

IN SEARCH OF A NEW ETHOS

GUNAWAN MUHAMMAD

The present decade will very likely see an Indonesia that has to reflect on her real existence. As happens to nearly all countries in the third world, she in her turn is forced to face an inevitable dilemma, which has often been discussed recently, namely between the urgency of accelerating economic growth on the one hand and the pressing problem of redistribution of income and that of employment on the other.⁽¹⁾ This dilemma is in the last instance to be solved technically. However, whatever the solution may be, it will nevertheless always depend on an existing philosophy of history. Decisions concerning the priority of social justice or welfare for instance, require a certain attitude, and must not be only a technical way out. And what we call attitude comprises certain ideological dimensions: it pertains to a self image, both in the present situation and in the future; it concerns a nation's position in the international community of nations; it involves what one expects of life and what is given to us by life. Many of these things must be reconsidered in the final years of the '70's.

One thing is to be clarified, and this is the fact that all our present desires and expectations, all our existing criteria and activities, are based on assumptions and aspirations that are determined by Indonesia's acceptance of the hegemony of the modern world. These assumptions and aspirations are naturally not always explicitly expressed. However, these can be seen from our hope of attaining a certain level in the GNP; these can be seen from the very idea of modernization, from some existing artistic expressions and from the efforts to foster educational reform and planning; in fact these can be clearly detected from the existing pattern of daily consumption.

These phenomena are not difficult to explain. In a society in which the elites have been forced from time to time to adapt themselves to existing foreign patterns those phenomena are somehow inevitable. We cannot deny the fact that not infrequently they have become influential factors fostering motivation to work for progress. But it is very important to note that poverty and underdevelopment have become openly manifest, and more interesting is that man begins to measure and calculate welfare, since poverty and underdevelopment become arithmetically measurable. Man has created tables and scales, in which one community of mankind is given a higher or lower ranking in relation to other communities. Statistics have become a spreading fashion everywhere, and are used to calculate and to draw comparison of various per capita income patterns, to fill comparative tables of educational attainment, of

annual publications, even to measure medals and records a man has won in international competitions. All this has come to be regarded as normal, and basically this use of statistics is not wrong.

The danger in measuring everything by statistics, which is often overlooked, is the growing confusion in the fundamental understanding of life itself. Here self-respect and self-confidence are merely defined with numbers and tables. Happiness is identified with a certain point in a mounting curve. Human capacities are merely incarnated into symbols. Life's unique and concrete situation is rigidly standardized.

It is not our intention to belittle economists and statisticians. However, two tendencies should be noted. First: that the existing elites and powerholders in the developing nations are prone to arithmetical calculations such as per capita income. Second: that they are prone — in accordance with the above criteria — to stress the equal distribution of wealth and of income among nations as the main aim of development. These two tendencies have been recognized as good dreams in a bad night. Mc Namara, using the World Bank's report on the first development decade, has shown how the distribution of wealth among nations is a real distortion: the per capita income in the United States rises more in a single year than it will in India in a century. Poverty which is measured according to modern standards has become a very suffocating poverty. While at the same time the situation is unconsciously fostering a growing total dependency, and old expectations are merely replaced by new dissatisfactions — even with new frustrations. and total pessimism.

Not everybody here is to be blamed. The existing elites of the third world are forced to look upon their existence as compared and measured against the wealthy communities. However the present community of nations lives in a paradox. As Raymond Aron expresses it, the post World War II period is an era of formal democracy combined with real oligarchy.⁽²⁾ The egalitarian principles in the international order, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in the United Nations Organization, diplomatic agreements, all these go hand in hand with the hard facts of inequality and discrimination in military technology as well as in technology in other fields.

We must consider the Vietnam war as an important lesson. It is there that the guerrilla forces of an underdeveloped society have succeeded in their defence against the war forces of a highly industrialized country. They have successfully invented a technique that does not require the instruments forged by the technology of a rich people. A question is by analogy open to us: why in time of peace and of development such a dialectic is not accepted as a common phenomenon ?

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Probably only Gandhi can be considered as the great pioneer in this field. The kadhi industry, of which Gandhi was the sponsor, was a rediscovery of a technique that had not been forged by the technology of the rich people, able to finance and to make use of it. Weaving instruments introduced by Gandhi were just simple machines adapted to the capacities of the Indian population. Gandhi has indeed been considered as sponsor of an adapted technology or the so-called intermediate technology.⁽³⁾ It is not surprising therefore that such a pattern of technology is still considered relevant for India today. Most probably its relevance to India will still be accepted for several decades to come, as long as India has not got sufficient capital for adapting modern patterns and modern technology to industry which at the same time absorbs the growing surplus of the unemployed village population, as workers.⁽⁴⁾

There are two factors which made such a technology acceptable in India. The first factor is the objective reality of India, and this means India's peculiar situation. The second is undoubtedly the figure of Gandhi himself: a great leader who was really honoured and loved by his people, a leader who committed himself to the poverty of the vast majority. His strength was not only based on his idealism to work to overcome poverty in an obscure future, but precisely is founded upon the hard fact of an existing poverty. Besides this, the swadeshi-movement — led by the kadhis as its core — was an attractive element: it was begun in a period filled with passion for a national struggle for political independence. In other words there were subjective factors fostering motivation, as well as the fact that the so-called charka instrument had been developed in the spirit of continuity of Indian history.

A comparative study of Gandhi's India and of Indonesia will reveal that Indonesia has indeed suffered from widespread poverty and underdevelopment, while at the same time she does not have the subjective factors required to improve her situation in her own way. The Indonesian independence movement has not known a swadeshi movement, due in part to the system of Dutch colonialism itself.⁽⁵⁾ Neither have we an inspiring thinker imbued with that spirit with which Gandhi was imbued. For Gandhi was a leader motivated by his religious passion to attain *moksha* and desiring a society characterized by simplicity in its material needs.

Soekarno was obviously no Gandhi. Besides his passion for external grandeur, this influential Indonesian leader spoke much of a glorious future instead of becoming involved with the existing poverty. His philosophy of history was a combination of Marxism and that of the *dalang* proclaiming a utopian kingdom full of peace and perfection. ⁽⁶⁾ Meanwhile the modern Indonesian elite, that was known afterwards as "Angkatan 28" (the 28-ers) were a new elite, scholars, modern, imbued with democratic idealism but also having elitist attitudes; they were also escaping from the task to be solved,

the essential problems in their society, creating communications and fostering a new myth. The "Angkatan 45" (the 45-ers) who have as source of legitimacy their active struggle for independence, suffer from a certain confusion too: a confusion between an expectation of a future full of progress and of honour, and values that have never been affected by imperialism.⁽⁸⁾

The dominant thinking of the Indonesian elites, especially of those who have been in the centre of power since independence, is basically an expression of their socio-cultural situation: inhabitants of an urban community with specifically Indonesian characteristics who live their lives as a "dependent middle-class", and — according to a sociologist — who "are still vainly trying to put old and new together, and to build from the bit of civilization, popular culture, mestizo culture and Western elements something of a new Indonesian culture".⁽⁹⁾ Even if they desire to return to a national identity, they have lost a continuity with the way of life of the village population or of those living in suburban areas, where it is not only an idyllic communal solidarity that exists, but especially a form of a communal "shared poverty" resulting from a pressing population problem which until now has been contained by a process of involution.⁽¹⁰⁾ It requires little effort to understand why this social community has not communicated their particular cultural values to the cultural struggle of the urban elite: economically they are too weak. There is hardly any social mobility among them. Social mobility for them is only attainable through education, which, however, often results in their losing contact with their original environment.

In such a socio-cultural situation, it has become nearly impossible for them to foster the psychological resistance needed to meet the demands coming from the wealthy countries, especially western countries. ⁽¹¹⁾ It is not all too easy for Indonesia to choose a definite way to move toward her future through a particular image of her own future that is not borrowed from outside. It is not a question of conserving "original values" handed down by our ancestors. The core of all the problems here is Indonesia's capacity to look into her real existence, measuring her own capacities. This is to be done at least to the end of this century, and afterwards Indonesia has to develop herself according to this Indonesia which is at once an ideal, but an ideal based on reality.

So it is only logical that the priority of an equitable distribution of income as well as that of employment is to be preferred to a highly accelerated economic growth, so that man is supposed to be prepared not to hurry towards progress and modernization — progress and modernization which is defined by an idealized standard measured by the pattern of industry and consumption in the present wealthy countries. In other words Indonesia has to revise her existing aspirations.

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A definite ethos is therefore needed, because a development based on limited expectations is hard to swallow, especially for a nation accustomed to being fascinated with dreams of a glorious future. It is very important to stress that the new ethos must be deeply rooted and equitably distributed within the society and at the same time enjoy a long period in which to develop. Probably there are aspects that can be taken from the very ideas and from the way of life existing in Indonesian society itself and existing in many Asian societies. We have mentioned Gandhi above. Naturally it is not a matter of imitation. However, Gandhi has once again reminded us of something important in the present situation: and this is a more humble attitude towards history.

NOTES

- (1) This phenomenon is touched upon by Mc Namara, President of the World Bank, in his speech in the UNO, October 18, 1972. The same is stressed too by President Soeharto in his speech to the Conference of the Provincial Governors at Jakarta, November 30, 1971. See further B. Higgins, "Survey of Recent Development", *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, March 1972, p. 26.
- (2) Raymond Aron, "The Anarchical Order of Power", *Daedalus*, No. 2, Vol. 95, (Spring 1966), pp. 499—501.
- (3) E. F. Schumacher, "Industrialization Through Intermediate Technology", Ronald Robinson (ed), *Industrialization in Developing Countries*, Cambridge, 1965, pp. 91 — 95, in which it is i.a. said that "the indigenous technology of a typical developing country is 'a £ 1 — technology'".
- (4) *The Kadh Industry*, Department of Information, India, December, 1963, pp. 30 — 31.
- (5) The difference between the Dutch colonial system and that of the British, is considered to be the reason that the swadeshi movement is irrelevant to the national struggle in Indonesia, Cfr. v.g. Soekarno, *Dibawah Bendera Revolusi*, I, 1963, pp. 143 sqq: "Swadeshi and the Mass-Action in Indonesia".
- (6) The tendency to syncretism is explained by Bernard Dahn in his "Sukarno's Ideal", *Quadrant*, September — October 1969, p. 88. Cfr. also Soekarno, *An Autobiography as told to Cindy Adams*, 1965, p. 2, in which Soekarno said: "I am always pursuing ideals instead of cold facts".
- (7) Taufiq Abdullah. "Tinjauan Historis Tentang Generasi dan Peranan Pemuda"; *Indonesia Magazine*; No. 14, 1972, p. 16:

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- (8) Ibid. p. 11.
- (9) W. F. Wertheim, *Indonesian Society in Transition. A Study of Social Change*, Bandung, 1965, p. 262.
- (10) Cfr. Clifford Geertz, *Peddlers and Princes. Social Change and Economic Modernization in Two Indonesian Towns* 1963, pp. 28 sqq. Cfr. Geertz, *Agricultural Involvement. The Process of Ecological Change in Indonesia*, 1963, p. 82.
- (11) Higgins op. cit. pp. 28 — 29: "The problem that has plagued Indonesia since independence — how to find an ideology which is at once consistent with the complex socio-cultural heritage and compatible with economic development — remains unsolved".
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