



Fighting in Surabaya, 1945

Painting by Trisno Sumardjo  
for the illustration of Indonesian history in schools  
collection Fasco Publishers, Djakarta

(photo by Claire Holt)

## SURABAJA

### Idrus

People were drunk with victory. Everything had exceeded their dreams and expectations. All of a sudden their valor emerged like a snake out of a thicket. All their self-confidence and patriotism bubbled over like the foam on a beer. Rational thinking declined, people acted like beasts, and the results were eminently satisfactory. People no longer had much faith in God. A new God had arrived, and he was known under various names: bomb, machine-gun, mortar.

When a few Eurasians dared to hoist the Dutch tricolor at the Yamato Hotel, the Indonesians were dumbfounded. The numbers of dumbfounded grew and grew, and moved closer and closer to the Hotel. Suddenly a young man sprang forward. He shinned up the flagpole and ripped off the blue stripe on the flag. The dumbfounded Indonesians clapped and cheered, but the Eurasians were angry. They had not hoisted the flag for it to be torn down! They remembered how things had been three and a half years before, and they remembered their fathers, who had been real Dutchmen. And they felt insulted, as though their own fathers had been stripped naked. That was why they were so enraged. And when their anger was made concrete through their fists, there was a brawl, just as in a Western movie. When the show was over, ambulances appeared; and after being loaded up, they moved off again. The drivers appeared to be driving very cautiously; their steering-wheels and hands were covered with blood.<sup>1</sup>

At that time the Indonesians still had faith in their old God. But when they began to feel more keenly every day that their safety was being threatened, they ravished the honor of the Japanese--their samurai swords and their guns--exactly like a rapist ravishing the honor of a young girl. The Japanese moaned with pain and surrendered.

Another cowboy film was playing. Behind iron bars yellow faces could be seen. And in the middle of the streets: cowboys. They wore revolvers and knives at their hips. The revolvers were for shooting rustlers, and the knives were for . . . decoration. The girls did not go for glittering titles or handsome looks any more: now they only had eyes for these

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1. The incident at the Yamato Hotel (formerly the Oranje Hotel) took place on September 19, 1945. It resulted in the death of a Eurasian.

revolvers and knives, and they surrendered themselves to these murderous weapons. People walked about with their chests thrown out. There were no cattle stolen, but still one could hear shots every day. At first people were startled by these shots. But when they understood that the shots were aimed at the sky, at the home of the old God, they cheered happily whenever they heard a shot.

Then, all of a sudden, like a bolt out of the blue, the radio announced that the Allied Forces were about to land!<sup>2</sup> People were shocked and felt afraid, as though they were anticipating some great danger. Everywhere one could sense uneasiness: in the people, in the cars roaring past along the streets, in the printing presses, and in the dogs. The dogs barked themselves hoarse till their voices were gone and their bellies collapsed like flat bicycle tires; no one remembered to feed them. Everywhere people were saying the same thing: "Of course the Allies aren't our enemies, but still they're killing and kidnapping people in Djakarta." And like a badly-trained choir they shouted: "We won't be treated like the people in Djakarta! We refuse such treatment! We'll fight! We've got revolvers and knives!"

These shouts rent the sky. But the Indonesian leaders were also rending the hearts of the people: they were trying with all their might to explain to the people that the Allies would not act as they had done in Djakarta. The Allies would only take away their prisoners of war and the Japanese. The hearts of the people were torn in two: one half believed what the leaders said, but the other half was still suspicious of the Allied Forces. Nonetheless they restrained themselves and watched with resentment the Allies land. The Allied soldiers, black as locomotives, were suspected by the cowboys of being bandits who had been given permission to run loose and wreak their will. And when the bandits did run loose, like birds in the air, and wreaked their will, like the late lamented Hitler, the whole community became very upset. Nothing was safe: cattle, girls, gold, not even the revolvers and knives of the cowboys. Along the streets the cowboys were stopped by the bandits and forced to surrender their weapons. The bandits shouted, as they raised their bayonets: "Your gun or your life!"

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2. Brigadier-General A. W. S. Mallaby, commander of the 49th (Indian) Brigade, arrived at Tandjung Perak, the harbor of Surabaya, on October 25, and immediately began disembarking his troops. Most of these troops were Indians under British officers. This explains Idrus' references (below) to these soldiers being "black as locomotives."

The cowboys did not put up their hands, nor were they prepared to surrender their weapons. They shouted back: "Take our lives!" And as they shouted these words, they began to fire. The bandits too opened fire and a fierce fight ensued.

The battle lasted a day and a night. Then from Djakarta the chief cowboy and the chief bandit flew in. They held a meeting with other leaders. The result was a piece of paper full of English and Indonesians words. Beneath these words there were signatures: Sukarno, Hawthorn. The bandits gave in, and were only allowed to stay in the harbor area. The newspapers announced an important news-item: "We want peace, but we are prepared to fight. On our side, one thousand men have died. The enemy has lost three hundred."<sup>3</sup>

This succession of victories left the people even more intoxicated than before. Their faith in the new God continued to grow and they abandoned the old God entirely. They fell in love with carbines and revolvers as if they were beautiful girls: they caressed them, kissed them, and sold them at very high prices. Their faces looked very happy and proud. Their confidence in their own strength radiated from their rifle-butts and from their mouths. People were in wonderful spirits, just like the Romans the day before Vesuvius erupted. Their mouths stank of tobacco and hot air. Vesuvius was emitting fire and smoke. Any minute it would erupt.

For some days now the Allies had been landing more soldiers and giant tanks. These tanks rolled down from the ships like the Angel of Death himself descending from the sky: silently, and in secret. The smoke of Vesuvius grew thicker and thicker in billowing clouds. It was raining pamphlets from the sky: the Indonesians must surrender their weapons to the Allies! Just like God's command in the dreams of the ancient Romans: "Romans, surrender yourselves to me, or I shall make Vesuvius erupt! I shall send down the Angel of Death to destroy you!" And just like the Romans the Indonesians refused to obey and ignored the command. And the Angel of Death stalked the earth, roaring through his gigantic teeth. Vesuvius erupted.<sup>4</sup>

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3. This battle opened on the late afternoon of October 28. On October 29 a plane flew in to Surabaya from Djakarta containing a Republican delegation headed by President Sukarno ("the chief cowboy") and Major-General D. C. Hawthorn, commander of the 23rd (Indian) Division, with headquarters in Djakarta ("the chief bandit"). The agreement between Sukarno and Hawthorn was signed on the morning of October 30.

4. The breakdown of the Sukarno-Hawthorn agreement was triggered by death of General Mallaby within hours of the signing of the truce-document. A subsequent rapid build-up of British strength in Surabaya culminated in a harsh ultimatum issued

Thousands of human beings lay dead in the streets. The air was filled with thick, black smoke. Lightning flashed repeatedly. Flames licked at buildings and at the soul of Indonesia. . . .

The roads outside the city were crowded with people, most of them women. Their faces showed their weariness and exhaustion from the long walk. Behind them were smoke, fire, cowboys, bandits and everything they loved: their husbands, their burning homes, their European hens, their children and their sprung bed-frames. As they trudged along they cried like children, they whimpered, and some of the women gave birth. These lucky mothers felt themselves overwhelmed by calamity: they groaned with pain by the side of the road and cursed God in their hearts. None of them wanted a child at this time. With swollen bellies they had fled from death, and now, in mid-journey, these bellies suddenly went flat, and one heard the cries of infants. There were not many who bothered about the fate of these mothers. They walked on with heavy, leaden feet, heading for people's prime goals in life in those days: a safe town and a place to spend the night. The heat seared everything: leaves, and people's backs and throats. They curled over to avoid the heat, but human beings could do nothing. They just trudged onward, onward, in silence, everyone busy with her own thoughts.

An old woman had gone mad. Actually she had not wanted to flee. She had wanted to stay in the burning city, in her own beautiful home, sitting beside her son-in-law's Erres radio and close to the safe where her gold was kept. Over and over she had said to herself:

"I don't want to run away. Let me just die here with my things!"

But when a bomb dropped near her house, she had run outside, and run and run, swept along in the stream of human beings heading out of the city. Now she was really no longer a normal person; she seemed in a trance, unconscious of herself. With a happy smile on her lips she walked along with the others. She moved along with swaying hips like someone going to a party. She smiled incessantly, and struck up conversations with those

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on November 9 by Brigadier-General Mansergh, Mallaby's successor, which in effect demanded that the Indonesians in Surabaya surrender their arms to the Allies within twenty-four hours. After some hesitation the local Indonesian leaders rejected the ultimatum, and the historic battle of Surabaya opened early on the morning of November 10, with a massive aerial and naval bombardment of the city by the Allies.

who walked beside her. She asked all kinds of questions:

"Do you know Doctor Mustafa's wife? Oh, she's very nice and friendly. The trouble is she likes to run people down behind their backs. What's your husband's name? Never forget to keep a close eye on your husband! There are very few men who never go to prostitutes. That's my experience. What make of radio do you have?"

The old woman was not surprised at all when she got no reply from the woman walking at her side. But when an old man shouted: "We're close to Krian!"--she stopped short.<sup>5</sup> She rubbed her eyebrows like someone deep in thought, then burst into tears and howled:

"My things, my house, my radio!"

She ran back and forth, screaming senselessly. She tore off her blouse and her bra, dropped her batik skirt, and naked as Eve ran as fast as she could in the direction of Surabaya to hug her things and her Erres radio.

Up in the sky, far above the heads of the refugees, silver-white birds frequently flew by. These birds roared loudly and dropped filth as they flew on--machine-gun bullets. The refugees hurried to take shelter in the gutters. They were terrified of these white birds, just as cats are terrified of brooms. The filth dropped by the birds bored into the bodies of the refugees and left burned-out holes in them. After that the birds disappeared, like the Angel of Death having done his duty.

The old man who had shouted that Krian was near was shot in the right hand. He groaned aloud in pain, asking for pity and help from the other refugees. When several women came up to give him help, they suddenly burst out laughing. They yelled to their companions, pointing at the man in pain:

"Look, he's not old, he's a young man!"

And no sooner had they yelled these words than they sprang on the old man who was not so old, tore off his coat, his wig and his false moustache, and shouted once more:

"Look! Look!"

The heat was parching dry, the sun's rays bored through the scalp into the head. People became angry and as fierce as tigers. They shouted:

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5. Krian is a small town about 15 miles south-west of Surabaya on the main road to Modjokerto and the west.

"Swine! Coward! Other young men are risking their lives! And you're running away like a woman!"

Suddenly there was a howl which drowned all the others:

"Kill him!"

Several women came up with large stones, which they dropped on the young man's head. The young man uttered one long last moan. The refugees continued their journey to a safer town.

A well-known journalist arrived from Djakarta. He wanted to look into the conditions of the refugees. He had a thin chest and bony buttocks. Everyone who saw him was certain that he had never played any games, but had often played with himself. But he had a sharp mind and now, rather condescendingly, he asked a doctor:

"How many refugees were victims of the Allied machine-guns?"

The doctor, who was very busy, was annoyed at being interrupted like this and answered:

"I'm not a statistical bureau! Count them yourself!"

The journalist felt insulted, and to get rid of the bitter taste of this pill, he turned his gaze towards some pretty female refugees:

"Ah, lots of opportunities here! This is real heaven!"

But by the time he returned to Djakarta he had completely forgotten these attractive women. Yet the sharp words of the doctor still rang in his ears, and without thinking he wrote in his newspaper:

"The medical care given to the refugees is very bad. Most of the doctors do not realize the seriousness of our struggle."

The refugees spent the night in Krian. There were not enough places to stay. Most slept on the platform of the railway station, looking like wooden beams or the figure 5.

In the middle of the night, they began to dream out loud. Their dreams were about all kinds of beautiful and pleasant things. A young woman sighed with pleasure in her sleep, then said loudly:

"Now, now, be good . . . people might see us!"

In one corner a woman was sitting up. She could not sleep. She was dandling something in her arms, all wrapped up, swinging it rhythmically to and fro, softly singing a lullaby. When

she got tired of singing, she said to her little burden:

"Do you want some milk, my pet?"

She opened a bottle with her right hand, but as she put the mouth of the bottle close to her burden, something startled her. Everything in her arms fell to the floor: the bottle of milk and a bolster. She stared at the bolster on the floor for a long time. Then she screamed and sobbed:

"My child! My child!"

The people sleeping near her corner were awakened by her scream, but the woman had already vanished into the darkness outside the station. They looked at the shattered bottle of milk and the bolster on the platform. Bewildered, they asked themselves:

"Who screamed just now? Well, perhaps it was the bolster and the bottle of milk."

And they went back to sleep, very soundly. . . .

## 3

Tuminah was given a small room by her relatives in Sidoardjo.<sup>6</sup> It was actually not an ordinary room. When these relatives had been less well off than they now were, the room had been used for storing charcoal and old bits of furniture. At that time the room smelt of rotten fruit. When the relatives subsequently became a little richer, they used the room as a kennel for a dog they had just bought. But the smell of the rotten fruit was still there, and was now compounded by the smell of dog's turds. As the lady of the house had no children of her own, she kept a dog instead, although she never put him on her lap like a baby. But, as usual, she had a signboard set up in front of the house with a picture of a dog's head and the words: Beware of the Dog! Passers-by, including beggars, would look at the signboard with alarm and hurry quickly away. Then the lady of the house would laugh delightedly to herself, and, like someone repeating a lesson for elementary school, would declare:

"The dog is a faithful animal."

After that the battle of Surabaja broke out and Tuminah, exhausted by her long walk and lack of food, came to see these

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6. Sidoardjo is a large town about 15 miles due south of Surabaja on the main road to Malang.



relatives of hers. The relatives hesitated for some time before they gave the room to Tuminah. They were very fond of their dog, yet custom required that they take pity on Tuminah. So, while inwardly cursing custom, the lady of the house said brusquely to Tuminah:

Clean up the room yourself! There's no bed in there. We've got no money, so don't expect anything from us. Try to get a job tomorrow."

The lady of the house said a great deal more, but Tuminah did not hear. She felt blind and deaf from exhaustion. She could not care less what people were saying to her. All she needed was a place to lie down that night, just that one night. As to what she would do "tomorrow," well, she had no time now to think about it. Hurriedly she opened the door of the kennel. The dog barked at Tuminah, but she did not hear it, she did not even notice the dog.

The stink of rotten fruit and dog's turds wafted through the door into Tuminah's nostrils--but she smelt nothing. All she saw was a piece of floor in a room, exactly the size of her body. There she lay down, and soon she was snoring like a water-buffalo. At her feet, and close by her head were little heaps of dog's turds; and the dog itself happily licked Tuminah's forehead.

Meanwhile the lady of the house was entertaining some guests in the dining-room. Now and then delighted laughter could be heard. But when the talk turned to the battle of Surabaja the lady of the house looked very serious and said with deep emotion:

"We must work together and help one another. We should give as much aid to the refugees as possible. If we have three bits of clothing, we should be willing to give them one."

After saying this, she laughed loudly and the serious expression disappeared quite rapidly from her face.

In a certain town where most of the refugees had gone, some charitable organizations had set up two barracks: one for the female refugees and one for the elderly males. The charitable organizations had made orderly arrangements for the occupants of both barracks to get equal amounts of food. But after the female refugees had gone with the barracks-guards to certain dark places beneath the dim rays of the moon, the distribution of food became extremely one-sided. The old men protested to the authorities, and waited hopefully for the results. And indeed the next day the results came, and were immediately felt by each elderly man, especially by each elderly belly. For on that day the old men received no food at all. The barracks-guards roared with laughter and said to the old men:

"Don't get into the habit of making protests! Do as the women do! They surrender themselves to fate--and get more food than they need!"

The old men were furious but kept silent. They thought:

"How wonderful it must be to be a woman. You get fun and food."

But finally they screamed in unison at the guards:

"You're swine! Swine! All of you!"

The female refugees received more and more food, and more and more love, from the barracks-guards; and every day they became more abandoned. Most of the time they forgot the husbands they had left fighting in Surabaya, and enjoyed themselves with the guards in dark places. There the young girls lost their most precious possessions, but they did not regret it. During the past weeks their sufferings had become almost unbearable: trudging along for so many, many kilometers, thirsty and hungry. Now that pleasure offered itself, why should they turn it down? After all, human beings are only human! They can bear almost anything, but afterwards they want some fun. In the women's barracks every day a new dirty word was born, and after several months--babies.

Refugees from Surabaya were to be found all over Java. Those who still kept a few standards lived like rats on a ship. When a big wave came, they were dashed against the ship's sides and were killed. Others lived lives of pleasure, as call-girls in hotels or beggars in the streets. They had little thought for the morrow, like people who have lost all hope.

Amat was a young man who had escaped from the clutches of the Allied soldiers, and now he boasted about it wherever he went. He refused to be called a refugee: he was a brave fighter who had sought refuge only when all his friends had died like heroes. He could tell you how mortars were loaded, what a machine-gun looked like, and how he had managed to kill ten British soldiers single-handed. To make the story more convincing he would add that he had killed them with a hand-grenade right smack on the target. At first people listened to these stories with interest, but later on they looked at him with boredom and disgust, as if he were a prostitute who had just been used.

An old man cried in his room every day, like a small child who has lost something. He had never loved his wife, and to close friends he had often said:

"I can't be completely frank with you about this. But what I can tell you is that there's something very unpleasant about my wife."

Perhaps that was the reason he had forgotten to bring her along when he fled from Surabaja. At first he had thanked God the All-Merciful,--like someone just released from years of suffering. But when he began to find life very difficult in his new living quarters, he cried like a baby all day long and shouted over and over again:

"Forgive me, Djaleah! Oh, if only you were here, my sufferings would not be so unbearable!"

At night he would see Djaleah in his dreams, having fun flirting with the Gurkha soldiers, and he would cry out loud:

"Djaleah, don't! Please don't!"

## 4

People were brave enough in the face of enemy cannons--but how terrified they were of enemy spies! This terrible specter howled like a hurricane over the cities and inside the hearts of men, leveling everything in its path--courage and rationality alike. Everyone suspected everyone else, and to free themselves from the torment of this specter they killed one another.

At the railway stations close to the front all passengers had to get off. The men had to go to a room reserved for men, and the women to a room reserved for women. These rooms were not hospital clinics, but simply places of inspection. The men and women were stripped naked, like Adam and Eve, and searched all over, even in those places which people are usually ashamed of exposing, to see if they bore any marks of being enemy spies. At first those who inspected the women had been young men. They fondled the women's bodies, and if they had anything to say they found themselves speechless, spellbound with lust. But after several women's organizations had protested to the authorities about this barbarous behavior, the young men were replaced by elderly matrons.

One day they caught a male spy. The station-guards swarmed around the inspection room, yelling and cheering happily like children who have been given candy. They shouted:

"Kill him! Kill him!"

The enemy spy was pale as a corpse. As more and more people came swarming into the room, he no longer denied the accusations. He resigned himself to God and to the throng of people. A confused babble of voices filled the room. One voice rose above the others:

"Kill him!"

"Of course, but how?"

"Shoot him! Shoot him!"

"No, that's too quick and too easy! Let's hang him! Yes, let's hang him!"

Then like thunder other voices rang out:

"Let's drag him behind a locomotive!"

Suddenly the babble of voices fell silent, like the noise of a radio when there is a short-circuit in the house. In the doorway stood the stationmaster. In a calm voice he asked:

"What's the matter? What's going on here?"

Several station attendants answered together:

"It's an enemy spy! Let's kill him!"

The stationmaster entered the room and said to the throng of people:

"Don't take matters into your own hands, friends, we have to report this to the police."

Many expressed their disagreement, and their voices grew louder and louder. When a young man stepped forward and said: "That's impossible! The police don't act radical enough! Let's kill him!" The crowd roared their approval:

"Yes, kill him! Kill him! We don't need to turn him over to the police! We're radical! We're the people's sovereignty! We're the people's sovereignty!"<sup>7</sup>

And like a reflex action, hands reached out for the clothes of the enemy spy. First they beat him on the head with their bare fists, then they used pieces of wood, bits of railway track, and finally their machetes. Blood spurted from his ears, nose and mouth, reddish-black like the color of a ripe mangosteen. The brains oozed out of his skull, white and runny like the marrow of a cock.

A young woman was walking in the marketplace at Modjokerto.<sup>8</sup>

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7. Kedaulatan Rakjat (sovereignty of the people) was an exceedingly popular and largely misunderstood slogan of the period. This is subtly indicated by Idrus' syntax here.

8. Modjokerto is a large town 25-30 miles south-west of Surabaya, capital of the regency of the same name. At this period it was the site of the main headquarters of the Republican military forces being driven out of Surabaya. It also bore the burden of handling the flow of refugees.

Now and then she smiled to herself. She had just got married and was now going to the market to buy some food for her husband. She always smiled to herself when she was doing something to please her husband. She loved him very much. Suddenly her smile vanished. A young man stopped in front of her, a revolver at his waist and a knife in his hand. The young man said to her roughly:

"Follow me!"

Astonished and alarmed the woman followed the young man to the rear of the market. There she saw more young men wearing revolvers at their sides, like Japanese Kempei.<sup>9</sup> One of them stepped forward and said:

"Hey, Karto, who's that you've brought here?"

Karto smiled and replied:

"The usual, what else?"

On hearing this, they began crowding around the young woman. She was as pale as chalk, and her thoughts flew to her husband. For a moment she suspected that they were going to rape her. But she quickly abandoned this suspicion: people who want to rape girls don't like company. Suddenly one of the young men said:

"You're an enemy spy, aren't you?"

The young woman was even more bewildered. She wanted to answer, but she felt as if her lips were locked tight by fear. So she only shook her head, like a horse trying to shake the flies off its neck. Then she smiled. Seeing the smile, the young men grew angrier still:

"She wants to coax us with that sweet smile of hers! That's what they always do, it's always like this! Hm, a red scarf, a white blouse and blue slippers, eh? And she thinks we don't understand their methods!"<sup>10</sup>

The face of the young woman grew paler still. Now she understood why she had been taken for an enemy spy. She looked first at her scarf, then at her blouse. When she bent over to look at her slippers, she was struck from behind. She fell on the ground. Her nose began to bleed. Several more blows

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9. Kempei, more usually Kempeitai, was the dreaded Japanese military police.

10. It should be recalled that Dutch flag consisted of red, white and blue stripes.

descended on other parts of her body. Curses filled the air. Suddenly one of the men shouted in surprise:

"Friends, stop hitting her! We're wrong, we're wrong! Her slippers aren't blue, they're black!"

Several men shoved aside the young man who had just uttered these words:

"Shut up, Parman! You're color-blind!"

But as they were about to resume their beating, the police arrived on the scene, fully armed. The young men acted as if they knew nothing. But the police took several of them along to the precinct headquarters, while the young woman was taken to the hospital more dead than alive. When she came to, she said to the nurse:

"I've forgiven them. They're young and they're fighting for our country."

But the police were of another opinion. Fighting for one's country is fighting for one's country, but crime has to be punished!

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People had become like pack-horses. They endured great sufferings without complaint, and without understanding why they had to suffer so. Everything had become blurred in their minds: the future, and the national struggle which gave birth to despair. The only thing that still stood out clearly in their minds was that they had to kill and drive out the enemy who were trampling on their newly liberated fatherland. And this they were doing with steadfast hearts, burning spirits and near-empty bellies.

The city was like Rebecca's house, which had been burned down and where a terrible tragedy had occurred.<sup>11</sup> Smoke came off the scorched beams like the smoke of Zipper cigarettes; and from people's mouths came the moans of death. The air stank of cordite and of human and animal carcasses; the hospitals stank of ether and rose-water. Now and then an explosion could be heard, followed by black smoke billowing up into the sky. The rain was full of a dirty black dust which hurt the eyes and the heart alike.

The further the Allied Forces penetrated into the city, the further the Indonesian Army retreated from it. It is always

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11. The reference is to Daphne du Maurier's well-known novel Rebecca.

this way in war: the strong advance, the weak retreat and die. Religious people will say that the strong are rewarded with victory by God, because they fight for justice. And to reinforce this point, they add that if the strong do not tread the path of justice, no matter how strong they are, God will punish them with defeat and disaster. But twentieth-century generals are of another opinion: they have more faith in their cannon than in such superstitious dogmas.

The attention of the entire people of Indonesia was concentrated on the battle now raging in Surabaya. Every time they heard that this or that building had been destroyed, they would sign sadly, like a parent insulted by his own child. From their lips would come words which no one could deny:

"These buildings will have to be repaired again later. But that doesn't matter."

From all directions came lemper, round as hand-grenades.<sup>12</sup> The soldiers laughed when they saw these cakes and they said to one another:

"The giant British tanks will get our grenades like this!"

And laughing they hung the lemper from their belts as if they were hand grenades, and later took them to the battlefield, to be thrown into their mouths at the height of the fighting.

One day the Indonesian anti-aircraft guns shot down several enemy planes. It was as if the world had been suddenly and rudely awakened from its sleep. Telegraph operators all over the world were busy and in the newspapers issued that day there was an important item: the shooting skill of the Indonesians compares with that of the Germans!

This news made the Indonesians very happy; their fighting spirit bubbled over and their self-confidence returned. But no sooner did the enemy's giant tanks move firmly forward than everything disappeared: glowing spirit, self-confidence and hundreds of lives. The Indonesian people and their Army could only surrender their lives to the Angel of Death with a last smile on their lips. Those who were still alive after facing the Angel of Death would say:

"He's like our President . . . immune!"<sup>13</sup>

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12. Lemper are croquettes made of sticky-rice with a meat filling, usually wrapped in banana leaves.

13. Idrus uses the Dutch word *onschendbaar*--the technical word for the legal inviolability or immunity of a Head of State. Though a provision guaranteeing this legal immunity to the President and Vice-President was only included for the first time in the Constitution of 1949, it was a generally accepted convention from the birth of the Republic.

The Army already knew that their struggle to defend Surabaya would soon end in defeat. They also knew that the reason for this defeat was not negligence, nor weakness of spirit, nor because the Allies were braver than they. It would not be boasting to say that their courage was twice as great as the Allies'. They could capture ordinary-sized tanks from the enemy with bamboo spears, but those huge tanks measuring twenty meters long, and those airplanes which were always dropping filth . . . yes, these were the causes of all their defeats. And this was why they hated those murderous objects; and their hatred was enormous, as enormous as their hatred of imperialism.

When the peak of the battle came, the Army commanders held a meeting. At this meeting their hearts were filled with grief and hatred, and there were circles around their eyes from lack of sleep.

The session was extremely democratic, very like a boys' club meeting. An observer at the meeting could easily have forgotten that he was not in the midst of booming cannons and mortars. The chairman described at great length the course of the struggle in the past few weeks. He did not forget to mention that he himself should actually be going to Malang to be with his wife when she gave birth. "But," he went on, "we should give thanks to God that there are still babies being born, otherwise we would lose hope seeing how many people have died here." And with a sad smile he continued:

"But I won't be able to go. Let the babies be born in safe places. We who are here will die. There should be a balance in everything. I've sent my wife a letter and my share of the lemper for the newborn child."

The meeting then decided to accept the chairman's proposal that they all die together in Surabaya, since many more babies would be born in safe areas anyway. They would hold out to the last drop of blood. Suddenly, amid all the pleasure of taking the decision to die, one of the officers had an inspiration, an excellent inspiration indeed. And as he talked, unfolding his inspiration to the assembled group, his thoughts were not in Surabaya but flying high above the Netherlands. He saw the Netherlands being flooded as the German fascists entered the country. True, he said, the German fascists eventually managed to occupy the Netherlands, but many of them died in the inundation. In a loud clear voice he asked the meeting:

"What do you think of our doing the same thing, to keep the Allied fascists from entering our country?"

Many other inspirations were put forward by other officers. One of them suggested that at this critical juncture the whole Indonesian people, seventy million strong, be urged to line up and march against the giant tanks and let them run over their bodies--all seventy million of them.



"The tank-drivers would obviously get tired of mowing down so many bodies, they'd die of exhaustion, and then we would grab their tanks!"

Another officer suggested that within the next two days the government should be able to order giant tanks of its own from abroad. And when still another officer asked how they would transport these tanks in such a short time, he replied:

"By plane, friend! From Australia and America it's only two days by plane, right?"

The officers burst out laughing. This last proposal was turned down without a vote. And the result of the three-hour meeting was that they accepted the proposal to inundate Surabaja as the Dutch had inundated the Netherlands. Furthermore, all the officers present swore to die on the field of battle, since in safer places babies would go on being born, by the thousands, by the millions.

## 6

There is a saying that a businessman is so good at lying that he can't tell anymore whether he's lying or telling the truth. Criminals never dirty their hands with crimes. Everything they do is simply routine work, like a clerk's job in an office. That some people may suffer from their activities doesn't really concern them at all. The same kind of thing can happen through the activities of an office clerk.

All the refugees had finally found a roof for their heads: in hotels, barracks or kennels. The newspapers did not have much to say about these refugees. Sometimes we had the impression that they no longer existed. Only once was there an announcement from a certain ministry warning black-marketeers not to turn the female refugees into prostitutes with their piles of money.

The black-marketeers laughed when they read this peculiar announcement. They wondered why this ministry should interfere in sexual matters. Did the French Ministry of Information ban an increase in the number of prostitutes in Paris? Wasn't it a normal thing in this world for there to be women who liked to become prostitutes, just as there should be people who liked to become literary scholars? For the literary scholars one built big schools and universities; for the prostitutes one built big houses. Wasn't it normal too that everything should have its price? No, the ministries should take care of their own problems, like making five-year plans, and not dirty their hands with prostitutes! The black-marketeers laughed loudly--and the number of prostitutes increased day-by-day. It reached the point where we could no longer tell the ordinary women from the

special ones--just like the businessman who can no longer tell whether he's lying or telling the truth.

Among the female refugees there were some, to be sure, who remained faithful to their religion and to their husbands. They refused to be bought by the black-marketeers. Every time the black-marketeers invited them to leave the straight and narrow path they prayed to God seven times a day and turned down the invitation with a bitter smile. That they could still smile, even though with bitterness, was thanks to the teachings of their husbands who were now meeting their death under the giant tanks.

The pious women, however, had to keep themselves alive too, and for this they had to have money. They could not ask God for money, even if they prayed thirteen times a day. And since the government could not supply them with everything they needed, certain gods appeared on the scene, kindhearted and compassionate, from some never-never land. These gods went in and out of the kampung, specially looking for refugees and specially to help those in trouble. With sweet smiles, these gods gave money to the refugees, and when the recipients of the money got up to fetch some tea for them, the gods would politely refuse:

"Don't trouble yourself, ma'am. No need at all, sir. Don't bother about it."

And true enough, at these moments the gods were not lying; they really did have no need for tea, or even for lemonade. There was only one thing they needed--a simple elementary school problem in arithmetic: how to make ten into twelve? Elementary school pupils would add two new palm-twigs to ten old ones to get a total of twelve. These gods, however, did not add anything to anything. They simply waited and waited until the number ten automatically became twelve.<sup>14</sup>

Of course there were people who disapproved of the activities of these gods. Angrily they complained everywhere: "This is really scandalous!"--and as they said this, they would rack their brains to think up some less scandalous methods.

If such people happened to appear among the groups organizing food distribution for the refugees in the barracks, they did not bother to calculate how to make twelve out of ten. They were busy with another calculation, easier and less scandalous: how to make 200 grams into 195 grams, 195 grams into 190 grams, 190 grams into 185 grams, and so on. The subtraction was always just five tiny grams. And at the end the refugees were left with a lump of food no bigger than would feed a bird.

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14. The "gods" referred to here are of course money-lenders and usurers.

When the outside world declared that the government of the Republic was killing its own people, the government strongly denied it. The government even announced that it was prepared to produce a list of the foodstuffs distributed to the people under its care. Officials at the Bureau of Statistics would add that these figures were "live," capable of speaking for themselves. But the food situation in the barracks showed that the figures were "dead" and dumb things like ugly paintings. The only things which were capable of saying anything, and which were very much alive, were the people who made the calculations of how to turn 185 grams into 180 grams, etc.; and the only ones who could make these people talk were the judge and the executioner.<sup>15</sup>

As time went on people took an increasingly lively interest in the fate of the refugees. When it was learned that thousands of people were fleeing from Surabaya suddenly all the houses in the nearby towns seemed to be fully occupied. Refugees with money went in and out of the kampung trying to find a house, a room or a garage, but all in vain. But invariably, when they were on the verge of despair, new gods would appear, kindhearted and compassionate, to offer their help. They spoke very ingratiatingly indeed:

"Housing's been very difficult here; it's been that way for a good while now!"

Then they would usually pause for a moment, intently watching the expression on the face of the refugees who were trying to rent a house, exactly as a psychiatrist watches his patients. If the faces of the refugees showed despair, they would continue:

"But I've got a friend who's willing to hand over his house to refugees. All he's asking is a small sum to pay for the removal of his things."

And when the refugees asked how much the small sum might be, the gods would mention a small figure, say 1 or 2 or 3. But then, smilingly, they would add that behind these tiny figures three trivial little objects would have to be added: 0 0 0. A small room: 1 plus 000; a garage: 2 plus 000; a small house: 3 plus 000. These small sums would go to pay for the costs of moving the belongings of the people who were willing to give up their places to the refugees whom they pitied so much and who had suffered so miserably. And as they accepted these small sums of money, with a feeling of, as it were, sharing the sufferings of the refugees, they would say in a low voice:

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15. The "gods" here are corrupt officials handling the distribution of supplies to the refugees.

"In this time of revolution, we must stick together and help one another!"

7

In the last moments of the battle to defend Surabaya, people again remembered the old God. Every evening on Radio Pemberontak, one heard the following words from the Qur'an:

"Allahuakbar! Allahuakbar! Allahuakbar!"<sup>16</sup>

But somehow, perhaps because God did not own a radio, or perhaps because God was tired of watching the behavior of human beings who only remembered Him in times of adversity--somehow or other God did not hear these sacred words coming over the radio. The Indonesian people suffered defeat after defeat, and finally, as announced by the Allied Forces' radio: "Surabaya is safe once more!"

The fight between the cowboys and the bandits was over, and this time the bandits won. But the wounds were still gaping and the people in Surabaya were still suffering. Buildings were still licked by flames, and those which were no longer on fire looked like piles of water-buffalo dung.<sup>17</sup>

The Indonesians in Surabaya were ruled by the bandits and lived like soldiers on the front lines. At any time a stray bullet could pierce them, at any time they could be arrested, and at any time their sighs could be their last. But until this happened they would not sigh, nor would they surrender. Like the defeated Germans they did not bow down--quite unlike the Japanese when they lost the war. In their hearts they were proud, proud as the politicians had been when they were led off to prison by the Dutch.

A great Moslem scholar went insane and died. Formerly he had been a bosom friend of the Japanese and had trusted them 100%. But when the Japanese behaved just like the Dutch--cruel

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16. Radio Pemberontak (Insurrectionary Radio) was evidently started up about October 12 by Sutomo, an ex-journalist who became famous under the soubriquet Bung Tomo because of his hypnotic radio oratory. The appeals of Bung Tomo were filled with Islamic symbols and Arabic words, designed to excite the generally devout Islamic population of the lowlands around Surabaya. The radio-transmitter did not belong to the Republic, but to Bung Tomo and his organization, the Barisan Pemberontak Republik Indonesia. Allahuakbar means "God is Great!"

17. The real fighting in Surabaya was over by early December 1945.

and clever only at giving empty promises--he began to be suspicious of a dishonest brother: he did not beat his brother to death, he simply kept silent and waited for his brother to be "beaten to death" by the situation. But this moment came too late for him, and long before the Japanese were "beaten to death" he was taken to a lunatic asylum. When the independence of Indonesia was proclaimed, he seemed to improve a little. Happily he yelled with the rest:

"Merdeka! Merdeka!"

But alas, it was not for long. When the Indonesians of Surabaya acted like cowboys in the cafes, kissing both girls and revolvers, he had a relapse. He was unable to join in the worship of the new God of the Surabajans. And when the city became "safe once more," his madness grew worse and he died with a smile of scorn and hatred on his lips.

A middle-aged man was always hiding his left hand in his trouser's pocket. Only when absolutely necessary did he take it out. People looked with amazement at this hand: they never saw it bare, it was always tightly wrapped in a white handkerchief. One of them could contain his curiosity no longer and asked the man one day:

"Pardon me, sir, but your left hand makes me very curious! If I think of it at night I can't sleep, and in the day time I can't think or eat--just like a man fretting over an unfaithful sweetheart! There's always this question in my mind: why is it always hidden? Why is it so tightly wrapped up? Please, sir, free me of this mental torture and answer this question in my heart!"

The man suddenly turned pale as chalk and said with considerable embarrassment:

"It's nothing really. It's just that all five fingers of my hand are gone. They were cut off by the Allied soldiers. That's why I always wrap my hand up tightly. I don't want people to feel disgusted by the sight of it, since my fingerless hand looks loathsome even to me."

Ashamed the questioner moved away, and no one felt it necessary to ask why the Allied soldiers had cut off all five fingers of his left hand. Had he stolen? Was he a looter? People did not feel it necessary to ask. It was as though it were perfectly natural for the Allied soldiers to cut off people's fingers and slit people's throats.

Indonesian youths no longer roamed the streets of Surabaya as they had done in the cowboy era. Now they lived in an orderly manner in long buildings. Early in the morning they were already awake, and after they had eaten a tiny piece of hard

bread, they hurriedly clambered into British trucks which took them to various places where they worked on very important jobs for the development of the country: sweeping streets, clearing up debris and acting as porters down at the harbor. Told this way, one might perhaps get the impression that the young men did all these chores voluntarily. Such an impression would be quite mistaken. If these youths got up so early in the morning, it was because of the yells and curses of the guards at the long buildings. When they went off to their jobs in the trucks there were always several fully-armed Gurkha soldiers to accompany them. Some of these Gurkhas were kind and tried very hard to create a cheerful atmosphere, but the Indonesian youths in the trucks could only smile bitterly and bow their heads in shame as they passed the people on the streets.

No, at that time the Indonesian youths were not creatures with any will of their own: they were "prisoners-of-war" of the Allies. And these prisoners of war went about their tasks without complaint. Their bitterly smiling faces radiated steel, pure steel, the steel of freedom.

A very young girl in rags said to everyone she met, Englishmen, Gurkhas and Indonesians alike:

"I m not a virgin any more! Look! See for yourself!"

Having said this, she groped under her skirt and, a little later, as if she was doing a magic trick, removed a dirty yellow rag from between her two legs. The Englishmen glanced for a moment at the dirty yellow rag and then quickly turned their heads away, grinning knowingly at each other. The Gurkhas roared with laughter when they saw the dirty yellow rag; they stared at it for minutes as if mesmerized by its spell. The Indonesians did not look at the dirty yellow rag at all. When they heard what the young girl was saying, their faces flushed with hatred and revenge. They walked quickly on, saying to themselves:

"Another victim of the revolution!"

And then, out loud:

"Like me, like all of us! Like all the Indonesian people. . . ."

It was six months since the battle of Surabaya had broken out.<sup>18</sup> To commemorate the occasion the newspapers in Malang

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18. The date must therefore be about May 10, 1946.

came out in red ink. People were surprised to see the red ink and asked themselves:

"Why the red ink? Was the battle of Surabaya the battle of Trotsky against Tsar Nicholas II? Or is it supposed to be the Indonesian blood that flowed in that city?"

No one knew the answer, not even the editors of the newspapers themselves. All they knew and deeply felt was that when they saw the red ink tears welled up in their eyes. Those who saw them cry naturally supposed that it was because they were reading some truly tragic story, or because they felt at one with the young men, the flower of the nation, who had fallen in battle. But this supposition must have been mistaken, since those who had been crying soon wiped their faces and burst out laughing as they spat on the red ink as if it were a dirty and disgusting object.

That same day work at the public kitchens in Modjokerto was piling up. The local Division Commander had given orders for thirty thousand lemper to be prepared for the soldiers on the front line.<sup>19</sup> In his letter to the public kitchen the Commander said:

"Our boys at the front can not celebrate this day of commemoration like the people in the towns. To keep up the spirit of our boys, I ask for your cooperation in sending them thirty thousand lemper with meat inside. I know that rice is hard to get and that the price is very high. That is why I do not ask for rice, only for lemper."

At first the head of the public kitchen was very proud to receive this letter from the Division Commander. He said to the other committee members:

"There's a real fighter! He knows that rice is hard to get, and that's why he's only asking for lemper. I'm proud we have young men like him!"

But when he arrived at the market to buy the necessary ingredients for the lemper, it turned out that the price of sticky rice was higher than that of ordinary rice, while meat for filling the lemper was so expensive that the public kitchen's budget could not possibly afford it. Cursing the sticky-rice vendor and the meat-seller, he hurried back and immediately wrote a letter to the Division Commander:

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19. The Division Commander referred to is probably Col. Sungkono, then commander of the Seventh Division with headquarters in Modjokerto. He was responsible for the military sector covering the residencies of Bodjonegoro, Surabaya and Madura.

"Sir, this is to inform you that the price of sticky rice is higher than that of ordinary rice. The public kitchen can not afford meat to fill the lemper either; so we are sending your soldiers thirty thousand bananas instead. We do hope, sir, that you will understand."

The Division Commander also received a banana, and as he ate it, he tried to banish the almost rotten fruit from his mind by imagining that he was eating a lemper full of very delicious meat.

Aside from the fact that its newspapers were printed with red ink, Malang also organized an "Ocean Rally." In the old days this kind of meeting was usually called a "Giant Rally," but after protests were heard from people who were 100% anti-Japanese, the rally was given this new name.

Thousands of people thronged to the Malang stadium. They bore the heat of the sun very patiently, just as they had borne three hundred and fifty years of colonial oppression. But secretly they were very annoyed.

When the national anthem was being played people stood erect as soldiers and all joined in the singing of *Indonesia Raya*. Everyone felt as if his neck was being tickled. Every hair stood on end: on necks and legs alike. And after the national anthem was over several genuine nationalists burst into tears and said hoarsely:

"This is what we've been fighting for all along. It's for this that we've sacrificed our material possessions and the lives of our young men. How beautiful our anthem is! Yes, our struggle has not been in vain!"

Suddenly everyone fell silent. All eyes were directed to the front, to a white figure on the dais. The figure was small and short, and out of it came a voice like the crackling of dry leaves. The Deputy Governor of East Java was delivering a speech. There were many rumors about this Deputy Governor, some good, some bad. But as he described the situation in Surabaya the day before the battle, everyone listened openmouthed to his account of the arrogance of the Allied Forces. And when he went on to say that such insults could not just be ignored, everyone without exception agreed with the Deputy Governor, good and bad as he was.<sup>20</sup>

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20. The man referred to here is Doel Arnowo, a well-known nationalist leader in East Java, and chairman of the representative Indonesian National Committee in Surabaya at the time of the fighting there.



Next the Division Commander of Malang spoke.<sup>21</sup> He was actually quite elderly, but he tried with all his might to speak like a young man. With great spirit he said:

"I am a General, but not because of these insignia on my collar. I am a General because of the people, by the people and for the people! In the name of Allah, I am a people's General."

After every speech there were roars of applause from the audience in the stadium, as though the people were watching an international soccer match. But after the Division Commander's speech the applause was followed by broad and scornful smiles: people had heard such words all too often. Now people wanted something new and vital, and they despised anything stale and sickly.

A tremendous and interesting event was now about to occur. The people applauded ten times more loudly than before. All eyes were again turned to the front, but this time their gaze was fixed not on a short and white figure but on something black and dirty. On top of this object was a tangle of long hair, as long as a woman's, and from the hair came the musty smell of a pillow never aired in the sun.

Bung Tomo, the leader of "Insurrection," was speaking! At first he spoke very slowly in order to quiet the audience. His voice was loud and harsh; the man himself small and pretty. His eyes sparkled like the rays of a light-house far out at sea. Briefly and forcefully he told of his experiences at the front:

"There's only one thing I'm afraid of: female spies. An evil woman is more cruel and cunning than any man. When I walk through the streets of Malang the girls look at me with seductive smiles on their lips. But remember this, all you girls, Bung Tomo will only take one girl, and she will certainly not be an enemy spy. As long as the revolution continues, Bung Tomo will remain single, and therefore I advise you not to look at Bung Tomo with those seductive glances that melt Bung Tomo's heart."

The thousands of people in the stadium roared with laughter and cheered their approval of Bung Tomo. The younger married men inwardly decided to divorce their wives as soon as they got home. But on second thoughts they said to themselves, in consolation:

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21. This was Major-General Imam Sudja'i, formerly a battalion commander in the PETA. At this period he was Commander of the Eighth Division and responsible for the military command covering the residencies of Malang and Besuki.

"Ah well, it doesn't make any difference really. My wife's certainly not an enemy spy!"

Hearing the roar of applause, Bung Tomo suddenly became another person, like a wounded buffalo. In a loud, savage voice he denounced the behavior of the Allies in Surabaya from the day they landed. With sparkling eyes that seemed to hypnotize his audience he described the cruelties of the Allied soldiers towards the Indonesian youths they captured. When his throat eventually got dry, he concluded his fiery oration with the following resolute words:

"We must exterminate the swindlers: ordinary swindlers, rank swindlers, bullet swindlers, military uniform swindlers and British swindlers! We must continue the struggle! It's only been six months so far, but if necessary we shall continue to fight for another sixty years! We must drive out the Dutch and any foreigners who want to colonize us again!"

## 9

Surabaya was completely under the control of the Allies and was now "safe once more." The Indonesians could do nothing any more. At every moment, on every occasion the Army leaders announced, with 100% certainty:

"We shall recapture Surabaya! As soon as possible!"

However, when they arrived at the front lines, they came face-to-face with a reality which was also 100%: the enemy's giant tanks were still there, their airplanes were still in use, and neither could be bluffed with boastful words alone. The front was now no longer the harbor of Tandjung Perak; it had moved deep into the interior.

Now and then minor skirmishes were fought, and rifle, cannon and mortar fire were heard again, as in the first days of the battle. Usually, however, the battlefield was silent, and this silence, which lasted for days and months, put a heavy strain on the morale of the troops, who found it more demoralizing than a major battle. In a major battle people don't have time to worry about when a bullet will pierce their chest; they don't have time to think about their grieving sweethearts left behind. In short, in a major battle people don't think at all, they simply act: kill, or if the situation seems hopeless, run like hell into the countryside.

During these quiet, silent days, the Army leaders had a lot of trouble. The soldiers usually made a lot of requests--often quite impossible to fulfill. When the leaders could stand it no longer, they would write off letters in every direction:

"Your Excellency, send us a theatrical troupe. Our boys can't stand this inactivity any longer. If you don't have a troupe to send over, give us anything at all to break the monotony."

The Army leaders knew exactly what their boys wanted. To break the monotony the commanders did not ask for bananas or lempers, they requested a theatrical troupe. For in such troupes there are always some girls, and it was actually girls that the soldiers wanted when they made their impossible requests.

The Army leaders knew too that a troupe would leave immediately after it had performed, but that the memory of the visit would not vanish nearly as rapidly as the memory of lempers or half-rotten bananas. Especially for the romantically inclined among the young soldiers, the show girls would be remembered forever.

A theatrical troupe finally arrived, very cheerful, but the Army leaders' faces suddenly were dark as the sky before a storm! When asked why they looked so sour, they answered rudely:

"Those people on the home front must be crazy! Look at the way they do their job! Here we are fighting to the last man, and they send us a troupe with ugly girls!"

The ordinary soldiers, however, were very happy. They did not worry whether the girls were goodlooking or ugly, but simply about the fact that they were girls. A girl at the front was like water in the Sahara desert. And since it was now the era of People's Sovereignty the Army leaders had to give in, and they watched the ugly girls with hatred and disgust. And later, when other quiet periods occurred, the Army leaders wrote again to the people on the home front:

"Your Excellency, the monotony is growing unbearable again. Please send us immediately some lempers and bananas. If these are not available, anything else would be welcome, so long as it is not a theatrical troupe."

The front line around Surabaya was enormous. Besides the Army's guard posts there were also Red Cross stations. But these aside, there were only dense forests and oppressive monotony.

Since there were many pretty girls at the Red Cross stations, some people who were true to their religious beliefs decided to set up a demarcation line between the men's posts and the girls' stations. Right on this demarcation line a signboard was set up, on which was posted an announcement by the local Army commander:

"It is absolutely forbidden to cross this demarcation line without the permission of the head of the Army post or the head of the Red Cross station."

And this line was guarded by several well-disciplined soldiers.

This went on for several weeks, but finally people got tired of being lonely. Their sanity returned and they said:

"The Army shouldn't be guarding the young men and women, it should be watching the giant tanks, the airplanes and all the imperialisms that want to dominate our country!"

Accordingly the guard at the demarcation line was abolished, the signboard vanished no one knew where and an atmosphere developed which consoled the lonely and made them forget such trivial things as battles, sweethearts left at home, yes, even death itself. For now the soldiers and the Red Cross girls were confronting a most important duty, a duty more important than anything else in the world, namely, the continuation of the species!

At a session of the Provincial Assembly in Malang the commander of the division on the outskirts of Surabaya was severely criticized. One of the delegates was extremely angry because he had once been rudely stopped by the guards at the front. He strongly urged that this fascist situation be immediately changed. "Our country must not become a militarist state," he said, "and the Army must be subordinate to the officials of the civilian government."

Another member expressed his disappointment that many soldiers violated the rules of propriety. He disapproved of the soldiers making love to the Dutch female internees. "I don't mind," he said, "if they make love in the dark. My children certainly won't be corrupted by it. But I do strongly object when they make love in the middle of the marketplace." And he concluded his speech by saying that this was one of the factors behind the Army's defeats in the battle of Surabaya.

Then an Army representative was given the floor. He looked very dashing. Everyone would have been proud if the whole Army had had his build and posture. At first he spoke very slowly and his words were carefully chosen. But later on he became more and more impassioned. His words made a great impression on the Assembly, so much so indeed that at the end of his speech everyone condemned the criticisms of the soldiers which had previously been expressed by some of the members. The Army representative's words were more or less as follows:

"The condition of our Army is very pitiful indeed. Our boys have only, so to speak, sharpened bamboo spears to fight with.

But with these spears they are standing their ground, yes, they have even repelled the enemy's attacks, and thereby saved all of us here on the home front. I won't deny the criticisms of my boys, in fact I want to add to your criticisms by telling you about a particularly pitiful aspect of the situation. . . ."

Here he glanced for a moment at the female members of the Assembly before he continued:

"Pardon me, ladies, but I don't want to beat about the bush. The pitiful situation I just mentioned is that at this moment 95% of the boys now bearing arms, 95% mind you, are suffering from a disease that will make your hair stand on end! 95% of them have syphilis! Syphilis, my friends! The Allies have been pouring prostitutes out by our front lines, and since our boys have been getting so little entertainment from the home front, naturally they've tried to find it with these whores. Now, my friends, tell me how we can rectify such conditions? How? Just tell me how? We military men don't say much--but please understand that in our struggle we are facing many difficulties: shortages of salvarsan and other medicines and a surplus of your criticisms!"

All the members of the Assembly were silent, and those who had previously uttered such sharp criticisms felt very ashamed. Some of the delegates who had sons fighting at the front wanted to send cables to remind their boys to take good care of themselves. But then a month later an intensive investigation revealed that the Army representative was a man with a lively imagination who had given free play to his fantasy at the earlier session. The investigation made it clear that there were no soldiers still using sharpened bamboo spears, and most important of all, that the figure of 95% was a fantastic and grossly exaggerated percentage. Accordingly, at the next session of the Assembly, the member who had once been rudely treated by Army guards mustered up the courage to say to the Army representative in an angry voice:

"We've made an intensive investigation of everything you said at the last meeting. It turns out it was all a pack of lies! All you wanted to do was to influence us to stop making any more sharp criticisms. I now strongly propose to the Assembly that we urge the Army to eliminate lies and syphilis completely!"

The members of the Assembly applauded their approval, and almost in unison they shouted:

"Yes, syphilis and imperialism! Crush them!"

Translated by Mrs. S. U. Nababan  
and Ben Anderson