

Klaas Stutje, *Campaigning in Europe for a Free Indonesia. Indonesian Nationalists and the Worldwide Anticolonial Movement, 1917-1931*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Monograph Series 145 (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2019, 272 pp., ISBN 9788776942649).

In *Campaigning in Europe for a Free Indonesia*, Klaas Stutje explores how and why the small, expatriate Indonesian nationalist organisation *Perhimpunan Indonesia* (PI) ended up having such a large impact on the development of the Indonesian nationalist movement in the twentieth century. PI was officially born in the Netherlands in 1924 and comprised of young Indonesian men who pursued their studies in the imperial metropole. Stutje demonstrates that their presence in Europe afforded them the opportunity to interact with anticolonial activists from a variety of other empires. The Indonesian students who founded PI learned about movements and struggles against colonialism in other places and drew inspiration – as well as bonds of solidarity – from them. Stutje argues that the development of PI must be understood against ‘the backdrop of a rapidly evolving global context and in relation to other political movements and networks’ (2).

The book is divided into six chapters plus an introduction and conclusion. Its structure is roughly chronological: it begins with the organisation of PI’s predecessor, the *Indische Vereeniging*, in 1908, and ends when the PI became more or less a front organisation for the Communist International in 1931. Chapters 1 and 6 give general overviews of Indonesians in the Netherlands and Europe at the beginning and end of this period, respectively, while the chapters in the middle are focused mainly on individuals who were emblematic of that particular phase of the movement.

Chapter One provides the necessary context, as it explores the phenomenon of Indonesians in the Netherlands from the 1920s and then moves to the particular case of Indonesian students. While students began going to the Netherlands in the late nineteenth century, Stutje reminds readers that, until World War I, these were generally children of the aristocracy. In time, children of lower-ranking aristocrats and bourgeois began sending their children as well, since opportunities for obtaining a higher education in the Dutch East Indies were limited. By the early 1920s, many of the Indonesian students who arrived in the Netherlands to study were frustrated with the failure of announced reforms in the Indies, and began to take on a more political outlook than those who had arrived earlier. By 1924, Stutje argues, these newer arrivals had transformed the apolitical social club *Indische Vereeniging* into the overtly nationalist PI, which had ties to anticolonial activists across Europe.

What prompted PI in its orientation toward anticolonial activists and movements representing other empires? Chapter Two explores this question in the figure of Ratu Langie, a student from Minahasa who went to study in the Netherlands in 1912. Five years later, he decided to pursue a PhD in Zürich, where he embraced Indonesian nationalism as a result of encounters with other Asians and pan-Asian thought. In 1918 he co-founded the *Société des Étudiantes Asiatiques*, which aimed to promote mutual understanding among Asians and to encourage members to work toward independence in their home territories. While the organisation was not particularly successful in the short term, Stutje claims that it provided a crucial example for other Indonesian students about the importance of establishing contact with other colonised students while abroad. Indeed, in Chapter Three Stutje shows that Ratu Langie's legacy played a role in the newly-formed PI's decision to send one of their members, Arnold Wilson Mononutu, to Paris. His task was explicitly to 'establish contacts and forge networks with anticolonial activists' (61). The choice of Paris stemmed from the fact that nearly ten percent of Paris' population at the time was made up of expatriate Asians and Africans. In Paris, Mononutu became involved with the *Association pour l'étude des civilisations orientales*, which sought autonomy for Asian people everywhere. It was through Mononutu's contacts that PI decided to participate in a peace conference in the town of Bierville in 1926, in which PI chairman Mohammad Hatta gave a stirring speech in which he pleaded for the end of colonial rule, ending with the pronouncement '[w]here there is no justice, there is no peace' (84). Yet while PI began to gain attention from other anticolonial activists in Europe as a result of participation in such events, its activities also attracted the attention of Dutch authorities, who were not at all pleased.

Chapter Four forms the heart of the story, as it marks the zenith of PI's standing both in Europe and in Indonesia as the most coherent nationalist voice against Dutch rule in the Dutch East Indies. In February 1927, PI representatives were invited to Brussels to attend the largest and most important anticolonial gathering of the interwar period: the Congress Against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism, initiated by Willi Münzenberg, the chair of the Workers International Relief. Stutje points out that, under ordinary circumstances, this tiny, rather elite group of nationalist students would not have had any business representing the Dutch East Indies at a congress at which luminaries like Jawaharlal Nehru and Lamine Senghor who represented their own territories. But circumstances were not ordinary in 1927, and the agenda of PI was catapulted to international attention largely because members were in the right place at the right time. Indeed, communist revolts in the Indies had just been brutally suppressed, and the Communist International in Moscow needed a strategy to indicate their *ex post facto* support for their Indonesian comrades. Semaoen, an exiled Indonesian communist active in

Europe, suggested working with PI members as the voice for Indonesian independence, and thus was the driver behind their invitation to the congress. ‘The facts’, as Stutje argues, ‘that the PI had never been part of the uprising itself and did not have a mass support base was not seen as problematic’ (127). At this point, PI members – and Hatta in particular – played important roles in the League Against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression that was formed in the wake of the Congress, giving them an international presence far beyond what they could have achieved on their own.

The attention/spotlight position of PI and its members during and after the Congress also led the Dutch authorities to crack down on what it thought was an increasingly dangerous, and certainly embarrassing, organisation. Chapter Five details the wave of repression that followed, beginning in the summer of 1927. Several PI members, including Hatta, were arrested and held in prison for nearly a year before they were ultimately acquitted. This repression had two main effects. First, the imprisonment and trial of PI members generated constant media attention, thus keeping the agenda of the PI in the spotlight. Second, in order to escape Dutch surveillance, the PI moved its headquarters from the Netherlands to Berlin, which brought members like Achmad Soebardjo (who features in this chapter) into contact with prominent communists in the anticolonial networks of that city. The political realignment of PI toward communism forms one of the main arguments of Chapter Six. Although the acquittal of Hatta and other PI members was seen as a huge victory for PI in 1928, by then the fortunes of the organisation had begun to wane. As PI became more communist in orientation, the original leadership – including Hatta himself – was progressively seen by younger, more radical members as obstructionist. By 1931, Hatta and other non-communist PI members were expelled from the organisation. In the meantime, nationalist agitation in Indonesia itself, notably by the Partai Nasional Indonesia, had overtaken the struggles organised by expatriates in Europe, and now began to dominate the story.

*Campaigning in Europe for a Free Indonesia* is an important book, both for the history of Indonesian nationalism and for those interested in the ‘international moment’ of interwar anticolonialism. Using archival sources from the Netherlands, Indonesia, France, and the United Kingdom as well as a wide variety of newspaper and printed sources, Stutje is absolutely convincing in his conviction that early ‘Indonesian nationalism derived much of its inspiration and legitimacy from the international stage’ (188). His work fits squarely within a historiographical trend in which scholars have sought to expose the importance of transnational and trans-imperial connections inherent within anticolonial movements around the world. For Indonesia, it is difficult to deny that PI’s experience on the international stage while in Europe had been transformative not just for individual members – many of

whom went on to long political careers – but to the development of Indonesian nationalism more generally. For this reason, *Campaigning in Europe for a Free Indonesia* should attract not only those scholars interested in the history of Indonesia and the Dutch East Indies, but those interested in imperialism and anticolonialism more generally.

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