



# Hands off Indonesia

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By GERALD PEEL, M.A.

## AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

Recent events have made Australians Indonesia-conscious. This booklet attempts to give some facts about this great neighbouring country to Australia, and throw some clarity on present happenings.

GERALD PEEL,  
Sydney, October 3rd, 1945.

### QUOTATION FROM "TROPICANA"

Official A.A.E.S. Organ of the 7th Divvy in Borneo,

Editor: Lt. W. F. WANNAN.

Supervising Officer: Capt. W. JOYCE.

Balikpapan, September, 1945.

"Those Australians who have been fortunate enough to gain some insight into the habits, customs and modes of living of the native peoples of the Balikpapan area, will, I feel, be agreed that they are an attractive race, *kindly, hospitable, clean, hard-working and intelligent.*

"Though subjected to the usual hardships and atrocities of vicious Japanese militarism, they have emerged with honour as a people who, with very few exceptions, *did not collaborate with the invader*, and who are now carrying on cheerfully in the difficult period of resettlement."

## CHAPTER ONE:

# INDONESIAN REPUBLIC

The Japs conquered the Dutch East Indies in 1942. They were heading for Australia, and met little resistance in Indonesia, where the Dutch Government, which had followed a policy of appeasement to Japan, had only a small army to fight with. Indonesians in the Dutch Army, however, fought valiantly.

During the Japanese occupation, Indonesians carried on consistent sabotage. Many letters I have seen from Australian servicemen in Borneo, bear witness to the effectiveness of the resistance movement in the islands. All legal and illegal means were used, and nationalists penetrated even the Japanese-formed state apparatus so that they could strike when the opportune time came.

Indonesians abroad fought side by side with the United Nations to free their homeland. Many gave their lives. Those of us who got to know them in Australia, made friends with them quickly, and came to admire their courage, their integrity, and their fervour for democracy. They were good trade unionists.

### Don't Want Dutch Back

With the defeat of the Japanese, an independent Republic was set up by the people of Indonesia at a conference of all nationalist organisations. As President of the Republic, they elected Dr. Soekarno, well-known to Indonesians in Australia as a man who has worked for Indonesian independence for many years.

In the first days of the Republic, red and white national flags, forbidden by the Dutch, were flown everywhere, and the banned National Anthem, "Indonesia Raja," was sung by the delighted people. "Especially," commented Batavia Radio, "are the ordinary common people delighted with independence." Law and order was maintained by youth leagues and volunteer organisations of the people themselves.

### Mass Arrests and Floggings

Indonesian Republican leaders in Batavia made clear they wanted a peaceful alliance with the British, Australians and Americans; but would resist any Dutch attempt to regain power.

In Australia, Indonesians, in the Dutch Army and Navy, and also in the labour corps, hospitals and merchant marine, who had contributed much to win the war, supported to a man the demand for an independent republic in their country. They reminded us of the Atlantic Charter for which they and we had fought.

The Dutch answer was the disarming of the Indonesian soldiers in Australia, and arrests of Indonesians in the camps. Men who had been demanding deferred pay which they said had been promised them, and were in dispute with the Dutch around other economic demands, were surrounded on parade by Dutch Tommy-guns and marched off to jail.

Meanwhile reports came to hand from Australian soldiers in Borneo, of the reintroduction of miserable labour conditions, and brutal treatment of Indonesians, including flogging, by Dutch (N.I.C.A.) officials.

### Mercy Ships

When it became clear that the Dutch were planning to reconquer Indonesia by force of arms and overthrow the newly-formed republic, Indonesian sailors refused to man ships.

Dutch propagandists called them "mercy ships," but this was exploded when arms and ammunition were found in their cargoes.

Under the heading "Mr. Chifley Explains," the "Sydney Morning Herald," October 3rd, wrote:—

"In the House of Representatives Mr. Chifley said that all the arms and ammunition in four 'so-called' mercy ships had been loaded into one Dutch ship by Dutch personnel, and that ship, carrying also Dutch soldiers had left Australia."

So much for the "mercy ships."

Dutch propaganda is very clever. Mynherr van der Plass's statement expressing willingness to discuss questions of independence with Dr. Soekarno and others, does not deceive Indonesians who know such discussions in the past. It is obvious such talk is playing for time as exemplified by this indecent haste to get arms and soldiers to Java.

### Defending Their Profits

Dr. Soekarno, President of the Indonesian Republic, said this to an A.A.P. correspondent in reply to van der Plass: "Seventy million natives, having proclaimed their independence, will fight any attempt to restore Dutch sovereignty."

Haji Salim, a founder of the Indonesian Nationalist Movement, told the same correspondent: "We have had Dutch promises for

350 years. We would not hesitate even to start a new world war if the Dutch tried to establish themselves." (S.M.H., 3/10/45).

The present Dutch Provisional Government appointed by Queen Wilhelmina, represents the big Dutch monopolies that have ruthlessly exploited the Indonesian people in the past.

Seven of the ministers are directly linked with big business. Van Kleffens, (Foreign Affairs), for two years held an important post with the Royal Dutch Shell; De Booy, (Navy and Shipping), was the director of this company; Meynen, (War), was until war's outbreak, connected with an American chemical concern, and belonged to Philips (radio, etc.); Van Schaik was a director of the A.K.U., with artificial silk interests in Germany; and so on.

The East Indies Government in Australia is composed of the same sort of people personally interested in the restoration of the former vicious exploitation of the Indonesian people; and wants to get back to safeguard the big profits they formerly extracted from the country.

### **Australian Trade Union Support**

Australian waterside workers, and the Australian trade union movement generally, supported fellow Indonesian trade unionists in their struggle. Cables were sent by Indonesians in Australia to the Council of Foreign Ministers and other bodies abroad. News soon followed that American and New Zealand waterside workers were also banning the loading of Dutch ships.

The duty of the Australian working-class and of all democratic Australians is clear. It is to give full support to the demand of the Indonesian people to run their own affairs in their own country in their own way. The Australian waterside workers, in their action of support for the Indonesian Republic, have shown the same solidarity with their brothers abroad, and far-sightedness in Australian democracy's own interests, as they showed in 1938 when they refused to load scrap-iron for Japan.

## CHAPTER TWO: UNDER THE DUTCH

By Indonesia is meant that part of the world better known as the East Indies. Except for parts of Borneo, which are British, and half of Timor, which is Portuguese, all Indonesia comes under the rule of the Dutch.

For 350 years Indonesians have lived under the autocratic rule of the Dutch Imperialists. Enormous profits have been extracted from the Indonesian people, and the Indonesian soil, to swell the coffers of the rich Dutch monopolists and other foreign imperialists. A reason given by a Dutch apologist (Daily Telegraph, 1/10/45), for Dutch return to power in Indonesia was: "We made the Indies with our own hands." That is the first mention I have heard of the Dutch "burra sahibs" in Indonesia as "coolies."

### A Rich Country Her People Kept Poor

In this chapter I shall try and show why Indonesians do not want to go back to what they had before.

Indonesia is one of the richest countries in the world. With a population of 72,000,000—of whom 50,000,000 live in Java—she has all the natural riches needed for prosperity, and to provide plenty for her people.

For instance, Indonesia provides 92% of the world's pepper, 91% of the world's cinchona, used for making the valuable drug quinine, 80% of the world's bauxite, 77% of the world's kapok, 40% of the world's rubber, and very large quantities of total world requirements of tea, cocos products, tin, tow fibres, sugar and oil.

Yet with all these great riches, Indonesians under the Dutch remained miserably poor. The great wealth produced by the toil of Indonesians was not used for the benefit of their country, or its people.

The rates of pay for the Indonesian workers, working in the big foreign concerns, ranged under the Dutch from 6d. to 1/- a day. Peasants, exploited by the foreigner, eked out a bare existence. According to the Heunder Commission, (a Dutch Government commission), in 1933, the average income of an Indonesian was 1d. per head per day.

## Where Did the Money Go?

Who got the booty? Europeans, less than 0.5% of the population, received 65% of the income individually subject to income tax, while Indonesians, 97.5% of the population, received only one-eighth of this income.

In 1937, only 1 in 11 children were attending any school. Annual cost of the education system was less than 11d. per head of the population. Only those who could afford to pay big fees, and were approved by the Dutch authorities, could attend the secondary schools, and they had to learn per medium of the foreign Dutch tongue. For others there was only the possibility of a very nominal education in primitive village schools, the construction and upkeep of which was paid for by the villages themselves.

While there was neither free nor compulsory education for Indonesians in their own country, education for Dutch children living there, was both compulsory and free.

## Sham Parliament

Dutch apologists quote the "Volksraad," or Parliament of Indonesia, as evidence of their benign and democratic rule. Actually the "Volksraad" was a sham.

It consisted of 60 members; 30 Indonesians, 25 Dutch and 5 other foreign Asiatics. Of these, 10 Indonesians, 10 Dutch and 2 Asiatics were appointed, the remaining 38 being elected on a very limited franchise and by an indirect system of election.

This "Volksraad" only met twice a year, it had no power to pass laws, or any other sort of power. Rule was by the Governor-General, and his officials the Governors, Dutch Residents, and puppet princes and chiefs, and a council of 4 to 6, all appointed by the Crown. Under the Dutch, Indonesians had no say whatsoever in the running of their own affairs.

## Fascist Laws

Some idea of the fascist-like Dutch rule in Indonesia is revealed in their own laws.

One act of this "democratic" government stated:—

"Those, who can be considered by the Government to have roused the cause of a Labour strike by means of speech, writing or drawing, will be fined for a maximum amount of £50 or five years imprisonment."

It was not only for "rousing the cause" of a strike you could get this penalty, but there was another separate act which allotted

the same penalty if you "directly or indirectly incited a strike," so they had you all ways.

Then you could get 6 years' imprisonment for "insulting the legal government," or 9 months for holding a meeting of "more than 3 persons" without getting permission from the government 24 hours before the meeting.

Another act stated that :—

"Those who can be considered by the government to disturb or to have disturbed the public peace and order will be *without any legal proceedings* exiled for an indefinite time at a specially appointed place."

I may add the "specially appointed place" was generally Tanah Merah Concentration camp in Hollandia, in which place of exile in the unhealthy jungle swamps of Dutch New Guinea many Indonesians now in Australia spent 17 of the best years of their lives. When released here they worked with enthusiasm for the war effort. News has lately come through that some of these men are being returned to this hell-camp and being treated with great brutality by the Dutch authorities.

These are some of the reasons why Indonesians in Batavia raise the slogan today: "Better be in hell than colonised again."



## CHAPTER THREE:

### WHO ARE THE QUISLINGS ?

The Dutch Imperialists have tried to confuse the issue with talk about "quislings." What is a quisling? A quisling is a man who sells out his own country.

For instance, in Holland, a free democratic country, Mussert, the leader of the Fascists, was a quisling when he co-operated with the German Imperialist Nazis who tried to make a colony out of Holland, as Indonesia was a colony of the Dutch.

There was no such choice for Indonesians. They never had a country they could call their own. Before the Jap conquest of their country, they were ruled in a fascist-like way by the Dutch and had no say in their own affairs. After the conquest, the Japs took the place of the Dutch.

The struggle for independence of Indonesian nationalists remained the same, that of ridding themselves of foreign rule. They still had to manoeuvre, and use all legal and illegal methods, to attain their goal—*independence*.

#### Democratic Constitution

I have read the constitution of the Indonesian Republic, drawn up by the Soekarno Government. It is a democratic constitution, along the same lines as ours, or Britain's, or Holland's, not the sort of constitution fascists, or people friendly to fascism, would adopt.

This constitution gave to the Indonesian people freedom of press, speech, assembly, and the right to organise in political parties and trade unions, all which freedoms were denied them by the Dutch. It provided universal adult franchise for men and women alike. It is a constitution based on sound democratic principles, never before known in Indonesia, under the Dutch, or the Japs.

#### A Puppet Government

The Soekarno Government, then, has the support of the people and a democratic constitution. The Dutch Indies Government, on the other hand, has been elected by no-one. It has no democratic

right to be recognised as the lawful government of Indonesia. Indonesians did not elect it, nor have they any confidence in it. It is nothing but a Dutch Tory rump—a puppet government.

This is the same N.E.I. Government which, before the war, banned trade unions and all patriotic parties of the people, jailed and exiled anti-fascists, but allowed Mussert, leader of the Dutch Fascists, to visit Java and establish a branch of his party there.

It is the government which jailed the Indonesian leader, Sarejono, now working in Australia, and when Dutch voters elected him to the Dutch Parliament, refused to allow him to take his seat.

Press reports state, that Dutch officials of this government, when they went back to Batavia, lived as "the guests of the Japanese Commander-in-Chief" in the luxury "Hotel des Indes." When the Dutch officials went on the streets, they went with Jap armed guards to protect them from the populace, the same Japs who yesterday were spilling the blood of Australians, Americans, Britishers, Indonesians and Dutchmen, and torturing them in the concentration camps. Japs used force against the newly-set-up republic, attempted to arrest Soekarno, while they treated the Dutch as their guests. Soekarno called the Japs "Dutch policemen."

### **Soekarno "Sincere"**

Indonesians in Australia have faith in Soekarno. They say he has lived all his life for the cause of an independent Indonesia and is a sincere democrat. They point out how before the war, Indonesian nationalists, among them Soekarno, asked the Dutch to conscript an army of Indonesians to fight for their country against the Japanese fascist threat; but the Dutch imperialists, fearing the popular power of the people in Indonesia more than the threat from outside, refused to arm the people, but relied on the goodwill of their brother Jap-Imperialists.

When the Japs came they found the country practically defenceless. The Dutch left the Shell Oil Refineries intact for the Japs.

The result of all this was tragic for Indonesia, and nearly brought tragedy to Australia. It must never be repeated.

Mynherr van der Plass, Dutch Imperialist spokesman, recently admitted Soekarno's sincerity. He was reported in the "Sydney Morning Herald", September 26th, as saying: "That he deeply regretted Dr. Soekarno's policy, because Dr. Soekarno and Mr. Hatta were most sincere." But quislings are not sincere. They are traitors to their countries, not patriots; fascists, not democrats.

### **The Issue Is A Straight One**

We must not let main issues be clouded. What Indonesians are asking is, that they be allowed to run their own affairs, in their

own country, in their own way; which is their democratic right; and accords with the principles of the Atlantic Charter.

They have made clear that they are not anti-anyone, but pro-Indonesia. In an independent Indonesia, Dutchmen, Britishers, Americans, Australians and other foreigners, they say, could carry on their business affairs and would be welcome. All they are asking for is recognition of Indonesia as a democratic republic, with a constitution very much like that of Australia—government of Indonesians by Indonesians for Indonesians.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### INDONESIAN INDEPENDENCE NO NEW DEMAND

The movement for national independence of the Indonesian people is no new growth. The first Indonesian political society, organised in 1908, was called "*Boedi Oetomo*", (Beautiful Spring). By 1910 it had 10,000 members. Its main activity was furtherance of popular education.

About 1910, a more radical movement, called "*Sarekat Islam*", was formed. The leaders of this movement appealed to the masses for support through religious slogans. The first congress in 1913 still pledged loyalty to Holland. The 1917 conference, however, declared independence the main objective. Great emphasis was laid on the class struggle.

#### Growth of Trade Unions

A central trade union organisation was first established in Indonesia in 1919. A wave of strikes followed, the most important of which were the Semarang-Cheribong tramway strike, the Sumatra East Coast railway strike, the Soerabaya printers' strike, the tailors' strike, and a strike in the sugar industry.

1920-27 witnessed a growth of Communist and radical elements in the national movement demanding action for independence. Strikes continued, including a strike in the State pawnshops in 1922, and a transport strike in 1923. The Governor-General took drastic measures. He restricted the right of assembly, and made it an offence to incite to strike.

By 1923, the majority of local branches of the Sarekat Islam had progressive leadership pledged to struggle. But in that year, the right-wing inner-group on the executive effected a purge. A new society was formed, called the "*Sarekat Merah*", (Red Proletarian League), with great popular support.

#### 1927 Uprising

1925 saw a new wave of strikes and lock-outs, and from November 1926 to January 1927 there were violent clashes between patriots and government forces in both Java and Sumatra. The outbreak

in Java lasted about 6 weeks. There were frequent skirmishes between nationalists and strikers on the one hand, and police on the other, in early 1927. The last and most serious of these was at Siloengkang, where 7 Indonesian patriots were killed and 2 policemen wounded. Then came the Dutch counter-offensive. 4,500 Indonesians, communists, strikers, nationalists were jailed, and a further 1,308 sent to the now famous concentration camp in Dutch New Guinea.

Tanah Merah is to Indonesians, what Belsen and Buchenwald are to Europeans. Many of those patriots sent there in 1927, besides others who joined them later, first tasted freedom again in Australia, and then only after democratic protest forced the hands of the Dutch. They played a leading part in the Indonesian war effort. They do not want to go back to Tanah Merah now that victory is won.

1927 remains a year of glory in the memory of the Indonesian people. The Tanah Merah exiles are their heroes.

In the period of terror which followed, organisation was difficult. The old parties of the people, such as the Sarekat Islam, Sarekat Merah, *Partai Kommunist Indonesia*, (Indonesian Communist Party), and others, had been suppressed or driven underground. For a time the Dutch imperialists allowed the existence of a nationalist party, *Partai Nasional Indonesia*, which had been formed by Indonesians who had studied in Holland. Dr. Soekarno and Mr. Hatta were both leaders of this party, and the Indonesian National Anthem, "Indonesia Raja", dates from this time. In 1929, however, the Dutch banned this party too, and many of its leaders, including Dr. Soekarno, were exiled by the Dutch imperialists.

Organisation for independence was illegal from that time, until, with the defeat of the Japs, they were able to come right out into the open in their true colours with democratic demands.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

# THREE REASONS WHY AUSTRALIA SHOULD SUPPORT INDONESIA

Australia has not only a democratic duty to support Indonesian independence, but a very direct material interest in favour of a free Indonesia. We do not forget 1942, and how Jap armies ripped through the countries to our immediate north as scissors rip through silk. And why? Because the peoples of those countries were neither free nor armed. We need for our defence, an armed, free and democratic Indonesia, friendly to Australia.

### How We Will Be Judged

It is my opinion Indonesia will get her freedom in the near future. The free Indonesia of the future will judge Australia, and democracy, largely by the support we give her now in her hour of need.

Support, then, for Indonesian independence now, is a patriotic duty vital to future Australian defence.

### Threat To Our Standards

Australians are also interested in Indonesian living standards. Big business in the white parts of the world sees wage cuts at home as its only way out in the wild international scramble for markets. Low wages in colonial countries threaten our hard-won standards at home. Our answer is not cuts, but higher standards everywhere.

That is why it is in our own material interests to support independence for colonial countries so that their peoples may have freedom and the right to organise in trade unions and improve their living standards.

### Markets and Jobs

Also, we need markets abroad as well as at home to create jobs for Australians. We are dependent upon Indonesia for many of our vital needs. Australia gets nearly all its tea, petrol, oils, kapok

and quinine from Indonesia, also large supplies of rubber and other useful goods. The reason the wartime brown liquid, called tea, was not tea, was because Indonesia was under the Japs.

A free Indonesia would also want in return many things Australia can produce. For instance tractors, farm implements, machinery for her new factories, raw materials like wool, manufactured goods, and more immediately, food.

Our past trade balance with Indonesia has been unsatisfactory. In 1937-38, a typical year, Australian imports from Indonesia were £7,530,500; our exports to Indonesia only £1,171,900; or there was an unfavourable balance of £6,358,600.

The Dutch Imperialist stranglehold of Indonesia has kept Australian products off the Indonesian market. A great potential market is awaiting Australian goods there, but only when Indonesia is free and her people get incomes which will permit them to buy the things from us they need.

### Deeds Not Words

From all points of view, Australian democracy must support the Indonesian people in their just demand for Independence. What Indonesia needs from the Australian Labour Movement, and all Australians who profess friendship for her today, is deeds not words.

*All support to Indonesian Independence. No aid to the Dutch Puppet Government. Indonesia for the Indonesians. No victimisation. Hands off Indonesia.*

These should be our democratic slogans.

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