

# International Relations Section

## Indonesian Students in the Dutch Courts

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**A**FTER the insurrections which broke out in Java in November, 1926, and two months later in Sumatra, had been swiftly and bloodily suppressed, with thousands imprisoned or deported to barren New Guinea, the Dutch government turned its attention to the Indonesian students in Holland, who had formed an association, the Perhimpoean Indonesia, to help win independence for their native country.

In June, 1927, the police organized sudden domiciliary visits in the Hague and Leyden. The rooms of the students were searched, and their books, pamphlets, and correspondence seized. So well was the raid prepared that the next day the bourgeois papers carried detailed reports of the subversive activities of the students. The semi-official government telegraph agency, Aneta, which maintains the intelligence service between Holland and her colonies, at once sent a column-long telegram about the discovery of a plot against the Dutch state. The houses had been searched, the papers said, because the members of the Perhimpoean Indonesia were suspected of belonging to a "forbidden association." For days the papers circulated news and rumors from government sources about the discovery of a "Communist plot."

Two months after this raid, with the public mind prepared, four leading members of the Perhimpoean Indonesia, all students, were arrested. After six months in jail without bail—in violation of the law—they were at last arraigned, in March, 1928. The charge was inciting to insurrection by articles in the organ of the Perhimpoean Indonesia—*Indonesia Merdeka* [Free Indonesia]. This paper appears in both the Dutch and Malay languages. This was the only charge. The enormous amount of material seized during the search, which it took a special judicial commission months to examine, furnished no basis for the charge of belonging to a "forbidden association"—meaning Communist—which the government had so loudly proclaimed.

This political prosecution obviously had the object of destroying the machinery of the Perhimpoean Indonesia, especially by discovering its connections with Indonesia. For their paper—*Indonesia Merdeka*—had not only asserted that the attempt of a small country like Holland despotically to rule 50,000,000 Malays must lead sooner or later to violent conflict, but it had also published from private sources startling facts which the telegraph agency, Aneta had suppressed. Eye-witness affidavits told of the bloody suppression of the insurrection, of brutalities by the Dutch soldiery, of wholesale arrests, of a reign of terror and torture. Among the accounts was a circumstantial story that innocent persons were bound to trees to be bitten by large and voracious ants in order to extort confessions. The desire to trace the origin of this material was probably a more urgent reason for the domiciliary visits, the confiscations, and the arrests than the suspicion of a "Communist plot."

On March 8 and 9 the case was brought to trial before the court at the Hague. All imperialist governments assume that nationalist insurrections in the East are due to conspiracies in Moscow, so the public prosecutor tried to prove a connection between the Indonesian students and European Communists. His attempt was a complete fiasco. The subversive character of the articles which the prisoners wrote was so unconvincing that the prosecution dragged in some articles published years ago, which had nothing whatever to do with the charges and which were, in any case, not actionable.

Counsel for the defense pointed out that if such press utterances were actionable the law courts would be working day and night. No public prosecutor in Holland, said he, thinks of taking action against articles opposing the present constitution which appear daily in the extreme radical papers.

Since the case ultimately rested not on a question of "incriminating articles," but on the revolutionary activities of the Indonesian nationalists, the public prosecutor demanded a total of nine and a half years' imprisonment for the four students. He attacked the secret activities of the association, but the defense showed that these were due to the illegal action of high Dutch officials who sent police spies into their circles and opened their mail. Mohammed Hatta, the leader of the accused students, in his speech for the defense, exclaimed:

We have been persecuted for years. . . . We believed that here in the land of Grotius, where so much is said about the constitutional rights of the free citizen, these elementary rights would apply to us too. It has been proved, however, that as we could not be legally prosecuted, other and immoral means were employed to strike at us. Members of our families in Indonesia were threatened with dismissal from the government service if they continued to send money to their sons who remained members of the Perhimpoean Indonesia. In this way the Christian Dutch government provoked conflict between fathers and sons, between the older and younger generations.

We do not make propaganda for violence. But an analysis of colonial conditions teaches us that the independence of Indonesia can be gained only by violence. This has been declared as a fact, not only by us, but also by members of Parliament and by missionaries. Two tendencies stand irreconcilably opposed to each other: Dutch imperialism, which will keep its colonies at any price, and the Indonesian nationalist movement, which aspires to complete independence. As with all other peoples, a day will dawn when the Indonesians will take their place among free peoples. The fight for this freedom has commenced. It does not depend on Indonesia, nor on us, but on Holland alone, as to whether or not this freedom will be won without violence and bloodshed.

The court exhibited a spirit of independence despite the government's demands for conviction and despite the agitation of the bourgeois press. The accused were acquitted.

*In next week's International Relations Section will appear an article on Labor in the Belgian Congo, by Raymond Leslie Buell of the Foreign Policy Association.*