement of women in public life. Nonetheless, the challenge to existing mores was never so widespread that the view that women were 'responsible' for the happiness of their husbands and families was undermined. On the contrary, it may be argued that even the views presented by the leadership of the secular organizations such as *Perwari* and *Gerwani* through their magazines, conferences and seminars, not only supported the household as woman's responsibility, but supported it within class notions. Thus, the traditional delineation of what constituted a woman's 'responsibility' remained intact.

The early efforts by *Gerwani* to mobilise women concentrated on educating women—on 'uplifting' them—and in this the patriarchy often came under challenge. For example, a banner at a *Gerwani* march in 1951 proclaimed:

'Value Women': Husbands and fathers give your wives and daughters the opportunity to progress.⁵⁰

In spite of such outward challenges to 'tradition', there were clearly substantial differences of opinion within *Gerwani* about the ways and means to achieve progress for women. The available issues of *Wanita Sedar* expose this tension. 'Progressive' women were chided that although they might escape the obligations of motherhood, this was not the time to think the basics of cooking and sewing were not needed.

Imagine this! our research shows lots of members who cannot sew or cook, yet some advocate that [*Gerwani*] members do not need this training. However, many of our members are not only poor in appearance but poor in knowledge as well. For this reason leadership must help them to develop themselves. These skills should not remain the provenance of leadership alone...we should enrich our members also.⁵¹

[and]

[I]f we educate young women to type they cannot survive if they do not live close to an office: their cleverness then has no meaning, but if their cleverness is always connected with their womanliness then their education will not be entirely in vain.⁵²

⁴⁹ Hurustiati Subandrio, 'The Respective Roles of Men and Women', pp.240, 237.

⁵⁰ *Wanita Sedar* 14 [25 July 1951], p.9.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

From these words can be gleaned some of the major internal difficulties of the organization. The tension is apparent between 'progressive' women committed to education for girls and women, but not in line with the dominant ideas on women's responsibility. The belief of others that commitment to women meant paying attention to the needs and difficulties of members for "otherwise *Gerwani* would have no meaning in their lives", and that any solution to those difficulties was best identified within their inherent 'womanliness'. The *Gerwani* leadership recognised women still lagged behind, despite constitutional guarantees. There was also a clear sense that new means and new steps were needed to move ahead and to make contact with the great mass of women. Too often however, as with the views of the leadership of organized labour, political reasons were seen as the sole factor for this failure of redress.

In 1954 in *Harian Rakjat*, Setiati Surasto argued that the lack of expertise in the young state, the fight against the unions and the community by foreign monopolies, and the ringleader, Dutch terror in the regions, lay behind women's backwardness.⁵³ These were recognisable political and economic difficulties faced by the new state, but it was recognition only of the external difficulties that were part of the struggle. Such an assessment underplayed the internal political/cultural cleavages and the class factors that were part of the relationship between women. And it also underplayed the gender relationship between women and men, and its effect on women's position.

In the *ruangan wanita* [women's page] of *Harian Rakjat*, political messages such as the aforementioned were given alongside practical instructions for everyday living. For example, there were instructions on how to make flower corsages as a practical means of obtaining additional income, on sewing clothes, and on making teapot cosies.⁵⁴ The call to action for women was imbued with the message of the 'super wife and mother': husbands should be kept happy and content; women should not neglect their household and should take every opportunity to cook a special meal for their husband, make a blouse for *mertua* [mother-in-law], or a toy for the children. In this way [women] could prove organizational responsibility would not lessen the attention to be given to their family.⁵⁵ This last message, coming as it did just after the 1958 May Day celebrations for the workers of Indonesia, revealed the gap in expectations between those 'in charge' and those at the 'bottom': the class position of those issuing such instructions.

⁵³ *Harian Rakjat*, 24 March 1954. On Setiati Surasto see also Chapter VI.

⁵⁴ *Harian Rakjat*, 7 July 1958.

⁵⁵ *Harian Rakjat*, 19 September 1956.

Shared travails

Unquestionably there developed amongst the leadership of women's organizations an acknowledgment of the problems of women generally and women workers in particular. It has been suggested that the genesis of this acknowledgment can be found in the shared travails of upper- and lower-class women during the Japanese occupation. Sujatin Kartowijono has written of the closeness which developed between women of different classes during the Japanese occupation period because they were forced to work together.⁵⁶ "Considerable gains as to communal responsibility and the breaking down of class barriers were made through the functioning of the *Fujinkai*, for the women from the upper-classes learnt to appreciate the worth of the women of the people with whom they worked in this Japanese organization".⁵⁷ S. K. Trimurti has also pointed to the comradeship amongst women of different classes which developed during the early days of the revolutionary struggle.⁵⁸ The correspondent to *The Voice of Free Indonesia* in 1946, also commented on the "bridging of the lower- and upper-classes; the higher born women learned to appreciate women of the people, class barriers were pulled down". At the same time [she?] gave a salient reminder of the history of the existing tensions between women's groups.

The *Pasoendan Istri* and the *Istri Sedar* were officially melted into the *Fujinkai*...In every village, city or quarter a *Fujinkai* was founded, chiefly engaged on knitting socks, running of eating houses, collecting relief goods...experiments on dietetics...and later on also military drilling of women, mostly in villages, and collecting gold and silver.

During the Japanese occupation the majority of *Istri Sedar* members did not take part as it was difficult to betray their ideologies, gained and defended at such a price. Hard and unspeakably difficult sometimes their mental suffering was, and so often they remained misunderstood by their own society.⁵⁹

Despite the egalitarian rhetoric of the 'new beginning', and the genuine desire on the part of so many Indonesians that this indeed be so, class distinctions and their own history were a constraint on the work of the women's organizations—shared travails during the revolution and Japanese occupation or not. Authoritarianism and a preoccupation with status had a long tradition in Javanese political culture, and although women's organizations publicly espoused egalitarian ideals, they were greatly influenced by the leanings of the urban-based dominant elite with their well-springs in Javanese

⁵⁶ *Trisula* 12 [December 1961], p.8

⁵⁷ Maria Ulfah Santoso, Minister of Social Affairs, Letter to the Central Committee of Indonesian Independence Information Service, Brisbane Australia, 21 February, 1947. *C.H. Campbell Deposit*, P81/45-46.

⁵⁸ Soebagijo. I.N. S. K. Trimurti *Wanita Pengabdian Bangsa*, pp.137-139.

⁵⁹ 'The Indonesian Woman and Her Struggle', *The Voice of Free Indonesia* 28 [August, 1946], p.10.

culture.⁶⁰ *Gerwani* had sought to protect the lower level workers in its rebuke to members about their household servants. *Perwari* had to comment in its publication on the difficulties of forming cadres, and of drawing younger women into the organization. All of these problems identified by some of the leadership were issues associated with deeply held views on authority and status.

In a 1961 issue of *Perwari's* journal, *Trisula*, Sujatin Kartowijono expressed her concern that the organization could become static unless younger women were encouraged to join.⁶¹ A reply to Sujatin's criticism appeared in a following November issue. The writer [a *Perwari* member living overseas] pointed to the difficulties of forming cadres when women only come for a few times, and then not again, because without the household help that middle- and upper-class women were able to avail themselves of they were too busy at home.⁶² Clearly, however, this opinion came through the prism of the writer's class views. It was not only the lack of household help that was a deterrent to lower class women's involvement. In order to obtain income—either as a supplement to household income or because they were the breadwinner in the family—poor women had to seek out wage work in the industrial or informal sectors, or petty trading in the informal sector, or take up a position of household servant.

Sujatin's reply to this criticism in the following December issue was an instruction in deflection. Cadre development was too important to give up, *Perwari's* future depended on it, she declared. In her view, an identifiable weakness in the organization was that: "clearly those in charge were not too amenable to criticism, and further, were too willing to criticise members who made mistakes". "Leaders must be aware that a learning process was taking place [amongst women] and not criticise too much, otherwise members would move away from the organization".⁶³ Sujatin herself was obviously keenly aware that the broadening of mass appeal could only take place if

⁶⁰ A study by Norma Sullivan on the life of a Yogyakarta *kampung* in the early 1970s confirms this point. Sullivan concludes that there is a wide gap in the class-based interests of Indonesian women and this is reflected in the ways in which middle and upper-class women look for solutions to problems confronting women, and in the ways they seek to implement various government or state policies: no matter whether policies were conceived to genuinely help working-class and poor women, class was an extremely strong influence on the world-view of those both designing and implementing such policies. Norma Sullivan, *Master and Managers: a study of gender relations in urban Java* [Allen and Unwin: Australia, 1994], pp.66–82.

⁶¹ *Trisula* 6 [June 1961].

⁶² *Trisula* 11 [November 1961], p.60. The same problem was identified in Sullivan's study as a reason for *kampung* women's lack of involvement in community activities organised by upper-class women. In their study of Java, Berninghausen and Kerstan comment on an unsuccessful attempt at the beginning of the 1980s to start a household workers' union. "Since all middle and upper-class women who wished to be active in addition to their responsibilities as housewives and mothers require the support of household workers, they would hardly be the most effective lobby for an improvement in working conditions and higher salaries for workers". Jutta Berninghausen, Birgit Kerstan, *Forging New Paths: feminist social methodology and rural women in Java* [University of California Press: Berkeley, 1992], p.92.

⁶³ *Trisula* [December 1961].

upper-class women put concerns with status after the goals of *Perwari*. In February of 1961 she wrote: “we are pleased that over the past fifteen years *Perwari* members have entered political parties according to their own ideological leanings, but we hope that they won’t forget their *ibu-induknya* [*Perwari*] and the furtherance of the struggle to improve the future of women”.⁶⁴

Working for women workers

Setiati Surasto—in commenting on the proceedings from the second congress of *Gerwani* held in Jakarta in 1954—asserted that her organization was different because it sought to discuss the problems of the rights of women workers as well as their roles as mothers and citizens.⁶⁵ As the problems of women workers, particularly of those with many children, began to receive prominence in writings, seminars, and in the mass mobilization efforts of *Gerwani*, her assessment that the organization covered all the interests of women began to have some substance. Nonetheless, the organization was aware that the class interests of its members could be an obstacle to improvement in conditions. The publication in the pages of *Harian Rakjat* of a lists of demands for workers’ rights was accompanied by demands aimed at the class attitudes of Indonesian women. They were urged to give better treatment to their servants in the form of rest times; to give nursing during times of illness, and not to treat their servants like animals, dividing and sharing out their servant’s food because they could not be trusted to do it themselves.⁶⁶

The ‘internationalisation’ of the struggle was also critical. Women, not only from *Gerwani*, but from various other organizations were participants at international conferences and meetings, and reciprocal visits were made by women from countries such as Holland, India, the USSR, China and Australia. The ‘Asian–African Women’s Conference’ was but one of the conferences attended by delegates representing a spectrum of women’s groups.⁶⁷ Another was the ‘First World Conference on Women Workers’, held in Budapest in 1956. Ten Indonesian women activists, representing independent federations and unions, and SOBSI aligned unions were present. Women also attended general international trade union conferences. Forums of this type clearly enabled the sharing of ideas, and served to give added impetus to the leadership in the

⁶⁴ *Trisula* 2 [February 1961], p.7.

⁶⁵ This conference ran from 25–31 March. For details of the conference deliberations see *Peraturan Dasar Gerwani* [Tjetakan Pertama pada bulan September 1954].

⁶⁶ *Harian Rakjat*, 8 May 1954.

⁶⁷ Those attending this conference in Colombo in 1958 were: Maria Ulfah Santoso; Hurustiati Subandrio; Nani Soewondo; Nj Kartini; K. Radjara; Nj. K. Soejono Prawirobismo; Nona Suhartini; S.K. Trimurti; Nj. Elias Sutan Pangeran. *SUA File*, N38/304.

fight for better conditions for women workers.⁶⁸ As the photographs of the 'Fourth World Trade Union Congress' in Leipzig in 1957 show, there was a great deal of joy to be had in this international comradeship. [Appendix II]

The demand for improvement in women's working conditions was linked with the changes being called for in international women's forums: equal pay, the granting of those protective measures which were contained in national labour laws, the same rights for women workers in agriculture and industry concerning pay and regulations on working condition, women farmers to own land and be able to keep the yields from that land, the right for all women to elect and be elected in all government bodies, and the right for women to have the same rights within marriage as men.⁶⁹ Malaya was exemplified as a country with a *united* women's front demanding a democratic marriage law. The "democratic countries of the USSR and Poland" were said by *Gerwani* to be examples of what could be achieved for women through solidarity.⁷⁰

For its part, *Kowani* established a *Jajasan Kesejahteraan Buruh* [Foundation for the Prosperity of Women Workers] with the operating funds to come from branches. An outcome of the 1957 *Kowani* conference in Surabaya, was the decision in 1958 to again establish a *seksi perburuhan* to research the problems of working women. This was the result of working papers delivered to the conference by S.K. Trimurti and Emma Poeradiredja on the labour and social/economic conditions of women.⁷¹ The *Kowani* seminar on the problems of women workers under the aegis of its *seksi perburuhan* in 1958 was, in its own words, "an experiment" because it was the first such event for the organization. All of the problems facing women workers were under discussion in the *Kowani* seminar: the need for child minding at workplaces, the discrimination in rates of pay, the dismissal of married women from their positions, night work for women, and the need for revision of the provisions in the labour law on maternity rights to bring them into line with those of women civil servants.⁷²

⁶⁸ Attendees were: S. Kumpul [KBKI], Sunardi [PGRI], Surasto [SOBSI], Tuti Dharta [SOBSI], Suhartini [Health Worker's Union], Darmini [*Gerwani*], Sutijati Mudjajin [*Sarbupri*], Sudjinem [Textile and Clothing], Sukinah Sarmidi [SBR], Suwardi [SB Postel]. *Suara SBKA* 46/47 [July/August 1956], p.26. See, Soewondo, *Kedudukan Wanita Indonesia dalam Hukum* [1984], pp.152–181 for a more complete list—other than labour conferences—of the international conferences attended by leaders and members of the women's organizations. On the 'Pan American Women's Conference' attended by Dr. Tanti Aidit [the wife of D.N. Aidit], see *The Indonesian Herald*, 2 February 1963.

⁶⁹ *Harian Rakjat*, 6 November 1957, 26 November 1957. See Donald Hindley, *The Communist Party of Indonesia*, for further discussion on the mobilization efforts of *Gerwani*.

⁷⁰ *Harian Rakjat*, 24 February 1954. See also *Api Kartini* [September 1964], p.3 for Hurustiati Subandrio's speech reconfirming the struggle of women against imperialism and the support for women in Asia, Africa, Latin America in their fight against imperialism.

⁷¹ *Buku Peringatan 30 Tahun*, p.55.

⁷² Laporan Mengenai Seminar Wanita Kerdja 24 Agustus, 1958, diselenggarakan oleh Seksi Perburuhan Kongres Wanita Indonesia, *Madjalah Kedudukan Wanita Indonesia* 1 [21 April 1959].

As economic conditions in the nation deteriorated towards the end of the 1950s and into the 1960s, women's organizations placed greater emphasis on the inequality between males and females regarding benefits and wage rates. In the 1961 conference on women workers arranged by SOBSI, Setiati Surasto called for equal pay for equal work so that women might stop their dependence on parents, husbands, or relations. At the same conference, Parjani Pradono, a member of the national leadership of *Gerwani*, said: "we must not be satisfied with the results for a small group of women...they must think of the majority—women workers and women farmers".⁷³ There were opposing views on issues such as the possibility of more part-time work for women. Some like Parjani saw part-time work as opening up opportunities for women with household responsibilities. Others, such as Roesiah Sardjono, argued that part-time women workers might be less valued by employers and hence more easily dismissed.⁷⁴

All organizations had struggled to improve the education of women. Now there were calls from the *Kowani* seminar on women's work for more technical education opportunities for women workers, so they could move up from the unskilled jobs and better "seek their livelihood".⁷⁵ At the SOBSI seminar Setiati gave a strong warning that the national development plan would not succeed if improvements were not made in the conditions of women workers.⁷⁶ But an even stronger concern of all the organizations was to do with the morality of women workers. *Kowani* hoped for a "type of convention about morals at the workplaces where men and women work together".⁷⁷ *Gerwani* also demanded a better overseeing of the proscriptive measures in the labour law in order to "guard the morality" of women.⁷⁸

The politics of the household

Sujatin Kartowijono, in a speech to the Eighth Congress of *Perwari* in Semarang, in January 1961, made reference to President Sukarno's *Manifesto Politik* and pledged the continued support of *Perwari* for this, for *Pantjasila*, and for the President in the overall development plans of the government. Sujatin stated that *Perwari* had a twofold role: to be a working group for women, and to follow the leadership of the Indonesian government. Reminding her audience that *Perwari* had contacted every

⁷³ Parjani Pradono, *Wanita berjuang untuk terdjaminnya hak-hak wanita dan menjelesaikan Revolusi Agustus 1945*, *Seminar Nasional Buruh Wanita*.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, and, Roesiah Sardjono, 'Kedudukan Wanita Dalam Lapangan Ekonomi', *Madjalah Kedudukan Wanita Indonesia* 1 [21 April 1959], p.34

⁷⁵ Laporan Mengenai Seminar Wanita Kerdja.

⁷⁶ Setiati Surasto [Wakil Ketua IV D.N. SOBSI] Peranan buruh wanita dalam pembangunan nasional semesta berentjana, *Seminar Nasional Buruh Wanita*.

⁷⁷ Laporan Mengenai Seminar Wanita Kerdja.

⁷⁸ *Harian Rakjat*, 24 February 1954.

cabinet to give its opinion on a Marriage Law, she also pledged to continue the efforts of the organization even under these “difficult conditions” in what was now to be the “third phase” in the history of *Perwari*. “We must [she said] expand and raise the level of recruitment [we must] leave behind the second phase—the feminist phase...of equal rights between men and women and work shoulder to shoulder with men for the sake of the family and the community”. “Economic development must involve *kaum wanita rumah-tanggā* but she must not skirt her household duties”.⁷⁹

Gerwani too pledged support to the government, and shifted its focus to include housewives.⁸⁰ *Gerwani*’s statement that the woman at home bore “a heavy responsibility because of her obligation to educate children” was itself a recognition that the organization must appeal to the broad mass of women.⁸¹ Its first seminar concerning *Wanita Rumah-tangga* sought to draw in women who were not already active in the “revolutionary movement”. Women workers and women farmers were not included in the definition of *wanita rumah-tangga*. Those to be mobilized were the wives of the elite, wives of the middle-class [for example, of middle-level officials, middle traders and businessmen], wives of working-class men, the daily workers, small traders and the *kaum miskin* [the destitute].⁸² This recognition of the housewife must be seen in the context of the difficult economic climate, the arrangement of a program for the distribution of *sandang pangan* [food and clothing], and of the expressed desire of women’s groups to mobilise at a mass level in support of the government. But it must also be seen in the context of the prevailing gender relations in the society. *Gerwani* members, for example, were urged to defend and uphold the characteristics of womanliness which were defined as love of one’s husband and children, being the household manager, having suitable grooming, being unpretentious, and participating in the defence of women and children’s’ rights, and peace. In carrying out their organizational duties, *Gerwani* members were cautioned not to leave behind the duties of the household and the characteristics of womanliness.⁸³

⁷⁹ Sujatin was the Head of *Perwari*. The conference ran from 23–26 January. *Trisula*, 2 [February 1961], p.6. *Manifesto Politik*—Sukarno’s manifesto of political orientation [*Manipol*] outlined in a speech on 17 August 1959

⁸⁰ See *Api Kartini* [1959] and *Api Kartini* 10 [October 1964] for similar support from *Gerwani* for *Manipol*. And, also, the letter to President Sukarno from DPT *Gerwani*, Ponorogo: Pernyataan No.26/SEK/DPT/59—Dukung Demokrasi Terpimpin Idee Presiden R.I. *Arsip Nasional: Koleksi Kabinet Presiden R.I. 1950–1959. No.1475*.

⁸¹ *Harian Rakjat*, 24 February 1954. See also *Peraturan Dasar Gerwani 1954*.

⁸² *Api Kartini* [September 1964]. See also *Program Gerwani*, Disahkan oleh, Kongres Nasional ke-IV *Gerwani* di Djakarta tg. 14 s/d 17 Desember 1961, and, *Peraturan Dasar Gerwani 1961*.

⁸³ Meluaskan Aksi–Aksi untuk Memperkuat Tuntutan Hak–Hak Wanita–Anak–Anak dan Perdamaian’, *Laporan Nj. Umi Sardjono atasnama DPP Gerwani*.

Thus, although *Gerwani* from its second congress had become more vocal about and more focused on the rights of women workers, its underlying message was still similar to other secular organizations such as *Perwari*. It was the strength of cultural tradition which lay behind the acceptance by women leaders of both religious and secular organizations of legislation limiting women's work. The household, or more precisely, women's responsibility for the household continued as the cornerstone of the policies of all women's organizations, party political and non-party, even as all organizations had to redefine their role in line with the new political concerns of Sukarno's *Manifesto Politik*.

Emancipated women?

Women had begun the decade demanding that they be allowed to take their 'rightful place' in this new era because their responsibilities were equal to men. They believed they had shown their abilities in their contribution to the fight for independence, through the colonial period, the Japanese occupation and the revolution. And therefore the true meaning of independence could only be fulfilled through equality between men and women.⁸⁴ The constancy of the calls for improvement in the opportunities for women through improved education and training and the elimination of illiteracy was laudable. So too was the development at the beginning of the 1960s that women not be seen as 'victims'. The later, more inclusive focus for women's organizations which saw the role of the housewife recognised was an outcome of this development; in reality, it was also a continuation of the observations and goals of earlier struggles: the household as a woman's first duty. The call for equality for women was never unrestrained. It was circumscribed by divergent calls for women to be the moral guardians for themselves, and the whole of society. This placed an added burden on working-class women. At the beginning of the decade it was said:

Women's problems include women's consumerism and moral decadence amongst women. Women's role is to give birth and national education. And in this era of independence, women should also take part in solving political crises of cynicism as well as the crisis within the Government's apparatus—the bureaucracy.⁸⁵

Towards the end of almost twenty years of independence President Sukarno, in a speech to the tenth *Kowani* congress, proclaimed:

The Indonesian Revolution had also been a women's revolution because Indonesian women now have different thoughts, behaviour, interests and their outlook is different compared to and

⁸⁴ *Marhaen* [March 1952], p.14.

⁸⁵ *Marhaen* [15 April 1952], p.11.

with women's conditions in the olden times. [He also called on women]...to put aside cultural imperialism...high hairdo style, tight mini skirts, rock and roll...because they are unsuitable for the Indonesian woman...Freedom is responsibility to the country and fatherland...collectively *Kowani* has to have responsibility for today and for the future.⁸⁶

There were inherent tensions in elite activist women's search for their 'rightful place' and the position of all women in the new society. The ideal of the emancipation of Indonesian women is not borne out when one becomes aware of this tension revealed in the written commentaries and speeches of this more privileged group of women, and when the options for *all* women including the uneducated, the poor and working-class are considered.

A theoretical way to assess the reality of equal status is to list for this period of Indonesian women's history their life options. The variance between the reality and the ideal, intersecting though the two may be, can be identified. Janet Zollinger Giele considers that life options for women are "related to six major types of human activity" which may be used to assess the status of women "across societies despite vast differences in government, economy and the family".⁸⁷

The first life option concerns women's participation, to the extent enjoyed by men, in community decision making, voting, and the holding of property or public office. And as an outcome from this political process the question of whether important segments of the female population exhibit "clear signs of dissatisfaction or a sense of injustice compared with men" or whether "a social movement for women's rights is in progress". The second option concerns the differences in the autonomy of men and women to choose a marriage partner, the right to institute divorce proceedings, the social consequences for women if they are single or widowed. Are there, for example, restrictions on their movements beyond the family? The third relates to the equality of access to educational opportunities, the standard of the curriculum for girls and the level of educational attainment; the fourth raises the question of comparative rates of mortality and serious physical or mental illness between women and men and a women's right to limit conception and birth; the fifth touches on the contributions of women to religious

⁸⁶ Wanita Indonesia: Selalu Ikut Bergerak Dalam Barisan Revolusioner, *Amanat Presiden Sukarno pada upacara pembukaan kongres Ke-10 Kongres Wanita Indonesia, Djakarta 24 Djuli 1964* [Departemen Penerangan R.I.]. See the photograph from *Harian Rakjat* supporting the President's stance on the influence of "high hairdo styles" in Appendix II. The 'edict' against foreign influences of beehive hair and unsuitable clothing for women [and long hair for men] was supported by the Police Commander for Jakarta in an announcement of what was suitable and not suitable for public behaviour. *Harian Rakjat*, 23 September 1964.

⁸⁷ Janet Zollinger Giele, 'The Status of Women in Comparative Perspective', in Janet Zollinger Giele, Audrey Chapman Smock [eds.], *Women: roles and status in eight countries* [John Wiley and Sons: New York, 1977]. Zollinger Giele sees the indicators for women's emancipation as political expression; family formation, duration and size; education; health and sexual control; cultural expression, work and mobility. The information in the following section is taken from Zollinger Giele: preface and pp.1-31.

culture, the arts, or practical artefacts and inventions. Are women, asks Zollinger Giele, symbolically portrayed to be as valuable and worthy of respect as are men? The sixth and final option in the framework questions whether women are more deliberately restricted in their movements and in their participation in the labour force, and whether their occupations are on equal rank with men, their pay “roughly equivalent” and their leisure time the same.

The history of the struggle of Indonesian women to achieve emancipation is complex. It is undercut by relations with the colonial state and the new nation state, and intersected by religious, class and ethnic factors which often limited and influenced the pace and pattern of change. Using Giele’s life options simply provides a framework for evaluating successful outcomes from the hopes and aspirations of the leadership of women’s organizations of the period. And, of extending from that point our knowledge about dominant ideologies which were influential in the shaping of the life options of Indonesian women.

Clearly, Indonesian women enjoyed some of the life options articulated by Zollinger Giele. Equally clearly, some enjoyed a greater share of the options than others. In spite of the perseverance of many in the women’s movement, constitutionally guaranteed rights did not deliver up the emancipation that Vreede de-Stuers claimed to see in her study. Many activist women recognised this fact as the following ‘cry from the heart’ in the pages of *Api Kartini* attests:

*Wanita
Kami bukan lagi,
bunga padjangan,
jang laju dalam djambangan,
Tjantik dalam menurut,
indah dalam menjerah,
molek tidak menentang,
keneraka mesti mengikut,
kesorga hanja menumpang.*

*Kami bukan djuga,
bunga tertjampak,
dalam hidup terindjak-indjak.
Pendjual keringat murah,
buruh separoh harga.
Tiada berlindungan,
tiada persamaan,
sarat dimuati beban.*

*Kami telah berseru,
dari balik dinding pingitan,
dari dendam pemaduan,
dari perdagangan dilorong malam
dari kesumat kawin paksaan:
“Kami manusia”⁸⁸*

⁸⁸ Damairia, ‘Wanita’, *Api Kartini* [1959] nn, p.2. Translation provided in Appendix III.

The poet passionately rejected the life which had been seemingly ordained for Indonesian women: compliant, surrendering, following. She pin-pointed the issues which concerned women's organizations and for which they struggled: seller of cheap sweat, half-price labourer full of heavy burdens without protection or equality, resenting polygamy, prostitution and forced marriages. Many activist women demonstrated the same passion in their struggle for improvement in women's lives. But their passion was constrained by their role in the ideational politics of the day, and the struggle for equality became subsumed under the weight of dogmatism and of cultural traditions of which they were a part. Even the PKI's women's faction in parliament couched its demand for equality in politics and work within accepted ideas of gender difference:

Ada pula djawatan jang menutup seluruhnja beberapa djabatan umum untuk wanita, umpamanja di Djawatan Kereta Api kita tidak seorangpun kondektur wanita, tidak seorangpun kepala stasiun wanita...Apabila umpamanja seorang wanita djadi kepala stasiun, keluar masuknja orang-orang kestasiun akan lebih teratur, stasiun-stasiun tidak akan sekotor sekarang ini. Kalau dia menjadi kondektur pasti kebersihan dalam wagon-wagon Djawatan Kereta Api akan terdjamin, hygiene akan terpelihara...karena sifat wanita adalah pembersih dan tjinta keindahan. [There are positions closed to women in departments, in the DKA we do not have a woman conductor or station master...if a woman became station master the entry and leaving of people from stations would be more orderly, stations would not be as dirty as they are nowadays. If a woman became a conductor the cleanliness of the carriages would be guaranteed, the hygiene protected...because the characteristic of woman is as cleaner and lover of beauty/beautiful things].⁸⁹

The relationship between workers and the state, thorny and full of tension as it was for male workers, was different again for female workers. We have seen how the goals of the state for protection and control of women workers were signalled in the specific articles pertaining to women contained in the new Labour Law. These goals were supported by the women's movement. The history of the women's movement is, therefore, not separate from the history of women wage earners. They are interconnected and provide another strand of the historical narrative about the lives of Indonesian women.

In the historiography which concerns the lives of Indonesian women, rural women and politicised intellectual women have had greater prominence. Women in the urban workforce were subject to the same societal changes and stresses, yet, they are less documented. Their presence in the paid workforce was acknowledged by middle-class and elite activist women, if first at the rhetorical level, later by greater and more concrete

⁸⁹ Nj. Mudigdio, Nj. Setiati Surasto, Nj. Amir Sjarifudin, *Hak-hak politik wanita* [Jajasan Pembaruan: Djakarta, 1960], p.7.

attempts to improve working conditions. With their educational activities; sewing, cooking, hygiene hints for poor women, women's groups were manifestly "channels of useful information". The establishment of kindergartens and the running of cooperatives were concrete attempts to help all women.⁹⁰ And the seminars such as *Kowani* and *Gerwani* held to discuss the problems of labour were intellectual attempts to seek answers to the question of poor working conditions. That these efforts were not enough to effect widespread change for working-class women needs to be understood within the general political and economic condition of the day for women's groups operated within the same milieu as did the railway and maritime unions. But it must also be understood within the prevailing ideas on gender, and class, relationships. There were indeed many individual passionate, feminist challenges on issues such as marriage laws and equal pay, but no overall 'feminist challenge' by the women's movement. Within the women's movement, the acknowledgment of women's participation in the paid workforce, and the fight for better conditions for them at both the rhetorical and more concrete levels by women's organizations, was full of tensions which, at base, concerned representations of gender in the society. For women wage earners true equality thus remained elusive.

Conclusion

The postscript to the history of women workers and of the many individual women who argued their case so passionately was, like the railway and maritime workers, a culmination of the years of tension. Sujatin Kartowijono has written that *Perwari* was almost dissolved by the Government in 1964 because of *Gerwani* pressure.⁹¹ We can see from the photographic evidence that women were part of the heightened tension on the streets of Jakarta in the months and days leading up to September 30. They too had been part of the delegations to government officials and the American Ambassador, Jones.⁹² On October 3, some local level *Gerwani* branches voluntarily began to dissolve themselves. On October 19, *Kowani* expelled *Gerwani*

⁹⁰ But two examples of these efforts were: the *Taman Kanak Melati* [kindergartens] established by *Gerwani*: the first one in Jakarta in 1952 with the aim of "lessening the load of members and of attracting members". Initially the kindergartens were for members only and payment was required. By 1957, there were enough operating funds to pay teachers and the children were given a daily ration of milk. *Harian Rakjat*, 6 March 1957. *Perwari* ran a central cooperative to accept the finished articles made by women working from home. Roesiah Sardjono, 'Kedudukan Wanita dalam Lapangan Ekonomi'. Note: In Jakarta, in 1957, there were 43 kindergartens operated by a range of women's groups—*Perwari*, *Wanita Demokrat*, *Persit*, Catholic Women etc. Djawatan Penerangan Kotapradja Djakarta Raya, *Djakarta Dewasa Ini*, pp. 261–263.

⁹¹ Sujatin Kartowijono, *Perkembangan Pergerakan Wanita*, p.18.

⁹² Sri Ambar told Jones [that]: "women workers [are] very angry about their children because of the American imperialist books coming into Indonesia". *Harian Rakjat*, 1 January 1965. Note: Jones' term as Ambassador finished in May, 1965 when he was replaced by Marshall Green. In his book on his time in Indonesia, Jones couches his references to *Gerwani* in pejoratively gender related terms: [*Gerwani* women] were "feverishly active...adding their shrill voice to the PKI chorus...led by the ambitious Madame Suryadarma. Howard Jones, *Indonesia: The Possible Dream* [Gunung Agung: Singapore, 1980], p.165.

from the organization. Ironically the announcement was made by Hurustiati Subandrio who appealed to *Kowani* members not to 'invite' *Gerwani* members to participate in *Kowani* activities.⁹³ We may say ironically because in March of the following year the 'Indonesian Women's United Action Front' was formed to oppose *Kowani* because:

The *Kowani* headed by Mrs. Subandrio has shown its true colors. *Kowani* does no longer reflect the struggles of the Indonesian woman and thus has been set up [the United Action Front] which actively renders its assistance to ABRI...⁹⁴

In the burning and looting, and the excesses, which took place in Jakarta after 30 September, ordinary women on all sides suffered. Especial anger, however, was directed at the women of left-oriented groups such as *Gerwani*. Approximately 10,000 women from Moslem, Christian and PNI groups marched on November 8 in Jakarta. They called for the dissolution of the PKI and in particular *Gerwani*. Their banners demanded: 'Kick Subandrio from the Cabinet and Hang Ban-Dit'.⁹⁵ Many amongst the leadership—such as Umi Sardjono, Nj. Kartinah Kurdi and Nj. Salawati, were accused of being *PKI/Gestapu* leaders and suffered accordingly.⁹⁶ Of the mass of the membership—including women workers? A Jakarta-based American official commented almost thirty years later on the number of *Gerwani* members eliminated: "nobody really knew who they were. They just disappeared off the screen..."⁹⁷

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⁹³ USE, 22 October 1965. *The Indonesian Herald*, 29 October 1965.

⁹⁴ USE, 31 March 1966.

⁹⁵ American Embassy Djakarta, Telegram to the Department of State November 8 1965. *Asia and the Pacific National Security Files 1963–1969. 6001 Cables Vol. V October 1965–November 1965*. 'Ban-Dit' was an acronym for Subandrio and Aidit.

⁹⁶ USE, 22 October 1965.

⁹⁷ Kathy Kaldane, 'Interview with Jack Lydman, Former Deputy Chief of Mission, American Embassy Jakarta 1965', in *Briefing Book: Law and Political Liberty in Indonesia* [Indonesian Publications: Maryland, USA, 1994]. Extract from Indonesia News Service, No. 300–303, June 22 1991.

Conclusion

This study has looked first to the general measures ventured by the State to effect change in the lives of workers. It concludes that there were genuine attempts at seeking improvements and a true sensitivity to the plight of workers displayed. It argues, however, that the pro-labour policies of governments were never entirely unrestrained. They were limited by efforts to control workers and unions by the force of law.

After 1957, when the Army became more involved and the Government a major employer, pro-labour policies were less in evidence. Yet, unions and workers were still constrained by the measures which 'pro-labour' governments had successively kept in place to control the work force. Was it then, as Hasibuan has asserted, a failure on the part of unions to exercise their independence that led governments to seek control? Railway, maritime unions and women's organizations were ideologically engaged but they were more than just arms of their politically aligned labour federations. They were a sum of their parts, of the ordinary members whom they represented. It is this aspect of their history that this study has sought to bring to the surface. Their political character was not separate from the economic and social conditions of the nation. It was political precisely because of these conditions. The willingness to mobilize and to be mobilized suggestive of economic deprivation as well as ideology. That said, the 'control' of labour was as much partisan and part of the ideological fight as were unions and women's organizations. 'Independence' was not a disinterested judgement on the part of the State. Therefore, the efforts of the State to, on the one hand help, and on the other to control labour, were a critical aspect of the relationship between workers and the State.

The *hukuman djabatan* was an effective means of controlling the railway workforce. Combined with this the railway trade unions knew that sympathy—and support—from the general populace was needed if large-scale actions were to be carried out: shutting down the railways would have been counter-productive to their overall aim of improving the welfare of their workforce. And the national credentials of their employer, however much they might object to actions of the DKA/PNKA, was a factor in their restraint. The railways did not have a highly casualized workforce, but as workers on fixed-incomes—under the PGPN scales—railway workers were particularly hard-hit by inflation. In agitating for improvements—such as the provision of uniforms, increased food allowances, or a *capil* to protect against the sun—the SBKA and the PBKA sought to gain some relief for workers, especially for those on the lower-level wage scales. It may be concluded that within their chosen means the unions did win improvements for their members.

Maritime workers had a different working environment. Faced with an employer whom they could to a greater extent pressure because of its association with the colonial past—as the flagship of the former colonial power—they carried out larger and more frequent actions. Unions believed they belonged to a company with little sense of commitment to its workforce and this coloured their actions. Still, they sought arbitrated decisions within the system; their delaying tactics more the result of a sense of justice denied than ‘bloody-mindedness’. Through these actions the greater mass of the waterside workers including the casual workers of the *Unie-Kampong* and the *badjos* on the ships gained improvements even though their employers resisted change.

Trade union representation work for women also had its successes. Yet, while women workers were ‘comrades in arms’ with male workers often, as activists complained, notions of gender meant that ‘brothers in arms’ was the reality. The fact that many were aware of gender discrimination did not mean that it disappeared, for the majority of both female and male activists couched their demands within accepted ideas of gender roles. This was the reason that equal pay and greater access to work for women proved elusive.

Railway, maritime and women’s groups were aware of their own organizational weaknesses. This is clear in the calls for better record keeping and in the calls for more understanding of the plight of *buruh kecil*. And class was a factor for both men and women: it put distance between those ‘in charge’ and the mass of ordinary workers. Subianto from the SBPP warned that the involvement of officials at the ‘top’ of unions was detrimental to their proper functioning; *Perwari* and *Gerwani* that women cadre needed to put aside their class notions if they were to be more responsive to the needs of the working-class. Nevertheless, it was the left-oriented SBKA, SBPP and *Gerwani*—through the involvement of people who had come through the ranks, who were most able to articulate the needs of the *buruh kecil*.

The study shows that the welfare component of unions and women’s groups was always an important part of their representative work for their members. It was apparent even in the chaotic years of the revolution when unions and women’s groups sought to provide some amelioration of conditions and some dignity for workers. The provision of *kain putih* for burial purposes by the early *Fonds Kematian* of the SBKA providing a poignant reminder of need. What they themselves termed their *sosek* work was a core part of all groups. It was more evident for railway workers than for maritime workers and this was a function of the different working environments. The welfare work of the railway unions through the Dana Hindromartono, and the BSP/KWKA was not considered a panacea for the difficulties faced by workers—both of the unions were too clear-sighted to hold that view. The funds were, however, designed to provide a small measure of ‘safety net’: some level of comfort for workers in an uncertain world. The SBPP had a greater casualized and less-educated workforce to represent. The union

did carry out *sosek* work for its members but it appears to have relied on the arbitration process to act as the overall 'safety net'. After the 'sailing away' of its former major employer—the KPM—the workforce then came under control of the government and new working conditions began to come into force. Those in employ gained improvements in conditions but the majority—the casual workers—continued to find times difficult. Women workers in the railways and maritime workforces were eligible for membership in these funds, but for the wider number of women wage earners we looked to the efforts of women's organizations to be "channels of useful information" in order to overcome the particular difficulties faced by working women. In so doing it became evident that women's groups brought to their post-independence work on behalf of women continuity with the aspirations of women's groups during the colonial era, and that activist women argued passionately for improvement in the lives of women wage earners.

Were there advantages for the workers of Jakarta? All workers had begun the decade in a poor state. But certainly it appears that first efforts at relieving the poverty of workers began in the city. The study shows that improvements were made and this was to the efforts of all—governments, unions and women's groups. Such attempts were not confined to the workers of Jakarta, but the closeness to the centre did mean a greater concentration on their welfare. They were a visible reminder of the work which needed to be done. Nevertheless, attempts by the State to regulate working conditions and afford some protection for workers proved to be ephemeral. By 1965, twenty years on from independence, despite wage rises, legislation, a rapid increase in industrial representation, and a proclaimed commitment to their welfare on the part of successive governments, workers were still living on the edge; struggling to get the basic necessities for themselves and their families in order to survive. That improvements were whittled away by inflation cannot be said to be the fault of unions and workers. Did Jakarta's workers have more time to study and read newspapers? An answer to this question is beyond the scope of this study. They did however have unions to represent them and their closeness to the centre meant that Jakarta's workers were not apart from the colourful and conflict ridden history of their city.

It is not that those who survived from the PBKA, the other harbour worker's unions, or from the women's organizations did not deserve to. It is that those who lost, lost so badly. Those who survived were silenced about their history; they, and their unions, deserved more. Unions and women's groups carried out critical social/economic work for their members. The tragedy is that the story of the actions of left-oriented unions and women's groups such as the SBKA, SBPP, and Gerwani—unlike their colonial comrades whose deeds were deemed just in the cause of fighting the Dutch—are used only to frighten the working men and women of contemporary Indonesia: a warning of what will happen if Indonesia should choose that form of labour relations again. Their

struggles, triumphs and defeats are seen only through their communist connections and the vibrancy of their efforts both misunderstood and dismissed. It is the core argument of this study that the recounting of the histories of the railway and maritime unions and workers allows a better understanding of their place in the ideational politics of the day but it also allows a more complete understanding of their individuality. Although we cannot—in the same way—recount the individual history of one trade union for women workers, the history of women workers as a ‘group’ is a critical adjunct to the overall social and labour history of this period. For it is a history that has been little understood beyond the rhetoric of the equality of Indonesian women.

Nonetheless, the disunity, the mistakes and excesses on all sides; the subsuming of the language of the heart by the language of the spleen ensured that ‘divided we fall’ became the final page in the history of Indonesian workers and unions in the period. What this study has attempted to show is perhaps best summed up through the words of an Indonesian—the writer Goenawan Mohamad—himself part of the ideational politics of the ‘Old Order’ and, as well, silenced by the ‘New’.

[Imogiri] —And what should be saved from these giant carved stones—if indeed there is anything to be saved at all?
 —Memories perhaps—those things that appear to be of profound importance. For humans are special creatures—they remember. Death lies before them as a paradox: death means the road to eternity, yet also the threat of the destruction of memories. And we do not wish to forget nor to be forgotten. People write history.¹

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¹ Goenawan Mohamad, ‘History’, *Sidelines: Writings from Tempo, Indonesia’s banned magazine* [Hyland House: Victoria, 1994]. p.161. Translated by Jennifer Lindsay.

Appendix 1

Spoken lives

- The oral testimony from women themselves about their working lives provides us with the means to contextualize the historical data which we have: to fill in, as it were, some of the 'silences' and 'gaps in the historical data about the working class women of Jakarta. Whereas statistical surveys and written documents may not have been able 'to speak for' women wage earners in Jakarta participants in that period of history can.¹ In this case the passage of time has allowed the women a "perspective on events" which, in a younger, busier and for most a more difficult period of their lives, in what Anthony Seldon refers to as "the very recentness of the episode" they may not have had.² The benefits of oral history are many, the caveat must be that interviews may have limitations: of memory; of unrepresentative sampling and of the nature of the interviewing exercise itself. There is the possibility that accounts might vary between interviews.³ For all of these reasons, there is no claim that the stories are 'typical'. They belong as individual stories to each woman and to her alone.⁴ The stipulation was for all of the women to have had a period of wage work in Jakarta during the 1950s or early 1960s.

The women were asked to speak to questions concerning their working lives in order that what remains of the written - documentation might be illuminated. They did so with grace and a willingness which was humbling. Their responses indicate that even with the efforts of mass organisations to be 'channels of useful information' the struggle for most women to survive and the necessity of their support for their families militated against

¹ Cf. Tom Nossiter, 'Surveys and Opinion Polls', in Anthony Seldon [ed.], *Contemporary History: Practice and Method* [Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1988], p.56.

² Anthony Seldon, 'Interviews', in Anthony Seldon [ed.], *Contemporary History*, p. 6.

³ *Ibid.*, p.6.

⁴ Cf. Walter L. Williams, *Javanese Lives: Women and Men in Modern Indonesian Society* [Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, 1990]. Preface.

their involvement. The majority worked because they must: personal wish could not be a consideration. The majority were also heads of households, unrepresented in many surveys, but vital to their own and their families survival.

Ibu K

Ibu K was born in Pandeglang [West Java] and came to Jakarta as a child of three in 1928. She is seventy years old. She was educated at a HIS [*Hollandsch Inlandsche School*] school to class 6 and speaks Dutch fluently. Married in 1941 to a teacher at a SD school [primary] she lived in Pisangan Baru, Jakarta. Three children were born but only one, a son, is still living. The others died young. Her first experience of wage work was at the *Dieng* cigarette factory in Kramat where she operated a manual cutting machine for the tobacco leaves. Her wage was very small, about Rp.100 per month. She did not feel her wage was suitable because it was not in accordance with her education so she found other employment at a foreign-owned business, the *Merbabu Bedrijven* factory, which produced foodstuffs such as bread, syrup and sausages. A government licence was required to bake bread and this meant it was very expensive. Therefore, only those with money—usually foreigners—could afford the factory's products. Her job was take orders from the [generally] Dutch buyers, and for this she received a wage of Rp.125 per month. Then the Japanese came to Jakarta. This was a time of disorder: houses around hers were burnt and she was afraid so she moved to Cirebon to live with her husband's family.

Bu K moved back to Jakarta after the Japanese were defeated but her husband stayed in Yogja in the military. On her return to Jakarta, because she was classified as a war victim she received aid in the form of a little money and rice. She then became a rice trader in the market with some of her relatives. From this they obtained enough to *hidup pas-pasan* [just enough to live and survive]. In 1945 after she had her second child she obtained work in the statistics department of a foreign firm [BVM—*Bataviaasch V. Maatschappij*] operating in the transport sector. There she recorded the daily statistics on the quantity of gasoline used; the number of kilometres travelled and the amount of money taken by the firm's vehicles. Her working conditions at this firm were good. In addition to her monthly wage which was sometimes as large as Rp.175 per month with overtime, she received a food allowance, sickness subsidy and a yearly *Lebaran* payment. As well, her wage was evaluated every three months. She performed this clerical work for approximately eight years.

It was during this time that her husband returned to Jakarta with another wife. She divorced him. This was an action which Bu K now regrets because life was very difficult. At her work Bu K was transferred to a telephonist position which had higher status than her previous position and where, because she was a fast learner, her wage

was Rp.200 per month. Bu K recalls that ones capacity for work and how many years you had worked for the firm were important for promotion. She was moved to the central administration section a position she desired. There she worked with six others—Eurasians and Indonesians. The majority of the firm's Chinese workers were cashiers. During this period Bu K married a workmate [Note: this is something she declined to speak about]. In 1957 she had another child and, because company policy at this time was to reduce its workforce, she had to leave her position. She states she left of her own accord with a three months salary severance payment. She did not belong to a union nor did she join a political party. She now lives in her own house, bought with her own money from her work, and from selling jewellery. Over the years her social activities have revolved around her Monday and Thursday *pengajian* [Koran recitals].

Ibu R.

Ibu R came to Jakarta at the age of fifteen from Soreang. [near Bandung] She is 87 years old and has had almost no schooling. [She started at an Arabic school but this was discontinued]. Ibu R has been a washerwoman all her working life: under the Dutch, the Japanese occupation and now in the time of the Republic. She has worked for employers from Holland, England, Japan, Australia and America. At the time of her interview she was still working and relying on charity to get by. She married when she was eighteen and had one child who later died. Life, particularly under the Japanese, was extremely difficult because she had no relatives. To keep starvation at bay she ate tubers, cassava, corn or anything she could come by. Her clothes were made from rubber or hessian. She recalls, however, that during the 1950s because she worked for foreigners, she did not have to queue for rice as did many other wage earners. She has never joined a union or any other organisation, never seen a film, nor has she ever received a subsidy of any kind from the state or *kelurahan*. Her wages as a washerwoman now are between Rp.3,000–Rp.5,000 every time she works. But she has not had work for a month because people see her as an old woman and think that she cannot do the work. Now other people help her, for example, at *Lebaran*. Apart from work her only activity has been *pengajian* on Tuesdays and Saturdays. The *Jaman Merdeka* period has been just ordinary—neither happy or sad, but she has had a long life and been healthy. She has only one ideal—to make the *haj*. She would like to go with legal money. [Note: This is a reference to the growing cost and extra payments which have to be made to make the *haj*].

Ibu E

Ibu E is 71 years old. She is Sundanese. Born in Subang in 1924 she married in 1939, and in 1941 had her first child. She subsequently gave birth to six other children, five of whom are still living. She was educated at a HIS school to class 3. She

continued her education at the *Sekolah Kepandaian Putri* in Matraman, Jakarta, and finished in 1938. On her marriage she moved back to Subang where, in 1944, in order to meet the needs of her household she took work as a daily worker in an embroidery factory with approximately 40-50 employees. Each worker received 50 cents for every flower finished and it was possible to finish only three per day. She knew that the business made a lot of money because the product was sent overseas. She knew she was paid too little for her efforts and after one year her husband said she must leave because it was better to be at home looking after the children than earning such a small amount. However she had to work because her husband's pay was not enough and she took work as a small trader. Moreover, her husband, who belonged to the *Serikat Buruh* of the PNI, joined the struggle during the revolution and was subsequently involved in the militia during the 1950s. Because of this she had to carry the load for the family.

During the revolution she queued to buy rice, if she had not, she recalls, they would have starved to death. She remembers rice cost twenty five cents a litre, kerosene three cents a litre and the family wore clothing made from rubber. Bu E moved to Jakarta in 1958 after the death of her husband. Life, she recalls, had been hard in Subang, but it was better than Jakarta. During this period Ibu E received a money payment of Rp.200 per month from the *mandor* at her husband's former work. From her own efforts and with the help of her husband's brother her children were able to have an education to SMR [elementary school] and SMP [junior high school], and even to business college. The children studied in Bandung and Bogor and Ibu E sent them rice to keep them going.

The only work she was able to get was as a small trader: sometimes she obtained work for a small wage but there were too many people trying to earn money. She joined an *arisan* [the rotating credit association] and this helped her to get by and to meet with other women. She often took opportunities as a middleman between ordinary people and the pawnshop. She feels she was far more sympathetic and more helpful to ordinary people because she understood the difficulties under which they lived. In 1965 because of the PKI life was hard, but one of her children was very brave and stopped 'them' burning down her house. A lot of people evacuated to the forest, and to her *kampung* in Subang: innocent people were victimised but she would prefer not to speak of those times as they were too hard. Now she has a house provided by one of her children and she attends *pengajian* every Monday. [Note: The connection of Ibu E's late husband with the PNI union may have been a factor in the difficulties with the PKI. For her part Ibu E claimed no party affiliation.]

Ibu W

Ibu W was born in Purbalingga [Central Java]. She is 58 years of age. Bu W has ten children all of whom are still living. She graduated from a teachers training college [SGB—*Sekolah Guru Bantu*] which produced second-class teachers. The

education was equivalent to SMP schooling plus one more year. Before moving to Jakarta in 1959 Bu W taught at a Chinese school in Pekalongan, Central Java. Here she was well paid. She came to Jakarta to follow her husband, who was jobless, and who had decided to move to Jakarta for a better life. The first year of living in Jakarta was terrible. Her husband was not working and she could not get work as a teacher because of government financial problems. New teachers were not being hired. Another reason for her being unable to find employment as a teacher was to do with government plans to stop people moving to Jakarta. She needed to wait a year to prove to the Department of Education that she had indeed moved to follow her husband, and she was then appointed to a school in Jatinegara in East Jakarta in a slum area.

During the first year when they were both without work they supported their family with the help of relatives, and through the sale of jewellery which Bu W had bought out of previous wages. Life was extremely difficult as she had a higher wage in Pekalongan; the atmosphere was better and she was closer to her family. In Jakarta she was without any social support in the way of welfare such as clinics. Further, to teach in Jakarta she was required to do another course called the SPG [*Sekolah Pendidikan Guru*] which was the equivalent of SMA schooling [senior high school].

As a teacher Bu W was paid a monthly salary which was very low: not enough to support the family. She received no *Lebaran* payment. She recalls that sometimes "incentives" were received which were small. She did not know about the labour laws and she believes most teachers were the same. They were too busy with attempts to support the family independently. It is Bu W's recollection that people generally during this period were more individualistic because they were busy with their endeavours to get money in order to support their families. Many teachers left the school for better paid work outside teaching, and many divorces happened amongst teachers because of the social conditions. Some teachers, she remarked, even turned to prostitution just in order to support the husband and the family. If their husbands found out they divorced them. To support her family she grew cassava trees and other vegetables: the cassava trees grew rapidly and its leaves could be harvested every day and its roots eaten as well. Those who had no land grew their vegetables in small pots. Sometimes she received money from her parents but she thought she should face all of her problems because it was her decision to work in Jakarta.

Although many teachers had to rent accommodation she was lucky. She occupied an empty house which was believed to be inhabited by a ghost. She lived there free of rent until she moved to a house provided by her uncle. For Bu W the move from Central Java to Jakarta was culturally very difficult. There was an image amongst the *Betawi* [the original inhabitants of Jakarta] people that Javanese like her were unreligious compared to the *Betawi* although her Islamic education in primary school eased the situation. As she could recite the Koran she was accepted by the *Betawi* community

where she lived. Bu W took the opportunity to educate illiterate women while at the same time she spread her networks for economic purposes: in order to support her family and to supplement her teaching income she could sell goods such as *batik*, food etc. to the women.

Teachers in Jakarta, like others throughout Indonesia, had to join the *Persatuan Guru Republik Indonesia* [PGRI]. Bu W did not join the PGRI NV. [Note: This was the union formed by the communist party after its attempts to take over the PGRI at the beginning of 1960]. She was uninvolved in political or social activities connected with the union primarily because she did not have the time. A related reason however was the high price of transport which kept teachers at home. Bu W knew other teachers, most of whom were poor, who joined the PGRI NV. According to her friends who joined, the activities were much more interesting than those of the PGRI: art activities, *sastra*, *gamelan*, meetings etc. Bu W believes this was because of the support given by the party. Those that joined were given promises of promotion in their work and as leaders in the union. She remembers that those who joined had no better education than others in the PGRI.

Ibu A

Ibu A was born in Semarang. She is 66 years of age. Bu A is well educated and her father was an architect in Yogja. While she was studying at the Department of Technical Education she took work as a teacher at a STM [Middle Industrial School] in 1954. In 1957 she received her *Sarjana Muda* [Bachelor of Science] and joined the civil service. She was well paid: Rp1,000 per month plus incentives of Rp.125 each month. For her lifestyle as a single woman this salary was quite high.

She moved to Jakarta in 1959 after she was married. In Jakarta she took work in the same department only in a different section, the *Balai Penelitian Industri* [Industrial Research Workshop]. She was the only woman working in her department but this did not concern her as she felt it helped the department to have a woman's touch. She could play a *wasit* [mediating] role. She needed both physical and intellectual ability for her position as a researcher in the chemical laboratory and she received a *tunjangan keahlian* [an incentive payment] of Rp.300 per month for her special skills. She did not receive other incentives such as a *Lebaran* payment. Her working hours were Monday to Saturday from 8.00 am to 2.00 pm. If she worked overtime she was not paid extra. Even though her wage was the same as in Yogja, the higher cost-of-living and Jakarta's lifestyle meant their income was just enough. It was common at this time that people borrowed rice from friends. She was too busy with her work and family to be involved in any organisations at this time, although she sometimes tried to teach sewing to the lower workers and was involved in motherhood activities such as cooking and trying out new recipes.

In her department there were two kinds of positions—structural and functional. In the structural position a worker had more jobs to do, such as to entertain guests from overseas. She did not want this higher position because she believed it had no relevancy to the job and was not particularly appropriate for Indonesian women. The lowest level of job in her department was messenger which was level 1 on the civil service scale. These workers were uneducated, or had only SD education, and it was their duty to wash equipment or to fulfil staff requests. They faced many difficulties in their lives, and her department quite often gave them leave from their tasks to see to their children. She believes divorce was higher amongst this group compared to the middle and upper levels.

Bu A continued to work in Jakarta until 1961 when she was transferred to Bandung. She moved back to Jakarta in 1985 as Director of Information Service for the Government Electricity Company. Her education and ability have enabled her to do very well but she believes that women government workers were luckier in her period than now. When she finished her job at 2.00pm she still had time for her family now women do not finish until 4.00pm. [Note: On her work at PLN Bu A had interesting observations to make on the role of women in contemporary Indonesia. In the PLN a woman worker had no right to receive a family subsidy because she was considered to be single. Bu A thought this unfair. Women were also seen as incapable of doing men's work, since women had their *kodrat*. The PLN divided jobs into *otot* [muscle] and *ketelitian* [carefulness]. *Otot* for men and *ketelitian* for women. Administration tasks were given to women and to men tasks which used machinery. She did not agree with this stereotype].

Ibu I

Ibu I was born in Gresik, East Java, where her family owned a plantation. They also had a salt-making business. Bu I is 60 years old. Members of her family died in a Japanese internment camp, and during the revolution she and her mother [along with hundreds of others] marched to find shelter in Java. Her mother lent her plantation to the Army to be used as a military base. It is still occupied by members of ABRI and her family have been trying unsuccessfully for more than thirty years to have it returned to them.

When the war was over she moved to Jakarta and completed junior high school. Her family first lived in *Jalan Sabang* then they moved to *Kebayoran Baru*, the new satellite city close to the centre of Jakarta. During her study she worked as a ticket seller in a famous cinema in the city. Her wage was enough to support herself as a single woman. With her typewriting skills she was able to obtain work as a casual daily worker in SIAT [The Department of Logistics of TNI]. Casual work suited her because her family was rich. Bu A married and had three children and during this period went to work for *Buptan*, a national tin company. In fact she had her third child two years after

starting work at *Buptan*. She remembers her working conditions as being rather better than a woman neighbour who worked as a manual worker. Her conditions, she recalls, were very poor. In the Jakarta of these times support from richer people for poorer people was a pattern. Because she had more than enough daily food, she sometimes helped, particularly by giving canned milk for babies. In her opinion solidarity amongst people was much higher compared to the situation in Jakarta now. Bu I believes that many women had a *nerimo* concept [accepting/giving up] and this was a reason why they never complained to the company.

She had never heard about the trade union until a friend encouraged her to join. Her friends told her that the SBTI—*Serikat Buruh Timah Indonesia*, [Note: her workplace trade union, affiliated with the SOBSI and through that the communist party] would support her promotion so she registered. Although she never paid any annual contribution. However, she was amongst the workers who had to leave their jobs after the destruction of the communist party because they were registered members of a proscribed organisation. She had to sign a piece of paper saying that she resigned and was given no compensation. The Government classified her as a C4 [communist level 1V] but she considers herself lucky they did not put her in prison. She is still very angry about this case.

Ibu S

[Note: Ibu S was not in the paid workforce. However, her position in the IWKA, and her recollection noted in Chapter II that the PNKA was always *menakut-nakuti* people to join the PNKA provide important background information. As well, the IWKA was one of the women's groups acting as "channels of useful information"]. Ibu S came to Jakarta with her husband who worked in the traffic section of the DKA. She has had ten children, six of whom are still living. Before moving to Jakarta her husband was a station master who worked on the railways under both the Dutch and the Japanese. As the wife of a man with a high position in the DKA she was active in IWKA [*Ikatan Wanita Kereta Api*] until her husband's retirement. She was involved in the conferences of the organization and once held a position as a branch secretary. She recalls that, unlike *Darma Wanita* now, the organization was not based on the level of one's husband, but on achievement and activity: the wife of an official was usually only a patron. IWKA was formed to provide support for the economic and social life of the DKA 'family'. It covered education and the management of the railway mess. Management of the mess helped increase the income of IWKA because they had charge of the canteen, and from the proceeds they were able to establish kindergartens and schools.

Membership of the IWKA comprised wives of white-collar workers and women white-collar workers. In fact, all wives including wives of *buruh kasar* were able to join IWKA. According to its constitution the organization was to become a bridge

between women of all levels. They had monthly meetings involving *arisan* activities; to sell things—such as food, which had been made by the women themselves; or the selling of *batik* on behalf of the Central Java region. This *batik* could be bought on instalments.

The majority of the women who worked in the DKA were secretaries. Their educational level in general was SD. In the opinion of Bu S if a woman worker's husband joined a trade union she also joined and in general this was the PBKA. Every year from the IWKA conference proposals were given to the PBKA to improve the life of workers. One successful proposal was that widows were to be given free rail travel; this began in 1955. Another was the maternity leave of three months for women workers available since 1965. IWKA also helped with aid to the families of *buruh kecil* when there was a fire in their *asrama*.

Bu S remembers that the wages paid by the DKA were very small and not all *pegawai* were given housing, although there was an *asrama* for the *buruh kecil*. However, the majority of this group still had no housing. Those unable to find a place built on empty land owned by the DKA. The IWKA often helped their children to find work, or let them help in the IWKA kiosk as a 'sales clerk' [*pramuniaga*]. Wives of the *buruh kecil* usually cooked food or opened a *warung* to earn money. When there were holidays such as the annual celebration of the DKA, or religious holidays, children and mothers arranged dance and *gamelan* activities. In the programme children of *pegawai* usually competed for an interesting prize. Celebrations such as these were a means for *pegawai* to come together. It is her recollection that almost 50 per cent of *pegawai* had no understanding of the labour laws and as a result they did not 'demand'.

* * * * *

Appendix II

Photographs.

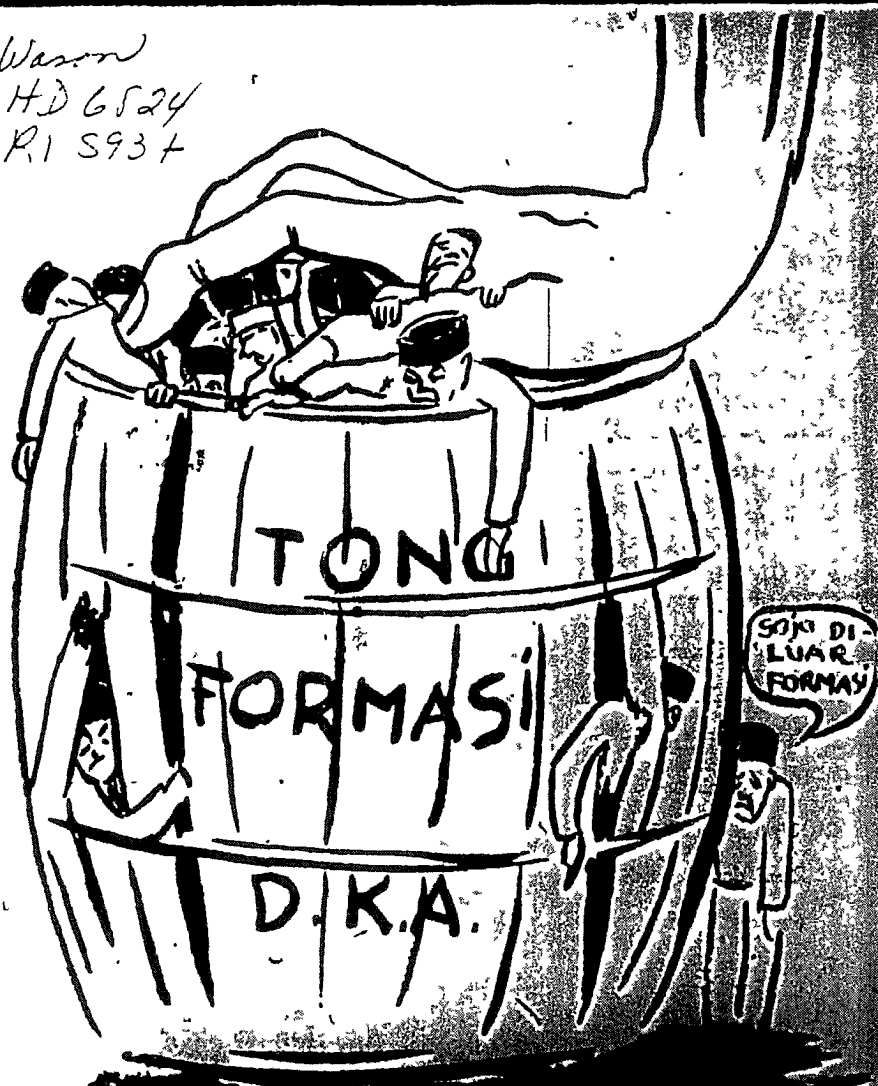
1. Golongan Boeroeh adalah Tiang Masjarakat Indonesia.
Suara SBKA 30 [April 1955].
2. Formasi in the DKA.
Suara SBKA [September 1954].
3. The SBKA and Pensions.
Suara SBKA 60 [February 1953].
4. 'Emir' Koesna Poeradiredja and the KBSI/PBKA.
Suara SBKA 32 [May 1955].
5. R.H. Koesna Poeradiredja.
PBKA Laporan Kerdja 3 Tahun 1955-1958.
6. Inside Unie-Kampong.
7. " " " " " "
8. Nama Saya Koeli Pelabuhan.
9. Buruh Pelabuhan, Tanjung Priok.
Mimbar Indonesia Nomor Kerdja [May 1948].
10. Buruh Pelabuhan.
Harian Rakjat, 20 September 1964.
11. On the Modern Production Line.
12. The agar-agar Factory.
13. " " " "
Indonesia 3, 4 [1958].
14. Trade Union Tasks in the Fight Against Colonialism.
SUA File, E183/77/184.
15. Presiden Sukarno Membuka Tahun Viveré Pericoloso.
Harian Rakjat, 19 August 1964.
16. Woman With Beehive Hair Do.
Harian Rakjat, 23 August 1964.
17. Women on the Streets of Djakarta.
Harian Rakjat, 15 August 1965.
18. Massa Kaum Buruh Djakarta.
Harian Rakjat, 14 August 1965.
19. Demonstrasi Djakarta.
Harian Rakjat, 30 September 1965.

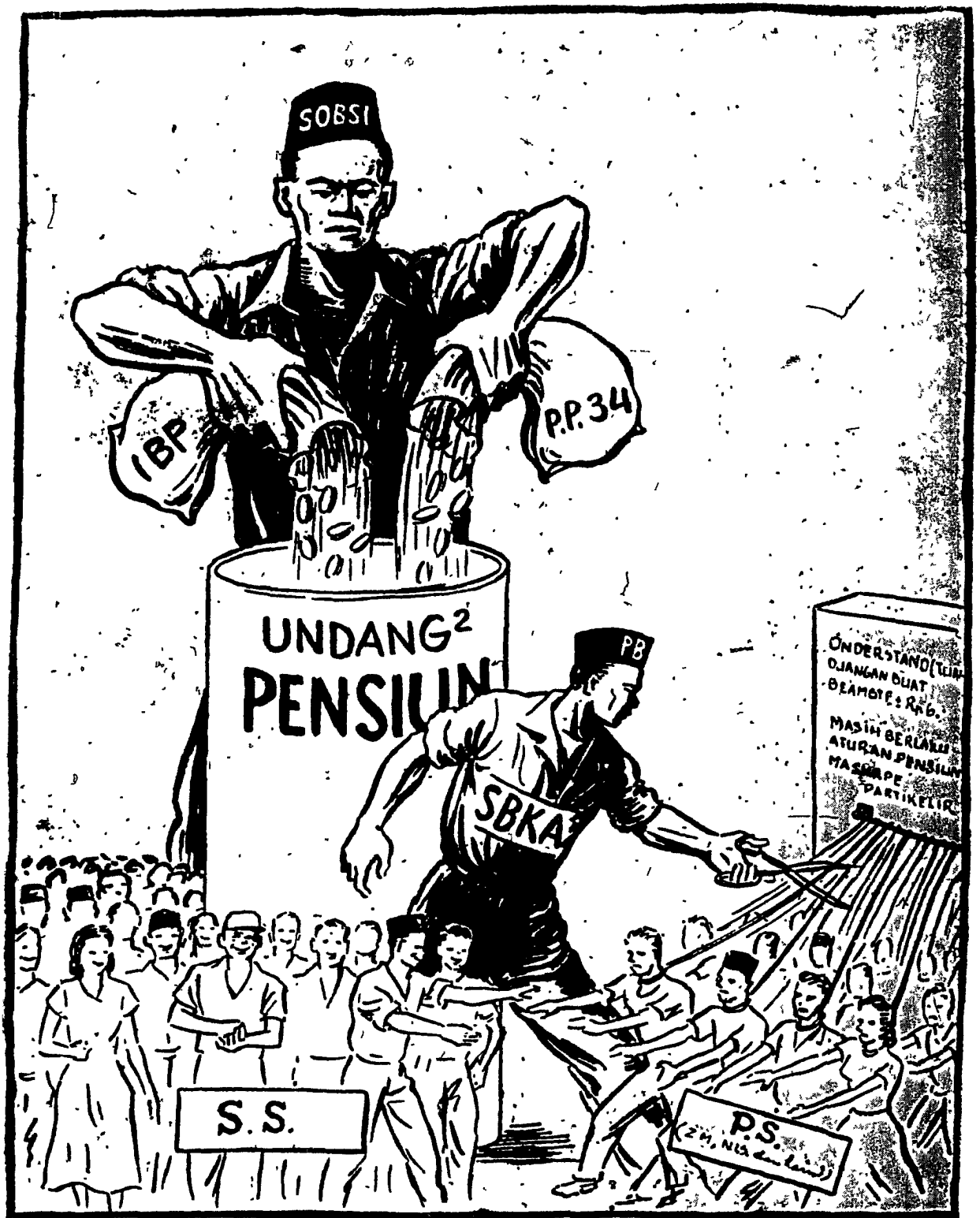
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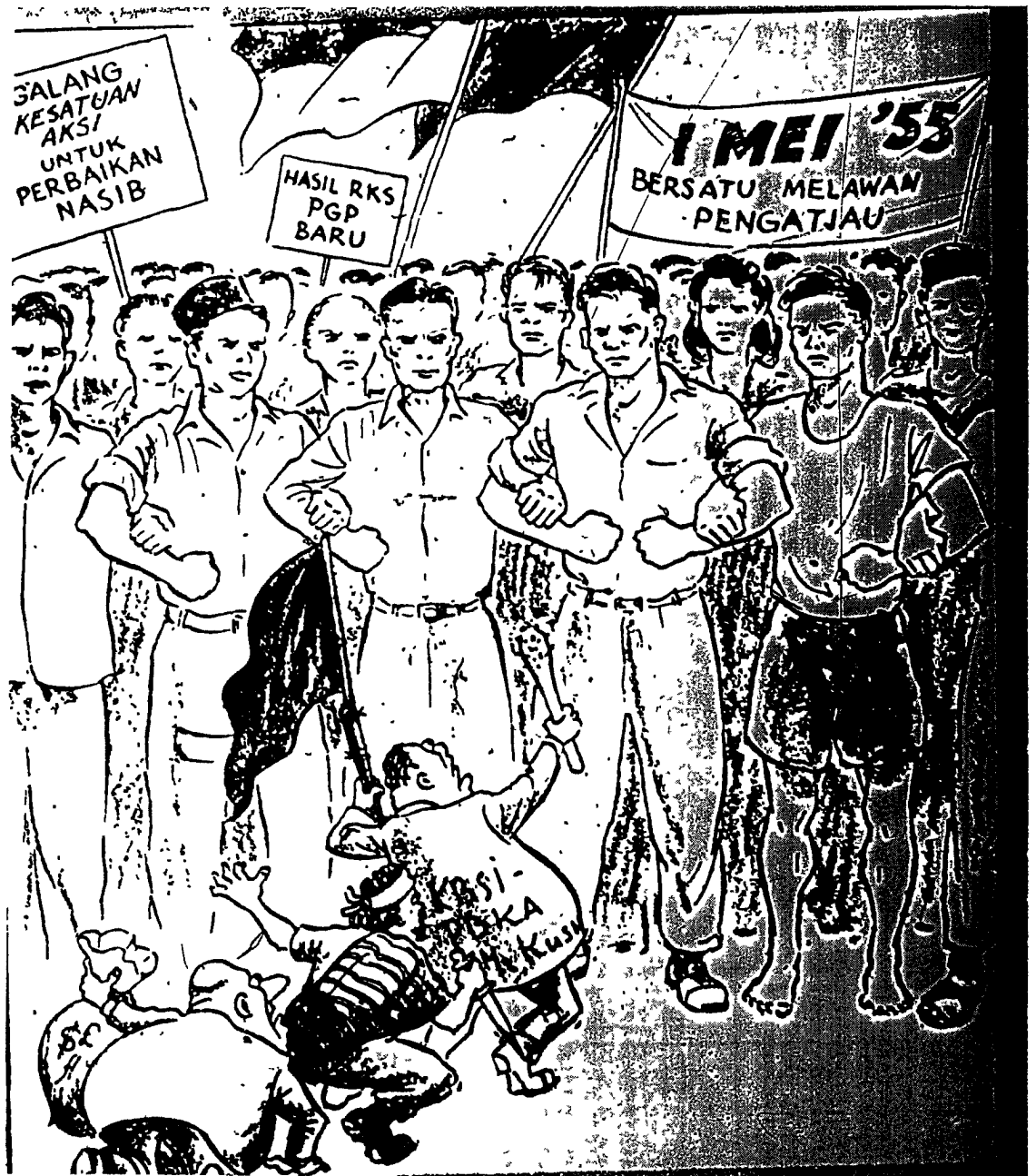


Para peserta kongres bergambar bersama-sama. Baris kedua dari muka (duduk) mulai nomer 3 dari kiri adalah SINGGIH, sekarang S.U. I DPP SBKA, S. HADISUMARTONO, sekarang anggota Dewan Pusat Pleno SBKA, almarhum ASMODIHARDJO, almarhum Mr. HINDROMARTONO, Mr. SAMIJONO, sekarang pegawai tinggi Kementerian Perburuhan dan paling kanan adalah ABDULAH, Referendaris Badan Perundang-undangan Balai Besar DKA.

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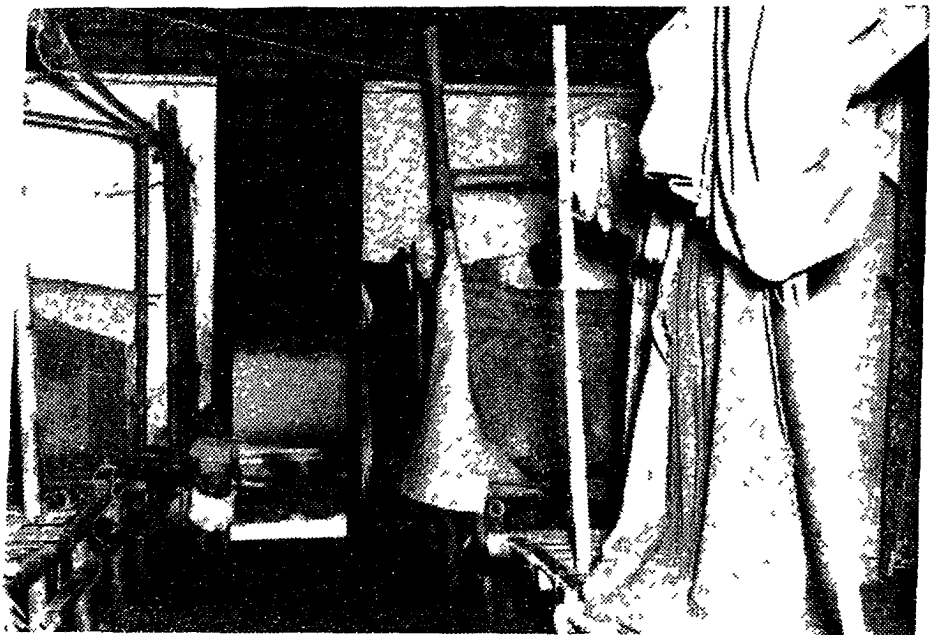








Keua Unium
Sdr. Mr. H. Koesna Poeradinedja

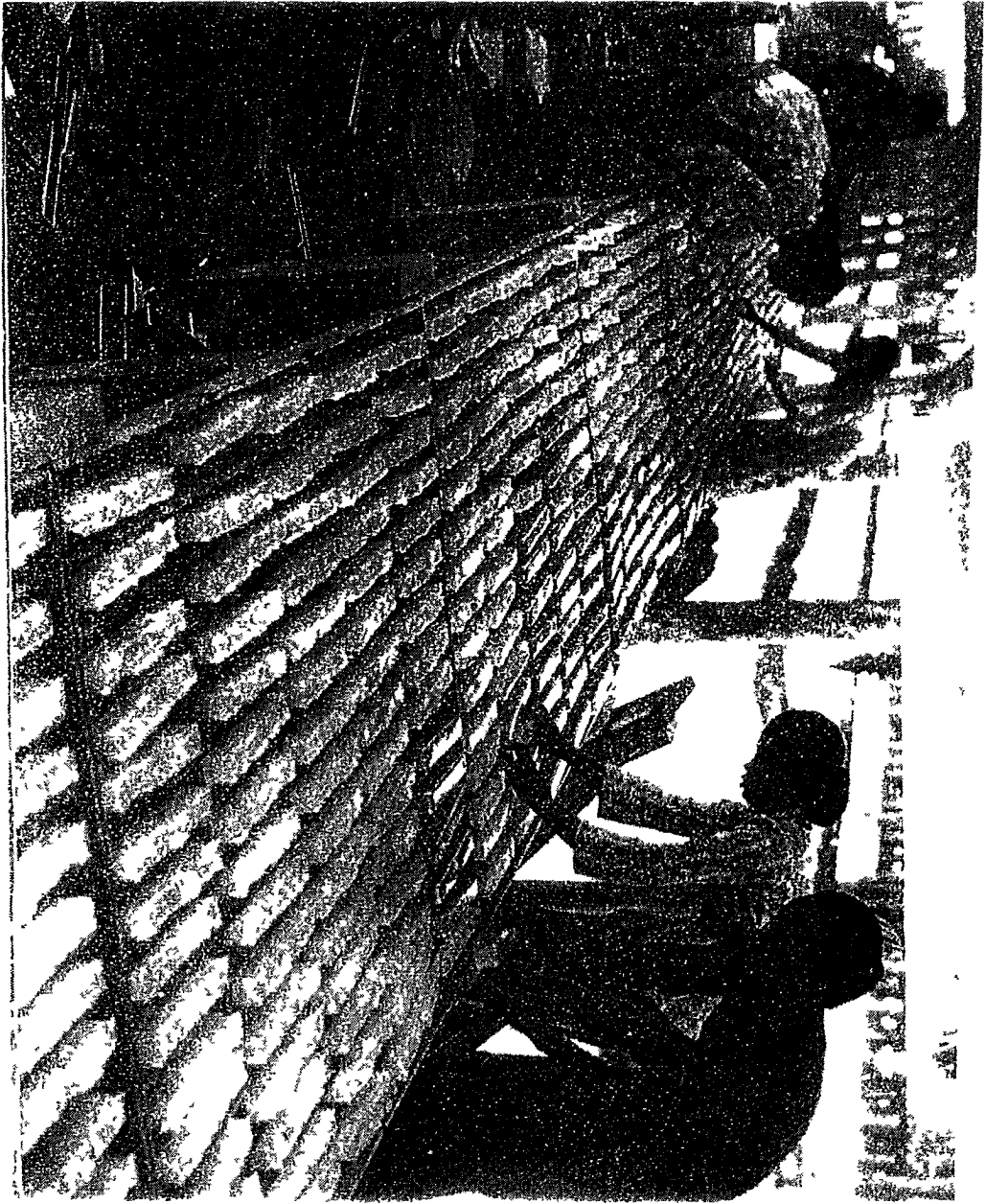








THE LIQUID IS POURED OUT INTO
MOULDS.





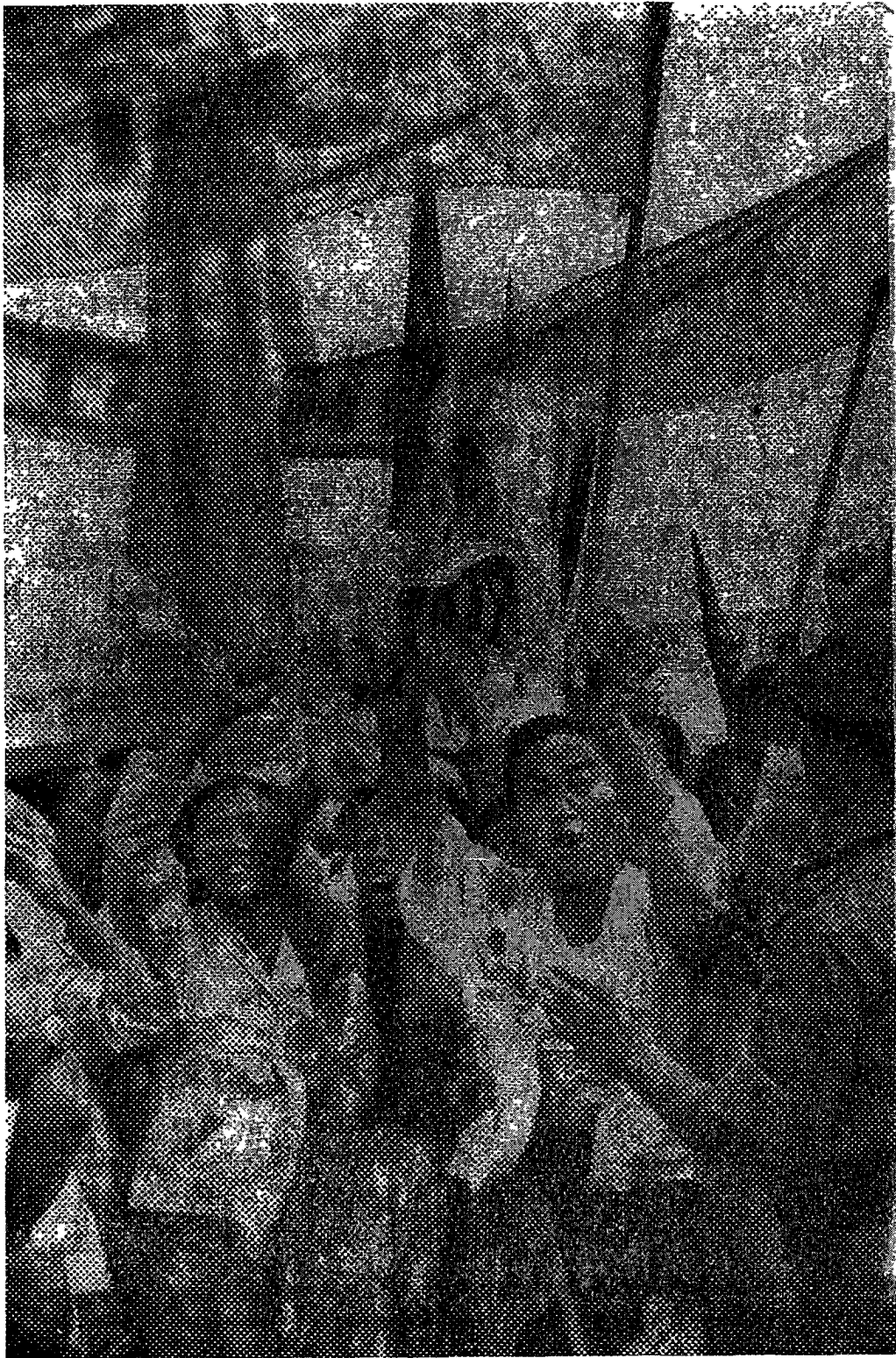
1. S. A. Dange (on the left) with two other Indian delegates.
2. Sudanese delegates ask a delegate from the C.D.R. for an explanation of some of the photographs of Leipzig which were among their collection of delegates' documents.
3. Indonesian delegates in front of the Congress hall.
4. Congress ends in a burst of enthusiasm.
5. A session is finished; the delegates leave.
6. During an interval. Discussions take place and signatures are exchanged.
7. The Egyptian delegates follow the proceedings of the Congress closely.







11 HAWKES







Appendix III

Women

**We are no longer,
a flower arrangement,
wilting in a vase,
compliant,
surrendering
pretty not defiant
must follow to heaven
or to hell.**

**We are also not flowers,
to be thrown out,
to be trampled upon in life.
Sellers of cheap sweat,
half price labourers.
No protection,
no equality,
full of heavy burdens.**

**We have shouted,
from behind secluded walls,
from resentment of polygamy,
from the trade in prostitution,
from the hatred of forced marriage:
“We are human beings”**

*** * * * ***

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