

History Wars – Indonesian Independence: Australia’s Involvement

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Introduction, aims and objectives

In the highbrow Dutch newspaper, *Handelsblad* (22 December, 2009), academics Adriaan van Dis, Nelleke Noordervliet and Geert Mak et al contend: “though the Netherlands is officially still of the opinion that Indonesia gained its Independence in December 1949, that Indonesians themselves think differently about this. Moreover, the Netherlands has, over the past 60 years, followed a particular storyline that entailed a denial of the Indonesian Republic and the Netherlands right to military might to regain sovereignty of the archipelago”. The *Handelsblad* researchers challenged newspaper readers to confront this revisionist quandary and issue a reply. All told, 77 persons responded; and while these could never be considered a ‘random sample’, an interesting theme did emerge in their rejoinders. Arguably, fashioned like a pact, many respondents noted they would agree to a change in the date for Independence from 1945 to 1949, if Indonesians were willing to acknowledge the human rights abuses visited on physically and mentally depleted Dutch ex-internees and Prisoners-Of-War from Japanese concentration camps, that characterised the Bersiap (stand prepared) period. Notably, this is a view also typically expressed by Netherlands East Indies (NEI) Dutch Australian migrants who suffered the Bersiap period. The ‘Bersiap’ -‘stand prepared’ period -is roughly defined- as from September 1945 into 1946 and it occurred mainly on Java. It is when young freedom fighters (*pemuda*), aged between 15-25, and generally described as the ‘extremist’ or ‘radical’ elements of the movement went on gruesome killing rampages targeting the Dutch or anyone Indonesian, Eurasian, British, Japanese considered pro-Dutch.¹ Japan’s capitulation saw these radical *pemuda* incite Sukarno and Hatta into declaring Indonesian Independence. Sukarno’s declaration foreshadowed the demise of the NEI as a Dutch colony and the emergence of the modern Indonesian state.² The interpretation of past representations and understandings of this period by young *Handelsblad* academics when compared to the experiences expressed by my NEI informants might well attract the descriptor present-day Dutch history wars! More important to this study is the power gap that followed the Japanese surrender since made it possible for a ‘culture of violence’ to emerge. This a view shared by Nelson Mandela who notes how violence

¹ Coté, Joost (2005) Memory and history, community and nation: telling the story of the Indisch Dutch in Australia, in Cote, Joost and Westerbeek, Loes (eds), *Recalling the Indies: colonial culture and postcolonial identities*, pp. 9-27, Aksant, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; U. Bosma, R. Raben and W. Willems, *De geschiedenis van Indische Nederlanders* (Amsterdam 2008). No official census of the European population in the Dutch East Indies at the beginning of the Japanese occupation exists, most calculations go back to the last colonial census of 1930. Again Imhoff et als research provides some reasonably firm figures: they note this census listed 283,000 persons classified as ‘European’ of which 87 percent were Dutch Europeans. Of these, 74 percent were born in the Netherlands Indies. Based on a range of sources and to some degree on estimations, the authors conclude the primary Indisch Dutch community, that is, those Dutch nationals who Pauawere in the Dutch East Indies in 1946, amounted to 288,000.

² J.A.A Van Doorn. *De Laatste eeuw van Indië* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij, Bert Bakker, 1994); H. Th. Bussemaker. *Bersiap! Opstand in het paradijs: de Bersiap-periode op Java en Sumatra 1945-1946* (Zutphen: Walburg Press, 2005).

frequently takes root in the absence of democracy, respect for human rights and good governance the history in this chapter is certainly an example of his vision!³

History has recorded that the Netherlands formally recognised Indonesian sovereignty at the Dutch Indonesian Round Table Conference in 1949. However, the extent of the bloodbath - on both sides – that preceded this event - is a significantly less known fact.⁴ Photographer and author, Jan Banning describes East Asia as one of the most brutal killing-grounds of WWII and its aftermath. He also asserts that the Dutch survivors of prison camps - administered by the Japanese military in the territories it conquered as part of its ‘Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere’ as among the least-heard voices from that era. This is surprising given that hundreds of thousands of lives were lost to the conflict. Moreover, the legacies of grief and bitterness in its wake often lasted decades. Following the transfer of Indonesian sovereignty, around 300, 000 Dutch and Eurasian Dutch refugees reluctantly resettled in the Netherlands.⁵ Most had lost family members and all their material possessions. All had lost their homeland⁶, its people, sights, sounds, fragrances, smells and feelings. This is the intangible heritage that had given them a sense of place, identity and belonging.⁷

The focus of this chapter is twofold: a) to explore how the ‘Bersiap’ was experienced by Dutch Australian ex-internees from Japanese POW and internment camps in Java and Sumatra; *Indisch* Dutch Australians left outside the camps and the NEI Dutch rehabilitated in Western Australia 1945-46 and later repatriated to the NEI or NL and: b) to examine the role Australian Unions and politics played in Indonesian Independence. The chapter draws on oral history interviews with informants from these groups; a myriad archival documents from national and war archives in Australia and the Netherlands, union archives in Australia, digitized newspapers in national libraries in both countries. Mainly in papers of Dutch colonies. The few articles in Netherlands (NL) newspapers begs research. It also accounts for the lack of understanding by Dutch of the wartime and revolution experiences of the NEI refugees resettled in NL after Independence. A secondary source I draw on is L. De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog*.⁸ This large, monumental work on the history of the Netherlands during WWII includes many facts and eyewitness accounts relevant to this study. De Jong was a reporter for Radio Orange during the war. After the war he became director of The Royal

³ World report on violence and health 2002, Foreword by Nelson Mandela.
http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/en/index.html

⁴ Jan Banning, *Traces of war: Dutch and Indonesian survivors*, exhibition from 15 August – 11 September 2005, Trolley Gallery, 73a Red Church Street, London. http://www.opendemocracy.net/arts-photography/war_2764.jsp.

⁵ Ulbe Bosma and Remco Rabin, *Being Dutch in the Indies: A History of Creolisation and Empire 1500-1920*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008) Translated by Wendi Schaffer; <http://www.tanap.net/>

⁶ <http://www.insideindonesia.org/weekly-articles/memories-of-a-homeland>;
http://www.papuaerfgoed.org/en/+Launch_Web_portal_Dutch_east_Indies_at_War

⁷ Margaret Loderichs, Margaret Leidelmeijer, Johan van Langen and Jan Kompagnie, *Verhalen in Documenten: Over het afscheid van Indië*, Amersvoort, Uigeverij Moesson, 1940-1950; Later some 50-60,000 NEI Dutch and Eurasians (Indos) would migrate, predominantly to the USA but also Australia.

⁸ L. De Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (1982).

Institute for Wartime Documentation.⁹ Theoretically, in this chapter I highlight similarities between Pemuda and Hitler Jugend. In the final analysis, I argue that, as it stands, the historical facts show, on balance, that all stakeholders in the Indonesian Independence equation: Dutch, Indonesians, Japanese, British and Australians were at times perpetrators and at other times victims of violence and brutality from one or other or all of the others. Consequently, and contrary to myth, there is not much for any side to be proud of.

During the *Bersiap* 1945-1946, across the NEI, there was a great deal of gruesome, macabre violent killings of European Dutch, Eurasians and their sympathizers. Later, and not handled in this chapter, from 1947-1948, many Indonesians died at the hands of the Dutch military during their two intensive two 'Police Actions' aimed at trying to regain control of the NEI. I would emphasise here that we should avoid rationalising on the grounds that there were crimes on all sides, look at the facts, and have each side acknowledge their own violence.

Background historical facts: the Indonesian archipelago 1602 – 1942

The history of the Dutch connection with Indonesia starts in 1602 with the VOC (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie) the Dutch East India trading company that operated in the South-east Asian region from 1602-1795. The largest and most impressive of the early modern European trading companies it had been authorized by the authority of the States-General of the Republic of the Netherlands to conduct trade in the zone between South Africa and Japan where it could also erect fortifications, appoint governors, keep a standing army, and conclude treaties in its name. There were numerous wars and disturbances across the archipelago as various indigenous groups resisted efforts to establish a Dutch hegemony, these tied up its military forces and in turn weakened Dutch control. The archipelago did not become an official Dutch colony until 1816. Moreover, Dutch dominance did not actually extend across the territory of modern-day Indonesia until the 20th century.

During colonial times the social order was based on rigid racial and social structures. 'Dutch elite' headed the various categories. However, although most Dutch lived separate from their indigenous servants, they remained closely linked. The 'Dutch elite' also included individuals of mixed Dutch and Indonesian origins (*Indos*) who had Dutch citizenship. This was a direct outcome of their Dutch progenitor having acknowledged them socially as 'family'.¹⁰ Compared to the Dutch and Indonesian Regents who were wealthy, the masses were oppressed and impoverished by both forms of governance. Their situation worsened during the 1930s worldwide Depression.¹¹ WWII followed on its heels and modern-day Indonesia arose in its aftermath.

Changing fortunes – the Dutch

⁹ None of de Jonge's many critics have produced a work of such mammoth proportions.

¹⁰ Bosma and Rabin, *Being Dutch in the Indies*, 293.

¹¹ Eric Heuvel and Ruud van der Rol, *The Return*, Indisch Herinnering Centrum, Bronbeek, 2012, 9.

During the period 1941-1942, the Japanese war machine swept all before it in a series of rapid conquests in Southeast Asia and the Pacific that made Japan the master of the region. The Philippines, Malaya, the Netherlands East Indies, Hong Kong and most of Burma were taken. In addition, a number of Australian Ports including Darwin and Broome were bombed. The Allies American, British, Dutch, Australian (ABDA) Alliance were ill-prepared. On land, they were no match for the Japanese armies, battle hardened since 1931. At sea, they were powerless in the face of the Japanese navy. The NEI capitulated on 8 March 1942 and the Japanese Occupation began. Unlike the Occupation of the Netherlands by Germany where life went on as before but under the Occupation Forces, in the NEI, Former Dutch military and bureaucratic personnel, including ethnic Ambonese and Mendonese were interned at once as Prisoners-Of-War (POWs). In the following six months, throughout the region Dutch civilians, including women and children, were herded into separate civilian concentration camps where they were starved and ill-treated. Some Dutch teenage females were taken to separate houses to serve as ‘comfort women’ for the Japanese military.¹² Males from as young as 10 years of age, were taken from their mothers and placed either in separate boys or men’s camps and treated like men. Many died there - alone.

The Japanese catered for the large numbers of Dutch they interned by transforming whole residential districts of the city of Batavia and other metropolitan and regional centres into vast camps by encircling selected areas with bamboo cladding topped with barbed wire. Inside there was little food on offer, sanitation was poor, overcrowding and acts of violence by the oppressors were the order of the day. The Japanese set out to specifically humiliate the white man – in full view of the indigenous peoples of the region – to make it very clear that the days of European domination were over. At the same time, he estimated that 172,000 Eurasian inhabitants of the NEI, retained their freedom, although little else, including enough food to eat.¹³ Relevant Dutch were kept in their job until they had trained an Indigenous Indonesian to fill the position, then they too were interned. The Japanese closed all bank accounts. Including those of Eurasians not interned. The latter survived by generating money for foodstuff by selling their furniture, clothes and jewellery.¹⁴

In the period 8 March 1942 to 15 August 1945, it is estimated that between 37,000 and 42,000 Netherlands East Indies Dutch adult males and 22,000 Australians became forced labour as prisoners of war. Plus an estimated 100,000 Western civilians, including children (4,700 in Sumatra and 29,000 in Java) were incarcerated in around 300 Japanese civilian internment camps. Disease became endemic and up to 20 per cent of internees and POWs died of ill treatment. According to the Netherlands Indies Government Director of Economic Affairs Dr. J. Van Hoogstraten, at least four million Indigenous Javanese also died from famine and disease during-the Japanese occupation. The figure does not include

¹² J.O’H, interview 2006.

¹³ Amigoe Di Curacao Dagblad Monday 11 March 1946, 2. Alle Nederlandse roepen naar Australie.

¹⁴ Frances Larder, interview, 2006.

the victims of Japanese slave labour conscription and illnesses such as yellow fever, malaria and cholera. Had the war lasted longer there would have been many more deaths due to starvation.¹⁵

Changing influences – the Indonesians

The three-and-a-half-year Occupation of the NEI by Japan changed the lives of the Indonesian in the archipelago forever as well. As the Dutch disappeared, Japanese and Indonesian took over their positions in public life. Lesser bureaucrats suddenly found themselves promoted immediately to positions three or four ranks higher that had formerly been reserved for the Dutch. From its onset intense Japanisation of the population was in force. This included the local population being forced to adopt *Bahasa Indonesia* as the *lingua franca* instead of Dutch, few Indonesians being able to speak Japanese. Japanisation was especially strong in schools, where pupils were duty-bound to be loyal to Japanese symbols and ideology. Currency and the annual calendar years also changed to Japanese. In addition, the Japanese, dissolved all overtly political organizations and immediately released the most prominent pre-war nationalists leaders from captivity to incorporate them into their administrative structure with promises of Independence. In these positions nationalists were directed to carry out various Japanese projects. For example, ‘radical nationalists’, such as Sukarno, were used as propaganda tools to spread the gospel of the Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and Greater East Asia slogans of ‘Asia for the Asians’. He was also directed to organise the compulsory requisitioning of rice and the recruitment of (labourers) *Romusha* for forced labour.¹⁶ The U.S. Library of Congress (estimates that in Java between four and 10 million indigenous Indonesians (*Romusha*) were forced to work by the Japanese military. About 270,000 of these Javanese laborers were sent to other Japanese-held areas in South East Asia. Only 52,000 were repatriated to Java, meaning that there was a death rate of 80 per cent.¹⁷ In 1943, the Japanese’ Emperor awarded Sukarno a medal for these activities. After the war, the same activities had him labelled a ‘collaborator’ by the Dutch government in the Netherlands who were, as a consequence, unwilling to negotiate with him around issues pertaining to Indonesian Independence. In the Netherlands any countrymen who had similarly collaborated with the German Occupation Forces were tried for treason. Growing poverty and repression of the archipelago characterised the Occupation.

As the Japanese war machine continued to lose ground, the food shortage situation reached ever more critical heights. This was made worse by the Japanese disrupting of the canal system constructed by the Dutch upon which agriculture depended, and enforced by their requisitioning and stockpiling of

¹⁵ Northern Star (Lismore, NSW) p.1 Monday 22 October 1945.

¹⁶ In fact tens of thousands of Indonesians were to starve, work as slave labourers (*romuscha*), be forced from their homes, and die in brutal hand-to-hand conflict before Indonesian sovereignty could be achieved.

¹⁷ Richard McMillan, *The British Occupation of Indonesia: 1945-1946: The Netherlands and the Indonesian Revolution* (London Routledge, 2005) 27.

growers' rice and other food products. The Japanese commandeering of trains for military purposes added to the Indonesians' dilemma as it stopped Javanese from traveling to markets to sell their produce, which in turn restricted their everyday economies.¹⁸ By the end of 1944, Japanese brutality and appalling administration of the region had led to a failure of the food supply causing widespread famine, malnutrition and disease. Medicines, clothing and footwear were unobtainable and many people were clad only in gunnysacks, burlap or thin sheets of rubber. The *History of Modern Indonesia*, cites *Pramoedya*, who recalls the sartorial inelegance with clarity and remembers with sadness seeing people who had starved to death by the side of the road.¹⁹

Throughout the Occupation the Japanese promised Indonesian that they would help them gain their independence. As an interim concession they were allowed greater Indonesian input at a local government level. Simultaneously, they encouraged Sukarno to assist them to deflect the growing hatred of the Indonesian people for the Japanese onto the Allies.²⁰ By 1945, the Japanese had given hundreds of thousands of Indonesian youth combat training/guerilla warfare tactics under various organizational structures such as the PETA and Heiho in readiness to help them fight the Allies (Appendix One details the names of a selection of the various groups and their activities). A direct consequence of these actions is the emergence of a strong revolutionary ethos that was in time aggravated further by the general economic malaise and suffering caused by hunger, malnutrition and social despair. The result was that Indonesians trained by the Japanese to become highly politicised against the former Dutch regime, were determined to prevent the Dutch implementing their schemes for the modernisation and gradual democratisation of Indonesia as proposed in a London radio address by Wilhelmina the Dutch Queen in exile on 7 December 1942.²¹ In it she indicated the possibility of a round table conference being held to deliberate upon a political structure for the kingdom and its territories that would be adapted to the changed circumstances. The structure she had in mind was that of a federated kingdom, of which the Netherlands, Indonesia, Surinam and Curaçao would take part as equals. Each would be allowed to manage its internal affairs independently, using its own resources, but each should at the same time be prepared to assist the others. This structure represented a logical continuation of the so-called ethical policy conceptualised in progressive circles before the war. Indonesia's future status was envisaged as that of an internationally recognised, self-governing, economically independent nation, in which all the different ethnic groups would co-exist peacefully and which would freely decide on its position *vis á vis* the Netherlands. Moreover, the federation structure appealed to both progressive and conservative politicians and most bureaucrats, who were, looking forward to implementing it. Despite this advance in Dutch thinking about Indonesian Independence during the war, when the news of the proclamation of

¹⁸ J.D. Legge, *Sukarno: A Political Biography* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin, 1972, 175.

¹⁹ Adrian Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁰ J.D. Legge, *Sukarno: A Political Biography* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin, 1972, 23.

²¹ J.D. Legge, 23.

²¹ The Mercury (Hobart, Tas) Wednesday 26 December 1945, 2; De Jonge, 125.

the Republic came it was dismissed by Dutch authorities in Australia and The Hague as Japanese-inspired, and its leaders including Sukarno were proclaimed traitors.²² Since little information had come out of the NEI during the Japanese Occupation neither the Dutch Government exiled in the UK nor The *Netherlands Indies Civil Administration (NICA)* exiled in Australia were aware of the extent to which, Indonesian youth, promised Independence if they complied, had been influenced by Japanese propaganda. Neither did NICA seem very well informed about the political activities of Indonesian merchant seamen exiled in Australia by the outbreak of war in 1942 lead by NEI nationalist communists in exile from their prison in Papua who were released in Australia in 1943.

Netherlands Indies Civil Administration (NICA) in exile in Australia

In 1942, the NEI Administration being part of the American British Dutch Australian Alliance was able to evacuate, an estimated 10 000 selected military and bureaucratic personnel, to continue the war effort from Australia in front of the Japanese Invasion. These evacuees were initially billeted around Australia. Navy personnel were mainly sent to Fremantle to be near their submarines and battleships. NICA was located first in Melbourne but later in Camp Columbia Wacol, Queensland after it had been vacated by the USA Military. Evacuees comprised Dutch, Eurasians – mixed race (Dutch and ethnic Indonesians or Chinese) and ethnic Indonesians bureaucrats, merchant seamen and military personnel including Ambonese and Mendonese.²³ The Dutch Consul General's Office organized their accommodation and healthcare.²⁴

In 1943, NICA brought in another 500 radical nationalist/communist political prisoners from *Tanah Merah* (their New Guinea prison camp at *Boven* which they established specifically to galvanize support for Indonesia's Independence). Many were well educated having studied in the Netherlands and elsewhere abroad including the USA. Some had also been to Russia. These prisoners had on arrival managed to alert Australian unions to their impending imprisonment in Australia. The unions protested Australia's right to having NEI nationalist political agitators imprisoned at Cowra POW camp near Casino, NSW. Freed they set about galvanising support for Indonesia's Independence.

Japan surrenders, Indonesians declare 'independence'

The catalyst prompting Japan to capitulate was the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima on three and Nagasaki on nine August 1945. These events also induced them to finally pursue Indonesian Independence. In a way it was the one successful aim they could still provoke. On seven August they

²² A. J. Piekaar, "A Dutch view of the struggle", in Wild & Carey, 1986, 198-199, xiv. Piekaar was a colonial civil servant in the Netherlands East Indies before WWII. During the Japanese occupation he was interned.

²³ Nationaal Archief. Digitale Collectie. Access 2.05.50.02 Item 43 'Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap /Ambassade in Australië (Canberra) 1942-1954 Gezantschap Australië : Stukken betreffende Nederlands Oost Indies evacuees in Australië; Nationaal Archief. Digitale Collectie. Access 2.05.50.02 Item 38 Inventaris van het archief van het Gezantschap /Ambassade in Australië (Canberra), (1940) 1942-1954 Gezantschap Australië : Stukken betreffende de sociale voorzieningen voor Nederlandse zeelieden in Australische havens.

²⁴ *ibid.*

convened a committee headed by Sukarno, Hatta and 20 other members, representing a cross-section of opinions and interests of the nation as a whole. A day later, Sukarno, Hatta and Radjiman were flown to Japanese headquarters in Saigon, where Marshal Terauchi urged them to speed up their preparations as Indonesia would be granted its independence in the immediate future. Sukarno, sensing the event to be close at hand, in a now-famous speech, told Indonesians “that their country would be free before the corn ripened.”²⁵

On August 15, on hearing of Japan’s unconditional surrender, radical *Pemuda*, send a delegation to Sukarno’s house to demand he and Hatta declare Indonesia’s Independence immediately, and without reference to the Japanese. This they did two days later on 17 August 1945, but only after having been abducted and coerced to do so by *pemuda* - radical youth freedom fighters.²⁶ The situation was salvaged by the intervention of Rear Admiral Maeda (Japanese Navy’s Liaison office in Jakarta) and had the leaders returned to his home. Maeda talked the Japanese military authorities into permitting a declaration of independence, provided it did not contravene Mountbatten’s orders directly. The final language worked out in Maeda’s house that night ran as follows:

*We the Indonesian people, hereby declare Indonesia’s independence. Matters concerning the transfer of power and other matters will be executed in an orderly manner and in the shortest possible time.*²⁷

Almost immediately, Sukarno formed the first government of the Republic of Indonesia with himself as President, Mohammad Hatta as his deputy and Sutan Sjahrir as Premier. They would be able to organize much of the infrastructure during the weeks of power gap before the Allies arrived to accept Japan’s surrender.

SEAC

At war’s end the Indonesian archipelago came under the jurisdiction of Admiral Earl Louis Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander in South East Asia Command (SEAC). However, because of Indonesia’s distance from the main theatres of war, it would be six weeks before British troops arrived to accept Japanese capitulation.²⁸ On 15 August 1945, the day that Japan announced its surrender, the eastern border of SEAC (South East Asia Command) was adjusted to include Indochina and the whole of the Dutch East Indies in addition to Burma, Siam, Malacca and Sumatra. The unexpected end to the war created a predicament for the SEAC Supreme Commander, Vice Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten. It was poorly equipped to carry out its new responsibilities SEAC. In an area larger than Europe, an estimated 120,000 Allied prisoners of war and internees were desperate for help,

²⁵ Anderson, *Java in the Time of Revolution*, 89.

²⁶ These leaders, fearful of a Japanese crackdown, had initially refused to do so.

²⁷ A. Lucas, ‘Revolutionary Youth’ in Colin Wild and Peter Carey, (eds) *Born in Fire: The Indonesian Struggle for Independence*, Athens, USA, Ohio University Press, 1986, 152-160.

²⁸ <http://countrystudies.us/indonesia/16.htm>

and approximately 730,000 Japanese soldiers and civilians were waiting to be disarmed and repatriated. Mountbatten had just 350,000 men, 120 transport ships and 50 RAF squadrons at his disposal to accomplish this mission. SEAC encountered further delays when on 19 August MacArthur ordered that no Allied forces would execute new landings or accept Japanese surrenders until the official surrender ceremony on 2 September 1945. Consequently, Mountbatten wrote:

I therefore had no alternative but to instruct the Japanese through their Supreme Commander, to maintain order in the areas for which they had been responsible up to the termination of hostilities. (...) Even if the political and military situation had been appreciated at the beginning, it would not have been physically possible (with our limited shipping lift and the delay imposed by General MacArthur's order) to bring in troops earlier than we have done, or in larger numbers.²⁹

In General Command no. I o.m. dated 2 September, MacArthur notes under the terms of surrender that the Japanese needed to be scrupulous in their care of the safety and wellbeing of the Internees and POWs.³⁰ SEAC directed them to stop the forced labour immediately, hand out medicaments, any available American military clothing, build up a three month supplies of food stocks and make up lists of Prisoner of War - survivors and those that didn't make it and he would be constrained to rely on the Japanese for protecting not only ex-prisoners of war and internees, but also his own forces, whose very task it was to disarm those self same Japanese.³¹ From the inmates perspective this was an unforeseen turn-about. Japanese camp commanders just recently their oppressors now their designated carers against a different enemy! The Japanese were also informed by SEAC that as from 25 August the American Airforce would be dropping relief supplies for camp inmates. It was another six days, on 21 August 1945, thus before internees were informed by the Japanese that in fact the war had ended. Four days later, as promised, American aircraft began dropping food parcels into internment camps. They also dropped fliers strongly urging internees to stay put in the camps, for their own safety, but also because it would be easier for Repatriation of Allied Prisoners of War and Internees (RAPWI) teams to organize their medical care and repatriation.³²

Internees will never forget the day they were told Japan had capitulated. At Siringoringo boys and men's camp recalls:

... a meeting of all the camp officials was convened where the Camp Commander conveyed this news to barrack heads. He told them that the war had ended and that the next day one

²⁹ <http://beeldbank.nationaalarchief.nl/viewer/schaduwarchief/2.22.21/119/>; Mountbatten War Diary August 14-19, 1945.

³⁰ De Jonge, quotes MacArthur Gereal Command on p. 532.

³¹ Han Bing Siong, The Secret of Major Kido, The Battle of Semarang 15-19 October, 1945, quoting (Dennis 1987:2, 59, 172, 226), In: Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 152 (1996), no: 3, Leiden, 382.

³² De Jonge, 540.

hundred men were to be moved to Pamienke a women and children's camp. The head of our barrack then came running and puffing into the barrack screaming freedom, freedom, freedom. At first dead silence hung there like a strange threat in the barrack. Then all hell let loose and above the immense uproar a chant became audible and we recognized it as the *Wilhelmus* (Dutch national anthem). When the barrack next to us had sung the last line we took it up. It was as if it had been agreed.... And finally I could not sing anymore, because my throat was closing up and the tears ran down my face. I felt overcome and ran outside into the rain crying. Then the barrack on the other side of us took up the song. And then the next and the next...And when it was sung by everyone, everyone came out, nearly intoxicated by emotion. Men hugged each other and walked aimlessly from one barrack to another. One appeared in incomplete uniform... another had a medal pinned on his chest. Everyone seemed to think the same: we must have a flag.... And yes please note an Indo-European had preserved one in the mud in the field in front of the barracks. It was hurriedly put on a flagpole.³³

When the news came out at Ambarawa camp where Winnie de Vries and her mother were interned people started laughing, crying, unbelieving but also feeling nervous and confused. Most people had been transported hundreds of thousands of miles from their homes, and few knew if family were alive or had dead.³⁴

'Liberated' and desperate to reunite with family, Donald Schotel who was around 12 years of age at the time stole out of Bangkok boys camp with a friend. He wanted to go "home" and home then was Halmaheira internment where the rest of his family were interned:

We were advised not to leave Bangkok. To stay behind the closed gates because outside the first riots had started and the first killings were a fact. Travelling by night and trying to stay out of sight by walking close to hedges and shrubbery Donald and Eduard finally reached Halmaheira camp only to find it filthy and overcrowded and the women and children there looked like ghosts. People did not walk briskly anymore they just moved very slowly. On their arms and legs there was no longer any flesh just skin over bone. They all looked so breakable. These first impressions of the Halmaheira camp in September 1945 are carved in my memory and will never leave me. People were staring at me as if I just came from the moon, but nobody spoke to me. I had shoes on, old shoes which were too big for me and which I had taken from the belongings of a man after he died in Bangkok; nobody had shoes anymore at that time. People looked at my shoes in disbelief, but they said nothing, apathetic and they uttered hardly a word. On the narrow dusty road was a

³³ De Jonge, 532.

³⁴ Winnie de Vries, interview 2006.scru

woman, no, a skeleton, standing and dressed in rags, barefooted, I went on walked past her and then somebody called my name. I turned around – it was my mother. I had not recognized my own mother. She recognized me. Yet it was not more than one year ago that I had last seen her.³⁵

An estimated, twenty two thousand men, twenty three thousand women and twenty two thousand children (Precise figure are not available) had survived interment. Many were seriously ill and deaths rates skyrocketed. News of loved ones in other camps was slow to arrive. The waiting had people's nerves on end because it could be bad news that would leave them bereft, having to contemplate a life without father, husband, wife, brother, sister, partner or children. It was for many also the loss of hope for the future that could no longer be. Because as many articulate even 60 years later: "When you have grown up in the NEI it is an essential part of who you are..."³⁶

But where were the liberators? A month after 'liberation' there was still no sign of the British troops. In fact for most, apart from increased food rations, the condition of their daily lives hardly changed. At Kampong Makassar (internment camp) between Batavia en Buitenzorg every day life was still plagued by the millions of bed bugs that lived in the bamboo of the walls and window frames, plus super cockroaches, rats as big as cats with long thin tails, and some as emaciated as the internees. To make matters worse they could not wash the floors. In the rain time the floor would get wet and turn to mud or form a creek inside the huts. The toilets were small huts hanging over an open drain that had become increasingly difficult to use for inmates who, due to the paralysis that accompanied severe Beri Beri, could no longer squat. As for the bathroom, in reality it was just four streams of water. To 'shower', inmates had to catch water in small containers and throw it over each other.³⁷ The story was the same for all the interned. Even so the fittest among them set about establishing a Red Cross organization to help fellow internees find family members.

De Jonge presents the range of views that prevailed among internees on hearing about the newly proclaimed Republic. He notes that in some installations internees hotly debated the issue. Some Dutch were in total disbelief, others supportive, while yet others scoffed at the very thought.³⁸ In contrast, a clandestine group at Baros III, the internee camp at Tjimahi that housed the most prominent NEI Government Officials, had in anticipation of capitulation, conceptualized a formula that would ensure that 400 inmates were in a position to take over leadership roles in government immediately Japan surrendered. The law provided that in the absence of a Governor-General or a Lieutenant-Governor General that the highest official of the land, in this instance Vice-President of the Board of the Dutch

³⁵ Donald Schotel, interview 2006.

³⁶ Margaret Loderichs, Margaret Leidelmeijer, Johan van Langen and Jan Kompagnie, *Verhalen in Documenten: Over het afscheid van Indië*, Amersvoort, Uigeverij Moesson, 1940-1950, 23; *Als je opgroeit in Indië is dat heel essentieel voor wie je bent. De ervaring van je jeugd in Indië laat je niet meer los.*

³⁷ De Jonge, 552.

³⁸ De Jonge, 552.

East Indies - Mr H.J. Spit (an inmate of Baros III), could insist on having the authority transferred from the Japanese to him in accordance with that law. They had made sure that the clandestine group were all well enough to step straight into organizing governance including re-establishing the police force and maintaining law and order.³⁹ However, when on 21 August, Mr Spit requested a meeting with the Japanese General in Batavia it was denied. He was told it would have to be authorised by SEAC. When he was finally granted a meeting with the head of the Japanese mission, General Nanganos he was told that there was no chance such a transfer of authority could take place. SEAC's instructions were that the Japanese would undertake law and order until they arrived. De Jonge claims that in reality they were giving as much leeway to the new Republic as possible. Consequently when Spit formulated a telegram to Mountbatten suggesting the Republican activities be curbed in the name of law and order, General Nanganos refused to send the telegram. Over the next weeks *pemuda* actions become increasingly more violent and far-reaching.⁴⁰ To their credit, not all Japanese were supportive of the Independence movement many fulfilled the 'terms of surrender' to the letter of the law. Their model protective behavior in the face of extreme danger for the Internees in their care had many reverse their negative views of the Japanese.⁴¹ However, there were also many Japanese who gave radical *pemuda* ready access to weapons in defiance of the Allies⁴². During the weeks before troops arrived it was never clear to the ex-internees what would happen next or who should be held responsible. Sentiments articulated by Mary Briggs-Koning, a Netherlands East Indies Dutch Australian and one of the internees caught up in the new debacle are representative:

While people around the world celebrated the end of the war, we who had survived Japanese concentration camps were now thrust into a civil war, the Indonesian Revolution. Consequently the banning of Dutch ships in Australian ports by the Australian wharf labourer greatly diminished assistance to provide us with much needed supplies of food, medicines and a means of leaving the country.⁴³

All internees rehabilitated in Australia that I interviewed mentioned the boycott of Dutch ships, their ships had all berthed in Australia and finally left Australia without the assistance of barges. But I am ahead of myself. I return first to early September 1945.

The calm before the storm

Information from diverse sources tends to suggest that the first month after capitulation before SEAC arrived, that the situation in Java was fairly quiet. In this period it appears it was common to see indigenous Indonesians – previous employees of the Dutch internees come to the camps with food and

³⁹ de Jonge, 552.

⁴⁰ De Jonge, 556.

⁴¹ Han Bing Siong, The Secret of Major Kido, The Battle of Semarang 15-19 October, 1945, quoting (Dennis 1987:2, 59, 172, 226), In: Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde 152 (1996), no: 3, Leiden, 382.

⁴² Merle C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia Since c.1300* (Second ed.) MacMillan, 1993) 27.

⁴³ Mary Briggs-Koning, *Footsteps in Memories*, self-published (Hobart, Marken Pty Ltd., 2001).

any material goods that they had taken care of for their former employers. J. B. Bouwer – who wrote a detailed account of his travels around Java for the first two weeks post capitulation, recalls in his diary, especially the calm of the peasantry on the trains he travelled. Many asked him when the *Belanda* (white man) would return to make things OK for them again. However, Bouwer also reported the devastated environmental conditions, sawahs empty of crops, fields and woodlands without trees, axed by the Japanese to run locomotives. Everywhere the population barely clothed, dressed in jute sacking or thin rubber sheeting, and undernourished with many also covered in sores. In addition, he noted that as yet there were few red and white flags to be seen and no public ‘Merdeka’ demonstrations. Bouwer’s description is an experience the recently appointed Premier of the Republic of Indonesia Sutan Sjahrir also encountered. In the two weeks he travelled around Java in a train (during the last week of August and first week of September) he recalls that: “During the whole period the attitude toward the Dutch who gradually came out of the camps was definitely neutral if not friendly. I can certify this personally from the trip I made ... quite often I was in a third-class railcar with dozens of Indonesians and groups of Dutch people”.⁴⁴ Away from the public eye Indonesian independence leaders were taking over key positions from the Japanese, trains were still running and some of the former Dutch and Eurasian internees were out looking for their families and property.

However, this period of seeming neutrality was not to last. Behind the scenes nationalist trouble was brewing. From mid September to mid-October, *pemuda* groups around the country were starting to organise themselves and obtain weapons. On 18 September, journalist Bouwer, records in his diary that a Nationalist ‘coup’ was now imminent. He relates this to the free reign the Japanese were giving Sukarno and Hatta. He speculates that the crucial element to the game was the length of time the Japanese could continue to play it, and this depended mainly on how quickly re-occupation forces appeared in Java. In his opinion, it was of paramount importance that the Allied authorities (especially NICA in Brisbane) be urgently informed about the extent of nationalist developments in Java.⁴⁵ However, trouble was also brewing in Australia in the guise of unionism, its severity *Netherlands Indies Government Information Service* NIGIS failed to pick-up.

Australian unions: ‘the boycott’

On eight September 1945, the first team of five (three Dutch and two British), including a doctor and two Marconists⁴⁶ were parachuted onto Kemajoran airfield outside of Batavia, Java. Its Dutch leader

⁴⁴ Sutan Sjahrir, *Out of Exile*, Editor, Maria Duchâteau Sjahrir. Translated by, Charles Wolf. Publisher, J. Day Co., 1949, 260.

⁴⁵ J.B Bouwer *Dagboek* p.367-385; Access No. 401 Item 142 *Nederlands-Indische dagboeken en egodocumenten*, Nederlands Institute Oorlogs Documentatie (NIOD) Institute voor Oorlogs-Holocaust en Genocide Studies. *Dagboek van 42 maanden Japansche bezetting van Nederlandsch -Indië. Het vermoorde land. De schrijver doet verslag van zijn belevenissen, ervaringen en indrukken buiten de kampen. Hij was de hele oorlog ondergedoken in Bandung. A diary of 42 months of Japanese Occupation of the NEI, my observations and experiences from outside the internment camps. I was in hiding in Bandung the entire war.*

⁴⁶ A telegraphic operator who uses the Marconi system of wireless telegraphy - <http://www.wordnik.com/words/marconist>.

was S. J. Baron van Tuyll van Serooskerken brief was to assess and report on the condition of POWs and internees. Its British leader, Greenhalgh was to report on the political situation to Colonel Patterson. However, having damaged their communication equipment, they were unable to connect with RAPWI head office in Colombo as planned.⁴⁷ Instead they manage to connect and report on the situation in Java to NIGIS in Melbourne. Van Mook, on hearing about the proclamation responded by denouncing the Republic as a creation of Japanese fascism that would soon blow over. These remarks may well have been the catalyst to inflame communist nationalists including ex-Digoelists into constructing a case against NICA.

On 23 September, the Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF) Federal Council received an appeal from the Indonesian trade unionists in exile in Australia, requesting that in the event of the outbreak of warfare in Indonesia', that 'all democratic and peaceful peoples everywhere, and especially the working class in all countries of the world, boycott all that is Dutch in all harbours, stores, roadways and other places throughout the world. This they took to the Waterside Workers Union Brisbane Branch on 23 September 1945.⁴⁸ On 24 September, Indonesian merchant seamen walk off ships. A strike started officially at 8pm that night.⁴⁹ They gain support from Australia-based indigenous Indonesian bureaucrats attached to NICA.⁵⁰ The unions' response is recorded in circular No.38 dated 26 September sent by the Waterside Workers Federation of Australia (Federal Office) to all its members. It contains the following resolve:

Federal Executive unanimously decided that it be a recommendation to the Federal Council that in view of the representation made to us by the Seaman's Union of Indonesia that our members [directed at improving their wage and working conditions and giving free reign to the Independence Movement] should be directed not to work any vessels involved in the strike by the Indonesian Seamen's Union and not to handle any munitions or military stores being loaded for Indonesian Ports which might be used against the new Republic.

This is the beginning of Australian union support for the newly proclaimed Indonesian Republic. On 25 September 1945, the Brisbane Branch of the Federated Waterside Workers Union note their determination to prevent the loading of Dutch ships. In their press statement: 'Wharfies Locked-Out' E.C. Eglehart, Secretary of the Brisbane Branch of the Waterside Workers Federation of Australia alleges as facts which I show throughout this chapter as largely 'misconstrued:

⁴⁷ De Jonge, 530.

⁴⁸ N114/190 Noel Butlin Archives ANU: Circular 28 September 1945, Waterside Workers Union to all branches notes they were approached on 23 September by President and Secretary of the Indonesian Seaman's Union for support for better wages and working conditions and support for their democratic government.

⁴⁹ N114/190 Noel Butlin Archives ANU: Waterside Workers Federation of Australia Brisbane Branch, letter dated 24 September 1945, from the Secretary Engelhart to J. Healy of the Sydney Branch, noting the Indonesian Seamen were striking from that day demanding better wages and conditions and that the NICA and the Dutch from Netherlands not to obstruct the newly formed Republican Government. They ask the Federal Body to endorse their stance.

⁵⁰ De Jonge, 624.

Waterside Workers know that the owners (of the Dutch ships), in an attempt to win public opinion to the side of the Dutch Government, are using the plea that thousands of POWs European evacuees, and Javanese people are suffering as a result of the shipping hold-up. But in boxes labelled 'comforts' for Dutch evacuees were found 'phosphorous bombs and tommy-guns'.⁵¹

At this juncture they lock the boycott into place. Generated by the Indonesian Political Exiles Association (Tanah Merah exiles) in Mackay, the Brisbane, the Komite Indonesia Merdeka (Freedom) (Australia)⁵² and the Central Committee for Indonesian Independence (CENKIM), and operationalised by the communist-led Waterside Workers Federation (WWF) and Seamen's Union it successfully involves another 30 more Australian Unions, including the Waterside Workers Unions, Trade and Labour Council, Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) plus the Australian communist party.⁵³ The WWF and Communist Party also set about activating Australians sympathetic to an Indonesian Republic, such as university students, to organize street demonstrations in capital cities around Australia. In all, the strikes and black ban was to affect 559 ships in Australian ports over a period of three years.⁵⁴

From a timeline perspective the ban was locked-in five days before Allied troops arrived in the NEI;⁵⁵ and four months before Mountbatten allowed Dutch troops into Java and Sumatra.⁵⁶ Moreover, most Dutch were still interned.⁵⁷ At that time, apart from the internees, POWs and Eurasians who spent the war years in Java or Sumatra, the only Dutch in the NEI from outside the country are those attached to the RAPWI teams parachuted in who are working under the auspices of SEAC commandos. Van der Plas (Governor of East Java) was allowed into Java to be reunited with his wife.⁵⁸ He records being greatly shocked by her emaciated condition the unimaginably pitiable state in which she was living and the spirit, courage and fortitude of the women he encountered there including van Mook's wife, that saw them through. He also noted the devastated economy and financial situation, how it had been made

⁵¹ N14/190 Noel Butlin Archives: Wharfies Locked-Out, Authorised by E.C. Engelhart, Secretary, Brisbane Branch, Waterside Workers Federation of Australia 25/9/45.

⁵² Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Letter to the Consul General of the Netherlands in Sydney, dated 29.3.1946, from K.R.I.A & Bureau Indonesian Affairs (NICA) detailing membership of the Komite Indonesia Merdeka in Sydney. Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Letter to the Consul General of the Netherlands in Sydney, dated 29.3.1946, from K.R.I.A & Bureau Indonesian Affairs (NICA) detailing membership of the Komite Indonesia Merdeka in Sydney.

⁵³ Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Letter to the Consul General of the Netherlands in Sydney, dated 29.3.1946, from K.R.I.A & Bureau Indonesian Affairs (NEI Administration Department) detailing membership of the Komite Indonesia Merdeka in Sydney.

⁵⁴ Rupert Lockwood, *Black Armada: Australia and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence 1942-1949* (Marrickville NSW, Hale and Iremonger, 1982, 231.

⁵⁵ Farewell to the Indies: <http://www.en.afscheidvanindie.nl/archieven-onderwerpen-brits-indische-militairen.aspx>. In order to prevent escalation on 19 November Mountbatten denied Dutch troops permission to land in Java and Sumatra

⁵⁶ The recent end of the 5-year Nazi Occupation of NL, 1940 - May 1945, meant it needed time to mobilise an army.

⁵⁷ Farewell to the Indies: <http://www.en.afscheidvanindie.nl/archieven-onderwerpen-brits-indische-militairen.aspx>

⁵⁸ Tekst: Ned=Indones. betrekk. 1945-195°, dl. I, p. 121 en vlg.

worse by a poor rice harvest, the desperate clothing position, largely paralyzed transport system and neglected public works.⁵⁹ Van Mook, Governor General of the NEI, arrived from Camp Columbia Wacol Queensland on 1 October - two days after SEAC. Dutch and British would soon become locked in verbal battles with the newly proclaimed Indonesian Republicans. It is important to note that Premier Sjahrir represented a group within the Republican movement that hoped to settle the Indonesian issue with the Dutch through diplomatic means that might include compromises.⁶⁰ On the other hand, that the group under the radical communist activist Tan Malaka, comprised mainly of extremist *pemuda*, wanted 100% Independence defended with armed force until all foreign troops had left Indonesian territory!⁶¹ The latter was gaining most ground via large groups of smoldering zealous *pemuda*.

SEAC the 'liberators' finally Arrive

The first British units arrived at Batavia on 29 September 1945.⁶² Mountbatten had ordered three Indian divisions the Seaforth Highlanders to the NEI: the 23rd Indian Division and 5th Indian Division were sent to Java and the 26th Indian Division was assigned to Sumatra. They were accompanied by a small detachment of Dutch military personnel employed to work as RAPWI officers under the direction of British commandos. Due to the explosive political situation created by the six-week power gap between Japan's capitulation and SEAC's arrival, Mountbatten decided to forego the planned re-occupation of the islands. Instead under the new 'key area' strategy he implemented, SEAC would only be occupying the bridgeheads of Batavia and Surabaya in Java and Padang, Medan and Palembang in Sumatra. British forces later moved on to Bandung, Buitenzorg and Semarang as well. The Indian soldiers sent to the NEI had two missions: to provide assistance to internees and evacuate the Japanese. After, checking the situation, SEAC decided contrary to earlier expectation not to assist to reinstate NICA. In addition, British troops were told not to come into conflict with the forces of the new Republic of Indonesia. Australian Newspapers from the period are full of the widespread food and clothing shortages, the starving population, the rapidly mobilizing *pemuda* and mounting danger of the situation to the lives of internees and Eurasians. The reports are verified by Australians-on-the-spot in the NEI. These include journalist Plumridge and McMurray Ball who arrives early November as representative of the Australian government, sent to assess the political and environmental situation.⁶³

⁵⁹ De Jonge .601.

⁶⁰ The many, varied complex discussions, stand-offs, truces, agreements and so forth are beyond the scope of this essay whose focus is the internees and the influence of Australian unions on the independence movement.

⁶¹ Ide Anak Agung Gde Agung, *From the Formation of the State of East Indonesia Towards the Establishment of the United States of Indonesia*, Gadjah Mada University Press, 1995, xxii.

⁶² Ide Anak Agung Gde Agung, *From the Formation of the State of East Indonesia Towards the Establishment of the United States of Indonesia*, Gadjah Mada University Press, 1995, p.xvii

⁶³ William Macmahon Ball. *The Japan and Batavia Diaries of W. Macmahon Ball*, edited by Alan Rix (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988); Alan Rix, (ed). *Intermittent Diplomat: The Japan and Batavia Diaries of W. Macmahon Ball* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988); W. Macmahon Ball and H. Wolfsohn, C.P. Fitzgerald, Gordon Greenwood, R.H. Greenwood, N.D.Harper, R.F. Holder and R.G. Neale under the general editorship of Professor Gordon Greenwood, (University of Queensland, Australian Policy Toward Asia, Australian Papers, Institute of Pacific Relations Conference, 1954).

Pemuda - extremist freedom fighters

Tensions began to mount with the arrival of the first RAPWI teams leading to an increase in incidents leading up to the arrival of SEAC. For example, on his return to Malang on 11 September, after two weeks away, the local police chief was surprised to find 'Merdeka' groups in full swing including the Indonesian red and white flag flying outside of nearly every property.⁶⁴ From mid-September *pemuda* attitudes toward Dutch and Eurasian civilians became increasingly more hostile. Indonesian propaganda more aggressive, the first Japanese soldiers were assaulted for refusing to hand over weapons. The first atrocities were committed by *pemuda* against Indo-Europeans. Graffiti also started to appear on the walls in Batavia carrying explicit slogans such as: 'Death to the Ambonese and Indos!' 'Death to the NICA dogs, and aggressive but less threatening: 'Indonesia for the Indonesians.'⁶⁵

By the end of September, *pemudas* had begun to take over government buildings and utilities in cities as far apart as Yogyakarta, Solo, Malang, Bandung, Surabaya and Batavia and be associated with a specific sartorial presence. Vickers observes that at this time after a series of incidents involving pro-Dutch Eurasians in which atrocities were committed against Dutch prisoners, the spirit of revolution arose in all its passionate ugliness.⁶⁶ "Courage rose like a snake in the grass. Self-confidence and nationalism welled up like froth in beer". Indonesian writer, Idrus, described it as the moment the revolutionary hero, was born: a young man with long hair, dressed in coolie trousers made of sacking, bandana on his head, samurai sword at his waist.⁶⁷ Like cowboys [standing] in the middle of the road with revolvers on their hips and knives in their belts, most were aged from 15-25 years. Both males and females were rapidly joining the movement. By the second half of September 1945, thus still before SEAC arrived, trains full of bandana wearing *pemuda* yelling *Merdeka* were seen to pass through station after station heading towards Central Java. They were a formidable combatant force on murderous rampages against anything perceived of as European or having worked for the benefit of Europeans wielding Japanese weapons or local improvisations – machete and *bambu runcing* [bamboo spears]. The nationalist salute "*Merdeka*" was their ferocious war cry for freedom, which they would shout as their fighters entered a street, accompanied by noisy beating of iron stakes against fences and light poles before surrounding the houses of their victims who they would torture and murder.⁶⁸

Clashes then also broke out between *pemuda* and the only pro-Dutch armed forces that existed on Java at that time, small re-grouped South Maluku KNIL (Royal Netherlands Indonesian Army) units. *Pemuda* mobs lynched a Eurasian youth who confronted them about his display of the Dutch flag. The KNIL groups subsequently retaliated any attacks by *pemuda* on their perceived enemies, namely Dutch

⁶⁴ De Jonge, 606.

⁶⁵ *Western Mail*, 18 October, 1945, 21.

⁶⁶ Vickers, *History of Modern Indonesia*, 1-28.

⁶⁷ Idrus Nasir Djajadiningrat. *The Beginnings of the Indonesian-Dutch Negotiations and the Hoge Veluwe Talks*, (New York: Monograph Series Modern

Indonesia Project, Southeast Asia Program, Department of Far Eastern Studies, Cornell University Ithaca 1958).

⁶⁸ *The West Australian*, 26 December 1945 1.

prisoners, Chinese, Eurasians and Japanese who would not hand over weapons.⁶⁹ Although their numbers were small their autonomous contra-terror operations escalated to the point that the British military leadership wanted to de-mobilise them from the city.⁷⁰ The action of these Eurasian groups gave Sukarno an excuse to seek international attention. The Canberra Times on Monday 22 October 1945 notes the radiogram he sent to President Truman contained an appeal in the name of America's neutrality to stop allowing 'Dutch forces' in Indonesia, seeking to quell the independence movement, who he claimed were using American equipment and uniforms.⁷¹ A quote in *Het Dagblad* Friday 8 February 1946, notes how throughout the Occupation, because of their anti-Japanese stance, the Ambonese had been forced to flee their homes and belongings. As well they had been constantly accused of being 'spies' by Indonesian youth trained by the Japanese to spy on people in their respective villages.⁷² Many had been imprisoned or executed during this period.

Few people including some Republican leaders could make sense of the 'excesses' of *pemuda* violence. Reporters believed *pemuda* statements needed analysing. The Advertiser (Adelaide, SA) 10 October 1945, quote 'The Times' special correspondent in Batavia, Ian Morrison. In his opinion, *pemuda* expressions such as... "We fight for 10 million people" and "We Indonesians demand freedom" were wildly overstated given that no more than 5 per cent of the NEI's 70 million had a real political national consciousness and that a further 10 per cent were young men getting a tremendous kick out of driving cars which do not belong to them, erecting barricades, stopping European officers in cars, marching at night with spears and knives, and beating up and occasionally, carving up Japanese and Eurasians if they are sufficiently defenceless.⁷³ Observations articulated by the headman of a kampong, and quoted by a correspondent in *The Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton, Queensland) on Monday 22 October 1945, offer a similar vision, but in this instance directed at officers of the Indonesian Peace Preservation Corps (BKR) who he describes as "immature youths wearing bright green uniforms carrying swords as big as themselves... like boy scouts, but such scouts are dangerous...".⁷⁴ It seems it is sometimes unclear as to whether perpetrators are extremist *pemuda* or members of BKR! Then there is the question of intimidation. The *Herald* 11 October 1945, reports Chinese were flying the Indonesian flag outside their property as a safety measure after being violently coerced into swearing allegiance to the independence movement by extremist *pemuda*.⁷⁵

Many newspaper reporters insist that *pemuda* violence threatened and terrorised many Indonesians into,

⁶⁹ Christopher Harper, Tim Bayly *Forgotten Wars, Freedom and revolution in Southeast Asia* (Publisher: Harvard University Press, 2006) 181-182.

⁷⁰ Christopher Harper, Tim Bayly *Forgotten Wars, Freedom and revolution in Southeast Asia* (Publisher: Harvard University Press, 2006) 181-182.

⁷¹ The Canberra Times, Monday 22 October 1945, Page 1.

⁷² *Het Dagblad* Friday 8 February 1946, 5.

⁷³ The Advertiser (Adelaide, SA) Wednesday 10 October 1945, 1.

⁷⁴ The Morning Bulletin (Rockhampton, Queensland), Monday 22 October 1945, 8.

⁷⁵ <http://beeldbank.nationaalarchief.nl/viewer/schaduwarchief/2.22.21/787/0158> Herald 11 October – coercion by Pemuda

if not overtly supporting them, then at least not obstructing them. A reporter attached to *Het Dagblad*, in an article dated 8 February 1946, describes the rapid gain in public momentum as follows: After the Japanese capitulated and the republican government had proclaimed Independence, the police in the kampongs remained, and the *Kei Bo Dan* and *Seinendan* organisations created by the Japanese continued their watch. The only changes were amalgamations of *pemuda* organisations that were also significantly increased by home-coming young men when the Japanese disbanded the *PETA* and *Heiho*. These organisations were subsequently able to form powerful combat groups from unemployed *PETA* and *Heiho* leaders who were among groups that received serious combat training Japanese style. The training had imbued many with a “we live and die together” mentality. The correspondent noted the development had commenced from the first day of capitulation (long before the Allies arrived), and across the length and breadth of cities as well as in the countryside. In many places the public were subjected to daily renditions of ‘Bersiap behaviours’. News correspondents saw these behaviours as whipped up by the extreme privations imposed during the Japanese Occupation and inflamed by the arrival of the British and any Dutch.⁷⁶ The article in *Het Dagblad* goes on to claim, the ‘Bersiap’ would not have been as successful if seditious *pemuda* had not been able to artificially instil a state of fear, suspicion and anxiety into the ‘wretched innocent masses’, who actually understood very little about the underlying politics. They are warned that any presence of the British and Dutch is a new menace of foreign domination. The reporter of the *Dagblad* claims *pemuda* used ‘Japanese cunning’ to frightened the masses into fearing what the forthcoming Allies might do. Moreover, when they had managed to change the masses anxiety and fear into hatred and anger, they empowered ‘mobs’ by putting weapons into their hands.⁷⁷ A reporter from the *West Australian* makes comparable observations:

The most striking manifestation of Java’s new spirit is that it has dazed most of the population. It is so vicious in its intensity that it is at first incomprehensible. It has touched the tattered peasant in countless villages and paddy fields. It is the passion of every youth. It is symbolised in the savage Nationalist salute that is part of every greeting and is always accompanied by the ferocious yell ‘*merdeka*’ [independence] — their cry for freedom.... It is certain death to dissent.⁷⁸

To the world it may have seemed like the whole nation were supportive but that is far from the case. The *Western Australian* newspaper correspondent notes:

A reporter attached to the *West Australian* designates the TKR (Peace Preservation Corp) the most dangerous power in Java and the youth (*pemuda*) movement second. He claims, “It has reached the stage where practically every youth is forced to join. It is led by a group of

⁷⁶ *West Australian* 26 December, 1945, 5. ‘National Movement Strong: Teeming Millions Enthralled’.

⁷⁷ *Het Dagblad*, 8 February 1946, 1.

⁷⁸ See *Herald* 11 October 1945.

fanatics who talk only fight to the masses. In its ranks lurk extremists causing atrocities....”⁷⁹ Whether attached to the extremist *pemuda* mobs or the Republican established security force the youth have all been imbued with suspicious Europeans and this does not bode well for RAPWI teams.

With the deployment of the RAPWI teams in early September and their discovery of thousands of internees in Semarang in the interior of Central Java, it became clear that a force would have to be dispatched to protect them and gather them in. It had not originally been the British intention to go to Central Java, but military reports confirmed that the severity and volatility of the situation there required their immediate attention. The protection of the internees in Central Java came to assume great importance when it was also discovered that Indonesian extremists were surrounding the camps and refusing to let food in.⁸⁰ Pemuda were becoming more powerful by the day. The *Advocate* (Burnie, Tasmania) notes on Friday 19 October 1945:

...apart from the fact that a number of strictly neutral contacts has been arranged between the British and Nationalist leaders it is now an accepted thing that the Indonesians are running trams, trains, the water supply, the electric light and the police. Although no one quite knows under what law they are operating there are clear signs of a tendency to treat the Sukarno Cabinet as having a sort of unofficial status.⁸¹

The role of Japanese in the early stages of the Republican Revolution was ambiguous: on the one hand, they sometimes cooperated with the Allies and attempted to curb republican activities; on the other hand, Japanese commanders, though usually under duress, turned over arms to the Republicans. De Jonge points out that many Japanese, particularly those that had married Indonesian women were also joining the revolutionaries - around 600 in Java and about the same in Sumatra.⁸² The *Examiner*, newspaper claims Japanese were also organizing *pemuda* activities.⁸³ Given the volatility of the situation, Gurkha Command felt it was better for ex-POWs and ex-internees to return to or remain in concentration camps, as it would be more convenient for food distribution and protection. Dutch internees were joined by thousands of *Eurasian* Dutch. Considered pro-Dutch, by *pemuda* these Eurasians had every reason to fear for their lives. Dutch historian Wim Willems, observes the deterioration of the situation, to the point where by one November 1945, SEAC were responsible for

⁷⁹ West Australian Newspapers, 26 December 1945, 5.

⁸⁰ William H. Frederick, *Visions and Heat: The Making of the Indonesian Revolution*, Athens, Ohio, Ohio University Press, 1989.

⁸¹ *Advocate* Newspaper, Burnie Tasmania, Friday 19 October 1945, 5.

⁸² De Jonge, 607.

⁸³ *The Examiner* (Launceston Tasmania) 29 March 1946, 5: It quotes Mr Lawson the War Minister (British Communist MP) in a letter to Mr Gallahar of the *Daily Worker*. He also notes that at no time had British in the Dutch East Indies, supplied Japanese troops weapons or tanks.

231,75 European and *Indisch* interned for their safety against attacks by pemuda mobs.⁸⁴ Depending on the camp's location their guards were either British, Japanese or from the Republic of Indonesia [TRI]. Not all camps operated under the auspices of the British Supreme Army by 1946, the Republican army also had camps with Dutch and Eurasian prisoners.⁸⁵

The escalating situation was particularly desperate in Central Java. SEAC initially unaware of, the many Japanese internment camps there found removing internees to safety extremely dangerous. As early as 12 October, all Eurasian men and boys had already been arrested by revolutionary extremist pemuda in Surabaya; 42 Eurasians were killed in the basement of the 'Simpang Club' – where their eyes had been gouged out first.⁸⁶ Several hundred were also tortured in the 'Kalisosok Prison'. All over town truckloads of white males had been driven to the prison. Awaiting them was an 'enflamed kampung population. Aroused crowds streamed from the central city kampong, shouting "kill the NICA dogs" and 'Filthy Dutch!' as they followed the vehicles to their destinations. At the prison, the men and boys were ordered to run the 'gauntlet', that is run towards the entryway of the prison while an angry mob hacked at them with spears and axes.⁸⁷ The British sought every means to remain neutral and seek cooperation with the Republican leadership. The Japanese military sought only to react when provoked. Eventually neither could avoid involvement either to protect internees and/or in retaliation for unbidden attacks and murders on their ranks. The Japanese in Semarang, and the British in Surabaya. Although the British (Indian) troops had control of the key areas in Surabaya, threats, murders and hostage taking were rife. By mid October 1945, Indonesian nationalists guerrillas declare a general food boycott against the Europeans. They follow-up this action by cutting off supplies of water and electricity to the internment camps where most Europeans still reside. During the months of October, November and December 1945 major Javanese cities became the scene of continuous kidnappings, disappearances, shootings, thefts and murders. The main victims of the early violence seemed to be Indo-European, Chinese and Moluccan families living outside of the camps, as they are unarmed and scattered, and therefore easy targets.

In Surabaya, on 28 October 1945, *pemuda* attacked a convoy of European and Indo-European women and children who were being transported from Gubeng neighbourhood to the protection camp Darmo. The incident was to result in serious conflict with British forces. General Christianson's reaction to the attack resulted in a general directive to Indonesians, his attempt to prevent a general flare-up as a consequence. One November 1945, in a memo from SACSEA to Cabinet Offices Christensen

⁸⁴ Wim Willems, *Uittocht uit Indië 1945-1949* (Amsterdam, Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2001); Peters, *From Tyranny to Freedom*, Perth: Black Swan Press, 2009.

⁸⁵ Jan van Wagtenonk, *Testimonies of the Japanese Occupation of the Dutch East Indies*, Foundation for the Japanese Honourary Debts, 2007, 95; see also their website website: www.jesinfo.org.

⁸⁶ Jan A. Krancher, *The Defining Years of the Dutch East Indies, 1942-1949, Survivors' Accounts of Japanese Invasion and Enslavement of Europeans and the Revolution That Created Free Indonesia*,

⁸⁷ William H. Frederick, *Visions and Heat: The Making of the Indonesian Revolution*, Athens, Ohio, Ohio University Press, 1989.

articulates the general warning sent Indonesians following the unprovoked attack on the Gubeng transport that ended in the death of 60 Gurkhas and 100 civilians. It also broke the truce that had been agreed on in the presence of Sukarno and Hatta. On 30 October Brigadier Mallaby is also killed in Surabaya. The directive notes:

Those direct and unprovoked attacks upon British forces cannot in any circumstances be permitted and unless the INDONESIANS who have committed those acts surrender to my forces I intend to bring the whole weight of my sea land and air forces and all the weapons of modern war against them until they are crushed. If in the process innocent INDONESIANS should be killed the sole responsibility will rest with those INDONESIANS who have committed the crime I have named. I warn all INDONESIANS throughout Java that they should have nothing to do with the extremist element and they should co-operate with my forces and live in peace and harmony with them. For if force is used against my troops it will be met with force. I am determined to maintain law and order and I look to all good INDONESIANS to support me in this task.⁸⁸

A full-scale battle developed between the *Gurkhas* and Indonesian extremists, the bloodiest of the revolution. Ferocious fighting erupted when 6,000 Indian troops landed in the city to evacuate European internees. The Indonesian extremists were led by a defiant Bung Sutomo, one of the most revered revolutionary leaders. He urges Indonesians to fight to the death to let their blood spill until all foreign troops had been expelled.⁸⁹ On 10 November, after issuing the above warning to no avail, the British retaliate with a punitive sweep from air, sea and land. The Indonesian hold on for three weeks. Estimates of Indonesian deaths range from between 6,300 and 15,000, and perhaps 200,000 fled the devastated city. British Indian casualties, total approximately 600.⁹⁰ Heroes day commemorates the Indonesians' deaths. This serious incident raises issues about how and who we define a hero! Despite mounting evidence to support the notion that *pemuda* (displaying behaviours reminiscent of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*), are running the country, the international community, beset intense postwar issues, ignore this reality. The Sukarno cabinet seem to have no control over *pemuda*, or perhaps they are reaping unexpected benefits!

The retaliation for the Battle of Surabaya took place against internees in isolated places.⁹¹ Women, children, and the aged, were all tortured, dismembered, and murdered by the Indonesian extremists. On

⁸⁸ Nationaal Archief. Digital collective. Toegang 2.22.21, inv.nr.167. National Archives, War Office 203, inv.nr.2455, out of the dossier 'Death of Brig. Mallaby (detail)'; Mark Loderichs, Margaret Leidelmeijer, Johan van Langen and Jan Kompagnie, *Verhalen in Documenten: Over het afscheid van Indië*, Amersfoort, Uitgeverij Moesson, 1940-1950, 23; Inez Hollander. *Silenced Voices, Uncovering a Family's Colonial History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, Ohio University Research in International Studies, South East Asia Series No.119, 2008).

⁸⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=96bvaapA7O4>.

⁹⁰ , London HMSO, 1965) S Woodburn, *The War Against Japan*

⁹¹ William H. Frederick, In Memoriam: Sutomo *Indonesia* (Cornell University Southeast Asia Program 1982) **33**: 127–128.

9 December 1945, *The West Australian*'s correspondent in Batavia wrote:

An Army spokesman said tonight that 150 Dutch and Eurasian internees had been kidnapped within the past few days from South Bandung from an area of the city held by Indonesians because they could not be rescued in time..... However 500 other evacuees had been rescued by Indian troops.

Those rescued had not eaten for several days and had been under constant attacks from Indonesian extremists. They were hysterical with joy when they reached safety in the northern sector of the town. At a convent near Ambarawa, the Indonesians found thirty internees, whom *pemuda* had lined up against a wall and used as targets for hand grenades.⁹²

The middle of October to the end of November 1945, are considered the most violent months of the Bersiap. A *West Australian* newspaper correspondent noted how Indonesian extremists were kidnapping the city's (Bandung's) prettiest Dutch girls and holding them up for ransom. They fetched the highest price on the prisoner exchange market with British forces. According to a nineteen-year-old Indonesian, the Allies were prepared to hand over ten Indonesian captives in exchange for one abducted girl.⁹³ *Pemuda* attacked Chinese families and anyone suspected of holding positive feelings for the Dutch, or having worked with the Dutch or had helped them get food while interned were tortured and murdered. In Bandung alone they slaughtered 1200 of their own people for this reason. Sukarno and his Republican Government seem to have little power to stop the fanatics.

On 29 November 1945, the *Melbourne Herald* quote Mr McMahon Ball's assessment of Java.⁹⁴ He predicts widespread starvation throughout the NEI by February 1946; worsening disorder in Java and Batavia (Djakarta) created by the lack of efficient local administration. He also describes the violence and sickening atrocities being perpetrated by *pemuda* that were making it necessary to find asylum for 190,000 Dutch whose condition was already pitiful due to their prolonged internment in Japanese concentration camps. McMahon Ball urged Australia to send all the food ships it could get to the NEI, noting, 'theirs [Dutch internees] is a humanitarian appeal of the most urgent and genuine kind'. He also urged Australia to provide a temporary home and recuperative care for at least 50,000 of them and ships to remove another 10,000 Ambonese, who had incurred the hostility of *pemuda*, from Batavia to the

⁹² McMillan, 27.

⁹³ *The West Australian*, 26 December 1945, 5.

⁹⁴ William Macmahon Ball. *The Japan and Batavia Diaries of W. Macmahon Ball*, edited by Alan Rix (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988); Alan Rix, Alan (ed). *Intermittent Diplomat: The Japan and Batavia Diaries of W. Macmahon Ball* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988); W. Macmahon Ball and H. Wolfsohn, C.P. Fitzgerald, Gordon Greenwood, R.H. Greenwood, N.D. Harper, R.F. Holder and R.G. Neale under the general editorship of Professor Gordon Greenwood, (University of Queensland, Australian Policy Toward Asia, Australian Papers, Institute of Pacific Relations Conference, 1954).

outer Indies islands. His words go largely unheeded. Australia finally rehabilitates around 6,000 Dutch refugee internees.

Many *pemuda* atrocities are also not uncovered until the following year and many years afterwards. On Wednesday 24 April 1946, Graham Jenkins, correspondent with the *Argus* (Melbourne) under the heading 'Devilish Crimes by Javanese *pemuda*, their behaviours as:

A grim chapter of the early months of the Indonesian revolution is being uncovered here by the Dutch civil police, who are daily exhuming the bodies of men, women, and children, victims of Indonesian atrocities, which, for stark horror, rival the worst crimes of the Japanese. During the first few months of its Allied occupation the small British garrison insecurely held Bandung against increasing extremist hostility. Camps housing 60,000 Dutch and Eurasian internees were constantly attacked. Many internees were murdered, and about 860 were kidnapped. What became of the missing people was only assumed, though escapees told of brutal murders, and the check now being made confirms the worst fears. Dismembered and mutilated bodies have proved that 860 people, including many little girls and boys, have been murdered, often in the most revolting and perverted ways imaginable. *Pemuda* are blamed for the crimes. They are the "werewolves" of Java, who, caught at an impressionable age by the Japanese, swallowed a creed of Asiatic naked of the Westerner, and now imagine it is their holy duty to "tjintjang" (dismember) every European they can capture. These youths owe allegiance to the Japanese-promoted Indonesian National Youth Movement, and are trained as suicide squads. The *pemuda* are an embarrassment to the Sjahrir Government, which has called on the Republican forces to put an end to the crimes, but the Indonesian Army is powerless....⁹⁵

Indonesian Republic's relationship with extremist *pemuda*

The Canberra Times, Monday 22 October 1945, alongside an article noting that fighting had flared up again in Batavia and more Eurasians had been slaughtered by Indonesians, also quote Dr. Soebardjo one of the Sukarno Republican Government team, as having sent a message to the U.S. Secretary for State (Mr. Byrnes) declaring that his government had the enthusiastic support of the entire population throughout Indonesia and that the whole civil administration was now in Indonesian hands.⁹⁶ The Advocate Tasmania 30 October 1945 notes that Indonesians angry mobs had set upon and killed 11 Dutch RAPWI officers at Patget, in the mountains between Batavia and Bandung. Australian newspapers report numerous attacks on RAPWI teams over the next months.

⁹⁵ Argus Newspaper, Wednesday 24 April 1946, 3.

⁹⁶ The Canberra Times, Monday 22 October 1945,1.

The Mercury (Hobart, Tas) Friday 19 October 1945, after referring to the recent disorders in Central Java, Morrison says the strongest protest against interference with relief "work had been lodged with Vice President Hatta, who announced that four members of the Cabinet had volunteered to go to Central Java to try to control the situation. The Nationalist leaders cannot control the wild extremists, who have taken the law into their own hands, and they regretfully admit they are unable even to establish communications let alone get their orders obeyed. Despite this they offer to assist the British moving internees to safety with the People's Security Corps (Badan Keamanan Rakjat or the BKR).⁹⁷ In reality neither the BKR nor TKR had control over the masses from the Kampongs.⁹⁸

De Jonge maintains that the Sukarno regime after its formation had not dared to establish a national army (they feared it might influence their relationship with the Allies). Consequently, the BKR corp was a disorganized entity of loose local formations, the remnants of semi-military organisation of Japanese origin that they disbanded on capitulation - Peta, Heiho groups, the Barisan Pelopor, the Barisan Brani Mati and Hizboellah to name some. However, only from Peta and Heiho were experience soldiers. Some joined the BKR, others disillusioned by years of towing the 'Japanese line' formed their own battle groups arbitrarily.⁹⁹

On 18 October 1945, the *Daily News* quote their 'Associated Press Reporter, who notes that extremists of Indonesian Nationalist youth had gotten completely out of hand in many areas in Java.

Taking advantage of the lack of sufficient European forces, they are killing and looting in frenzied zeal to show their hatred for Europeans. At Depok, 15 Netherlands Christian Indonesians were killed and 1050 women were herded into two houses and threatened with torture and death when extremists, ran amok. The four-day terror ended when newspaper' correspondents arrived with an escort of British and Indian troops to investigate rumours of looting. They rescued the women, who were being menaced by a mob of fanatics. The village was a mass of horrible wreckage. In one house seven men and women had been forced to line up facing the wall while two fanatics, armed with 'swords went down 'the line beheading them. One of the women escaped death only because she collapsed, fainting, just as the sword whistled past her neck. She came to several hours later and found herself bathed in the blood of her friends. ...British Commander Lieutenant General Christenson said that he would hold Nationalist leader Dr Sukarno responsible for violent disturbances such as those reported today. Sukarno, however, refuses to take the responsibility. In fact,

⁹⁷ Mercury (Hobart, Tas) Friday 19 October 1945, 2.

⁹⁸ Williams quoted by Hollander 2008, 190

⁹⁹ De Jonge, 606.

according to a Nationalist spokesman, he is scouring the country in an attempt to persuade the people to win freedom by peaceful means.¹⁰⁰

On 1 November 1945, Sjahrir issued a pamphlet (*Perjuangan Kita*) 'Our Struggle' in which he heavily criticized leaders who had collaborated with the Japanese. He also charged that the revolution not be thrown off the track into becoming a racial battle against all white people. In his opinion since Indonesia was situated in a region of Anglo Saxon countries it was normal for it to form certain agreements with those countries in order that foreign capital be invested in the interests of Indonesian economic development. In addition he condemned the unnecessarily cruel actions of the *pemudas*, to which he called an immediate halt. He believed that Indonesian relations with the Netherlands should be a cooperative arrangement based on equal status unlike in colonial times when the Dutch held all the power.¹⁰¹

Australian media's involvement in reporting on the Independence Movement was very comprehensive. Australian unions could therefore never plead ignorance of the situation in the NEI/Indonesia. Throughout, the media report on the bleakness of the situation for former Dutch ex-civilian internees in the Netherlands East Indies; note the lack of law and order, and how the volatility of the situation was intensified by the desperate food situation in Java. The most critical shortages were within the Allied perimeter near Surabaya where some 400,000 civilians, including peaceful Indonesians, Chinese and Arabs resided. They highlight how drastic the boycotting of Dutch ships was; not only for the supplies it stopped critical for indigenous Indonesians' wellbeing but also because these ships were a potential source for Dutch evacuations away from the perilous situation.¹⁰²

Despite the vast newspaper coverage about the intolerable conditions for Indonesians and Dutch in the NEI - derived from witnessed accounts of reliable people such as Macmahon Ball, Mountbatten, nothing changes. Some six weeks later, in a press release dated 15 January 1946, by Australian journalist claim Mr Plumridge, embarrassment about being an Australians in Indonesia given the unions refusal to help with the desperate food situation is down to the Dutch given Unions have put forward conditions for

¹⁰⁰ The Daily News (Perth, WA : 1882 - 1950), Thursday 18 October 1945, 1.

¹⁰¹ Inv.nr 85: Algemeen RijksArchief, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Inventaris van het Archief van het Consulaat generaal te Sydney (Australië), (1927), 1930-1954. Translation of the pamphlet 'Our Struggle' by Sutan Sjahrir, 5 November 1945) 1.4; Sjahrir, Soetan *Onze Strijd* (Publisher: Vrij Nederland, Amsterdam, 1946) P15-16, 27.

¹⁰² Wim Willems, *Uittocht uit Indië 1945-1949* (Amsterdam, Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2001); *Melbourne Herald* and *Argus* newspapers 29 and 30 November 1945; *The West Australian*, 10 December 1945, 10: In an article, "Control of Netherlands East Indies: Stronger British Policy" published on December 10 1945, *The West Australian* newspaper reported that at the Singapore conference of British army commanders and Dutch and French political leaders, the agreement was that pacification of the Netherlands East Indies was to be pursued by the British with greater vigour military force than they were currently using. But also that Britain did not stand pledged to restore Dutch sovereignty in the East Indies. The article also noted that the only issue on which present British military policy remained unchanged was the use of Dutch troops. Dutch troops would not be employed in the actual restoration of law and order, partly with the object of not unnecessarily provoking the Indonesians and partly because the Dutch were insufficiently prepared. But it was clear that the Dutch were expected to come in later to enable the British to leave the country.

their cooperation!¹⁰³ The Trades and Labour Council also receive an appeal from Dutch Trade Unions to please send food to the NEI. Despite these appeals, Australian Unions continue the ban. They explain why via the flyer *What is Behind the Wharf Holdup?* In it they accuse the Dutch of collaborating with the Japanese. The notion the Japanese are collaborating with the Dutch come from the ‘Terms of Surrender’, conceptualised by SEAC that direct Japanese troops to assist RAPWI to protect internees.¹⁰⁴ Digoelists do not appear to have enlighten Unions about the chaotic situation which meant ‘the field’ comprised Republican Government troops, fanatical youth driven by revolutionary zeal as well as opportunistic gangland players.¹⁰⁵ Consequently, the question posed about whether violence is necessarily the best way to go about Independence is ever posed!

Australian unions and RAPWI – more misconstructions!

‘The booklet ‘The Voice of Free Indonesia’ date No. 4 January, 1946 argues, despite the ‘help’ given by Indonesia in providing food for RAPWI internees and reassurance that RAPWI was a humane and philanthropic organization that would not meddle in politics nor military affairs that ammunition had been found in one of their cars.¹⁰⁶ The reports by RAPWI staff claim support was thin on the ground.¹⁰⁷ No mention is made of the extensive evidence about attacks by extremist *pemuda* on RAPWI teams in numerous Australian newspapers – all readily available to all union members and the Merdeka Komite in Mackay. Clearly RAPWI personnel need to be able to protect themselves and the internees in their care from the violent murderous *pemuda* mobs (Appendix One, contains examples of the headlines of the plethora of articles found in myriad newspapers around Australia in 1945 reporting deploring the food boycott, transport blockages and massacres of entire RAPWI teams).¹⁰⁸

The Noel Butlin Union archives also holds a letter from RAPWI directed at Australian unions teams imploring them to let ships provide food and a means of escape. It contains another letter, dated 15 January 1946, from the Australasian Council of Trade Unions following a telegram from the Executive Netherlands Federation of Trade Unions beseeching Australian unions to stop the boycott for the sake of the starving masses in Indonesia. It urgently appeals to have unions move the workers to load ships with relief goods as Indonesia is threatened by serious famine and great shortages of medicines.¹⁰⁹ In a follow up interview, Mr Kuper, President of the Netherlands Federation of Trade Unions in Amsterdam, requests the ACTU urgently cable all unions to restore the loading of ships with the proviso that no war

¹⁰³ N14/190 Noel Butlin Archives: Press release by Unions to Mr Plumridge’s appeal.

¹⁰⁴ Colin Wild and Peter Carey, (eds) *Born in Fire: The Indonesian Struggle for Independence*, Athens, USA, Ohio University Press, 1986, 152-160.

¹⁰⁵ Anton Lucas, in Wild and, Carey, pp. 156-57. Robert Cribb, *Gangsters and Revolutionaries: The Jakarta People’s Militia and the Indonesian Revolution 1945-1949* (Honolulu, University of Hawai’i Press, 1991).

¹⁰⁶ N14/190 Noel Butlin Archives: The Voice of Free Indonesia date No. 4 January 1946.

¹⁰⁷ Tekst van zijn rapport d.d. 27 dec. 1945: a.v., 74I4, 2 A.v., Part One, p. 7. 3 A.v., Pari Two, p. 7, quoted by de Jonge, 1985, 601.

¹⁰⁸ These newspapers can be located on TROVE the National Library of Australia search engine: Argus, Age, Sun, Business News,

¹⁰⁹ Letter dated 15 February 1945, from A.E Monk Secretary Australasian Council of Trade to ACTU Members.

materials be loaded.¹¹⁰ Instead the unions call a conference and continue the ban. The same thing happens after their 30 March 1946, meetings with Lord Louis Mountbatten who also appeals to them to lift the ban as the situation is desperate. Loading, however, the 'side of logic' does not prevail and loading of ships is not resumed.¹¹¹ Despite all the evidence to the contrary, the unions continue to ridicule the mention of 'mercy ships'. They have the tacit support of the Australian Labour Party!

Australian political involvement

The research shows that Menzies, opposition leader at that time, denounced the shipping ban and claimed the unions were running foreign affairs. Questions in Parliament are directed at the Acting Minister of External Affairs by M. Byrne, Press Secretary to the Leader of the Australian Country party concerning the impact on Dutch Australian relationships of the shipping ban. He:

Demand(s) that the Government order... an immediate investigation as to whether indictments could be presented under the section of the Act against the communists who are virtually accessories before the fact in the Indonesian trouble. The position regarding communists behind the industrial dislocation should also be investigated in relation to this same section.¹¹²

This was also the opinion of the mainstream press who were simultaneously printing articles about the revolution and its impact on innocent Netherlands East Indies Dutch civilian internees and POWs. In contrast, the Australian Labor Government supported the Indonesian Republic, at least at the United Nations level, set up after the war; here the personal ambitions of Chifley and Evatt played a key role, because they were keen to be seen supporting the rights of newly emerging nations. Bill Guy in his biography of Clyde Cameron, noted: Evatt promoted Independence at United Nations level where he had an influential voice as a result of his contribution to the creation of the international organisation.¹¹³ At home, Evatt and Chifley supported it in a practical way. They had to tread carefully because of Australia wartime agreement with its allies, including the Netherlands carried over to an extent into peacetime. Australia had become host to NICA in exile in March 1942, following the occupation of the Dutch colony. Dutch warships, merchant ships and planes that had escaped from the Japanese were based in Australia for the entire war years., ready to regain control when the Japanese were defeated. That was the plan but it began to unravel with days of the surrender. After Nationalists headed by Dr Achmed Sukarno declared Independence they let it be known that they intended dealing harshly with anyone who opposed a restored colonial regime. Instead they adopted a passive strategy of support for

¹¹⁰ Noel Butlin Union Archives, N114/190, Letter from Mr Monk, Australasian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) addressed Dear Comrade, dated 15 January 1946, Indonesian Blockade correspondence 1945-1949 it presents the request from Amsterdam unions to load supplies urgently needed in NEI.

¹¹¹ These newspapers can be located on TROVE the National Library of Australia search engine: Argus, Age, Sun, Business News,

¹¹² Letter from the Press Secretary of the leader of the Country party.

¹¹³ Bill Guy, A life on the left: a biography of Clyde Cameron, ARTSA, 1999, p.115.

the boycott campaign – doing little to encourage it but nothing to discourage it either. Guy claims their actions greatly accelerated Indonesia Independence and brought Evatt a great deal of prestige internationally.¹¹⁴ Some of the boycotts infringed the laws that Evatt as Attorney General administered, so he could have intervened to order a lifting of the bans. Chifley as Prime Minister could have invoked emergency powers to the same end. They were under considerable pressure from Menzies and other Opposition front-benchers to take action to prevent the unions dictating foreign policy.

The Mercury (Hobart) Wednesday 26 December 1945 (Australia Associated Press) ‘Recognition of the Sjahrir Indonesian Nationalist Government is the only solution of the Indonesian problem, Dr van Mook is reported to have told the Dutch Cabinet. Dr van Mook, Lieutenant Governor General of the Netherlands Indies, flew from Java to Holland last week to report to the Dutch Government on the situation in Indonesia. American Associated Press says Dr van Mook emphasised that nothing less than full independence would satisfy the Indonesians who would not accept the limited form of self-government within the Dutch Empire, which Queen Wilhelmina promised on Dec. 7, 1942.¹¹⁵ The Dutch Cabinet do not heed his advice. The ‘Police Actions’ imposed by the Netherlands in 1947 and 1948, cause great loss of life and there is evidence for war crimes. They are also the death knell for the NEI. Literature on the revolution focuses predominately on these action, in most instances it is as if the violent ,war crime ridden ‘Bersiap’ did not precede them!

An analysis - Premier Sutan Sjahrir

Sutan Sjahrir, nominated by Sukarno as first Premier of Indonesia, provides an interesting analysis of this period in Indonesian history. His observations about the consequences of indoctrination of the *pemuda* by the Japanese bear similarities to that of *Hitler Jugend* (HJ) by the Nazis. In a document dated 5 November 1945, sent to the Dutch Consul General in Sydney by the Indonesian Republican Information Service, he notes how Indonesia’s isolation from abroad during the Occupation, had enabled Japanese propaganda and combat training to gain a strong foothold on the views and behaviours of Indonesian youth.¹¹⁶ He notes:

For three and a half years, our country has been cut off from abroad so that we knew nothing about conditions abroad, and they [Japanese] had a free hand in selling their lies, which formed the foundation of their propaganda. When the hate of our people for the Japanese became universal and here and there a revolt broke out, our national feeling was used to quell the hate against them. A youth movement was established, by the Japanese to encourage nationalism so as to avert the social dangers that threatened them. This

¹¹⁴ Bill Guy, *A life on the left: a biography of Clyde Cameron*, ARTSA, 1999, p.115.

¹¹⁵ The Mercury (Hobart) Wednesday 26 December 1945, 2.

¹¹⁶ The brochure was sent to me by Dutch academic Dr Margaret Leidenmeyer, historical advisor to the curators of the Bersiap exhibition at Bronbeek Museum Arnhem, Netherlands.

nationalism indeed satisfied the feeling of our younger intellectuals, who were restless and uncertain. In general the secret Japanese societies, Black Dragon, Black Fan and others, originating from the Japanese fifth column, Kempai Tai, Kaigun and others, strongly tuned to the spirit of our youth and they have influenced their spirit to a certain extent though in many cases our youth also maintained their hate of the Japanese.¹¹⁷

Sjahrir notes further how: “ Their hearts were unconsciously influenced by this propaganda, their attitudes and even their thoughts were often similar to those of the Japanese. Their enthusiasm is shown in the first instance in their abhorrence of foreign races... the allied peoples, Netherlanders, Indo-Europeans (our own race), Amboinese, the people of Minahassa, both their own race, Chinese, the internal government. Japanese aim as nothing else if need be than to have *pemuda* hate the whole world with the exception of the Japanese.

Thus, like HJ, *pemuda* were indoctrinated into racial hatred (for HJ it was anti-semitic and anti-Romany); like HJ *pemuda* were instilled with the motivation and given the combat training to enable them as soldiers, to fight faithfully for Dai Nippon (for HJ it was the Third Reich); and like HJ their learning encompassed physical and military training rather than academic study to help the Japanese combat the Allies rather than be taught to think rationally (HJ as young as 12 fought on the Russians front more ferociously than their military counterparts). Indonesia’s Independence was the inducement the Japanese used to hold *pemuda*’s interest. The Japanese combat training (that included encouraging them to resolve to ‘fight to the death’) given these youth to help with Japan’s defence gave them additional power, this was complimented by their new capacity to also mobilise nationally. He also observes, that when the Free State of Indonesia was proclaimed, that the ‘Governors’ were mostly previous civil servants or helpers of the Japanese and that this in addition, formed the obstruction to freeing the Indonesian community of Japanese influence, which he saw as dangerous to the mentality of ‘our youth’. In any case most interpretation of the behaviours of *pemuda* has a contextual bias. Hume and Gibbon’s model of revolutionaries is relevant to extremist *pemuda* behaviours. Both philosophers declare fanatical zeal frequently the moving force in history. ‘For all its terrors, the monomaniac passion of a true believer has the explosive energy to revolutionise the world when men of more sanguine tempers prefer to sleep in peace!’¹¹⁸ However, as Ben Wilson notes, hotheads, such as the *pemuda* (and this best describes their brutal killing rampages) – pull down but do not reconstruct, they leave that to other people – !¹¹⁹ Then again perhaps they more readily fit Jean Paul Sartre model: In a contemporary essay ‘Materialism and revolution’ he claims that the true revolutionaries do not demand rights for themselves. They set out to destroy the idea of rights, which they understand as a hoax of the privileged

¹¹⁷ Inv.nr 85: Algemeen RijksArchief, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, Inventaris van het Archief van het Consulaat generaal te Sydney (Australië), (1927), 1930-1954. Translation of the pamphlet ‘Our Struggle’ by Sutan Sjahrir, 5 November 1945) 1,4.

¹¹⁸ Ben Wilson, *What Price Liberty* (London: faber and faber, 2010) 35; Wilson quotes Hume and Gibbon.

¹¹⁹ Ben Wilson, *What Price Liberty* (London: faber and faber, 2010) 35.

class'. To claim ones' rights as an individual is not to be revolutionary, but to seek to join the privileged class. One cannot claim these rights for a whole class. This is because the rights derive from the oppression the revolutionary wants to destroy. One cannot destroy the oppression without destroying the rights.¹²⁰ The reality ultimately is that the Independence Revolution hardly changed the simple hope of the masses for a 'better future'.

In terms of the debate on changing the date of Indonesian Independence: in historiographical terms, historical revisionism is the reinterpretation of orthodox views on evidence, motivations, and decision-making processes surrounding an historical event. Historians Deborah Lipstadt (1993), Michael Schermer and Alex Grobman (2000), authors of critical studies of Holocaust denial, make a distinction between revisionism and denial. Revisionism, in their view, entails a refinement of existing knowledge about a historical event, not a denial of the event itself, a refinement that comes through the examination of new empirical evidence or a re-examination or reinterpretation of existing evidence. Legitimate historical revisionism acknowledges a 'certain body of irrefutable evidence' or a 'convergence of evidence' that suggest that an event — like the black plague, American slavery, or the Holocaust — did occur. Denial, on the other hand, rejects the entire foundation of historical evidence...."(Lipstadt 1993:21; Shermer & Grobman 200:34). I argue that on balance the evidence as presented in this chapter would support the assumption - I make at the beginning of this chapter - that each of the protagonists should 'acknowledge their own violence'. In terms of the changed date for Indonesian Independence suggested by the *Handelsblad* article discussed in the beginning of this chapter - the evidence does not support this as to do so would be denying the historiography of the Bersiap contained in this account!

Contradictions!

For example, the Australian government while allowing the unions to persuade them to free the Tanah Merah activists was actively imprisoning her own 'naturalised' Italians, Germans and Japanese citizens, some for the entire war years!¹²¹ Also, while supporting Indonesians Independence, Australian Unions were completely ignoring Aboriginal rights. Aboriginals do not register on Census records for another 22 years. The White Australia Policy remained intact for another 27 years, consequently, the exiled Indonesians, who had lived in Australia throughout the war were unable to stay in Australia in its aftermath, even if they had married a local Australian woman. Moreover, if their Australian wife died in Indonesia and the males did not want their children, Australia would not accept them.¹²²

Concluding

¹²⁰ John Paul Sartre, "Materialisme et revolution," *Situations III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p.186; trans. Annette Michelson, *Literary and Philosophical Essays*, (New York: Criterion, 1955), p.215.

¹²¹ Richard Bosworth (ed.), *Oral Histories of Internment, in War, Interment and Mass Migration: The Italo-Australian Experience 1940-1990*, Richard Bosworth & Romano Ugolini, Gruppo Editoriale Internazionale, Roma, 1992, 105.

¹²² Frank Bennett Jnr. *Return of the Exiles, Australia's Repatriation of the Indonesians 1945-47*, (Melbourne: Monash Asia Institute Clayton, 2003). (DFAT 1989:No.405), 174 (Ball), 280 (endnotes) 2003 A 834.

Hans Meijer¹²³, notes how the ferocious mix of social revolution, xenophobia, opportunistic crime and feral populism that resulted in the *Bersiap* atrocities, surprised and horrified not only the British commanders, but also moderate Indonesian leaders. In reflection the Islamicist leader Abu Hanifah who later became minister of education and ambassador admitted: “The Indonesian revolution was not totally pure.” But while western-educated Indonesian leaders were deeply shaken by what they witnessed, many Indonesian accounts of the time considered the violence inevitable, and even morally neutral!¹²⁴

Postscript: To think about!

Netherlands New Guinea^[SEP](Irian Jaya/West Papua)

On May 1, 1963, at the behest of the USA without reference to the Papuans, Indonesia became the ‘new colonial power’ in West Papua New Guinea. The elected West Papuan Council is disbanded, West Papuan flags are banned and burnt, singing of the West Papuan national anthem ‘O, My Land Papua’ is banned, the founding of any new political parties is banned, and anything else to do with West Papuan independence is burnt and destroyed. The Organisasi Papua Merdeka, OPM resistance movement is founded to fight for West Papuan independence. Suharto became President of Indonesia on March 12, 1967 (until 1998) and changes the name Sukarnapura to Jayapura (Djajapura), Irian Barat in Irian Jaya.¹²⁵ He vehemently opposed and form of independence!

Then there is Suriname

Suriname, another Dutch colony did proceed to Independence in the way suggested on 7 December – peacefully. Perhaps a comparison between the two would be useful.

Given that the economic and environmental situation of the masses hardly improved in Indonesia under Independence it raises the question – “is there a non-violent way to achieve Independence?” Perhaps an example might be Suriname. Another of the Dutch Colonies established by the VOC, in 1954, it opted to transition to a system of limited self-governance with the Netherlands in control of defense and foreign affairs. In 1973, the NPK, a leading government party, opened negotiations that culminated with full independence for Suriname in November 25, 1975. The Dutch government in the following decades aided Suriname and its economy, receiving much of the population of Suriname that wanted to leave the country. The process that marked the Suriname case study was similar to the process offered Indonesians by Queen Wilhelmina in her 7 December 1942 radio broadcast.

¹²³ Hans, Meijer, *In Indie geworteld, de Geschiedenis van Indische Nederlanders, de twintigste eeuw* (Publisher Bert Bakker, Amsterdam, 2004) 249-250.

¹²⁴ <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/the-act-of-killing-reenacting-war-crimes-with-indonesian-gangsters-a-882970.html>; this is a highly thought provoking website relevant to wartime killing behaviours.

¹²⁵ <http://www.vanderheijden.org/ng/history.html#4>