Voluntary participation, state involvement: Indonesian propaganda in the struggle for maintaining independence, 1945-1949

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CHAPTER 1

State and Revolutionaries:
Institutionalizing Propaganda
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In his book about how the Nazis persuaded the Germans to support the war, David Welch argues that it was easy for a regime to draw its population into an armed conflict if it could create a ‘closed society’, characterized primarily by the regime’s total control of communications media.¹ Given this situation, Indonesian society during the revolution can arguably be considered to have been experiencing the process of becoming an ‘open society’. State and non-governmental agencies had access to various means of communications media which were shared or, in some cases, used in competition. The development toward an open society arose when, at the outbreak of the Indonesian revolution, control of the media was taken from the Japanese troops not by the state, but rather by those working in the background. These were particularly the youth (pemuda) and former employees of Japanese-founded media installations. Throughout the course of the revolution, these two groups continually stressed their desire for autonomy from the state.

Without control over the media, it was therefore difficult—seemingly impossible—for the Indonesian state to mobilize its people to wage a war of independence. Yet ‘open society’ also conveys that active participation by members of society is permitted, even flourishing. In this chapter and against the backdrop of this ‘open society’, I examine how the Republic of Indonesia managed its propaganda. However, as the Indonesian state was not as effective as the colonial state or the Japanese rulers in terms of control and

dominion over Indonesian society, this chapter also addresses non-government actors such as militia and individuals who possessed mass media technology. One notable characteristic of their involvement in the revolution is their voluntary participation in and association with Republic-sponsored propaganda. In some cases, though, they also expressed resistance to state intervention in media management.

This chapter tries to explain how and why Indonesians, both those within the newly-born Indonesian nation and those participating from outside, took part in establishing and running Republican propaganda institutions. The questions I pose in this chapter are: 1) What propagandistic institutions were established by the Republican government and how did they operate? 2) How did non-state propagandistic institutions, such as print media and radio, contribute to Indonesian propaganda? 3) How did the government manipulate both state and non-state propagandistic institutions for the benefit of the Republic’s political agenda?

*Indonesia’s Political Landscape Prior to 1945*

Indonesia’s political history before 1945 can be divided into two disparate regimes, the colonial regime and the Japanese occupation. The dissolution of the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) in 1799 and the establishment of the Dutch Indies in the following year were followed by further Dutch involvement in local politics, particularly in the Javanese kingdom of Mataram. In an effort to gain access to land and property, the Dutch contended with local rulers, leading to armed conflict. The status of the Chinese population was also problematic. The Chinese, as moneylenders and entrepreneurs, had become middlemen and thereby held a stronger economic position than the impoverished Javanese peasants and rural inhabitants. This situation led to rising ethnic tension between the natives and the Chinese. Dutch expansion from Java to other islands increased
during the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century. Three major conflicts occurred between the Dutch and the locals, with the Dutch emerging as victor; these were the Padri War (1803-1838), the Java War (1825-1830), and the Aceh War (1873-1904).2

The Dutch colonial government continued to come under attack throughout the early 20th Century, triggered respectively by an assortment of Dutch policies. One such challenge was the problem of local rebellions, such as the 1908 anti-tax war in West Sumatra and the communists’ anti-colonial revolt in West Sumatra, Banten and Batavia in 1926/1927. Another form of challenge was the rise of political consciousness among young and educated Indonesians. Owing to their access to a modern Dutch education and their contact with the Arab world, which at the turn of the century was pervaded with the idea of Islamic revivalism, these young Indonesians aspired to self-identity as an Indonesian nation. These aspirations were articulated by the foundation of social and political organizations, and by their increasing use of newspapers as the primary medium for the dissemination of propaganda.

Seeing these movements as a threat to the colonial regime, the government put these movements down harshly, employing means such as courtroom trials, armed response, and internment. Soekarno and Mohammad Hatta, who later became, respectively, President and Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia, were among the leading anti-colonial activists in the 1920’s, utilizing political parties, rallies, speeches and the written word. Soekarno was the head of the nationalist party Partai Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Party, PNI); Hatta was the head of Perhimpunan Indonesia organization (Indonesian Union, PI) in the Netherlands. Their anti-colonial activities, along with those of other nationalists, were severely

punished by the colonial regime. Soekarno was imprisoned and Hatta was exiled. Thousands of Indonesians involved in anti-colonial movements were jailed, killed or exiled.  

The surrender of the Dutch Indies to the invading Japanese troops in March, 1942, was followed by three and a half years of Japanese occupation of Indonesia. This also marked a new era in Indonesian politics. Over the course of the three years, the Japanese mobilized Indonesians and indoctrinated them into supporting the Japanese war effort. The Japanese cooperated with leading pre-war nationalists, including Soekarno and Hatta, who led Japanese-sponsored organisations with the principle aim of mobilizing the Indonesian people, in particular the pemuda, to support the Japanese war effort. They also cooperated with local rulers for the administration of the archipelago, preferring Javanese aristocrats (priyayi), whose administrative skills proved essential in the management of various civil affairs. Simultaneously, the Japanese interned tens of thousands of Dutch and Allied army personnel, as well as Dutch and Eurasian civilians.

The Japanese employed unprecedented propaganda activities aimed at Indonesians. According to Aiko Kurasawa, they used propaganda methods aimed primarily at influencing people via their ‘auditory and visual’ senses, employing such print media as newspapers, magazine, pamphlets, books, and posters, and audio sources such as radio, speeches, and music, and also involving

\footnote{3 For further discussion on the rise of Indonesian nationalism and local rebellions against the colonial regime, see, for example, John Ingleson: \textit{Road to Exile: The Indonesian Nationalist Movement, 1927-1934} (Singapore: Heinemann, 1979); Takashi Shiraishi: \textit{An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912-1926} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Michael F. Laffan: \textit{Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma below the Winds} (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003); Mestika Zed, \textit{Pemberontakan Komunis Sihungkang 1927: Studi Gerakan Sosial di Sumatera Barat} (Yogyakarta: Syarikat Indonesia, 2004); and Ken Young: \textit{Islamic Peasants and the State: The 1908 Anti-Tax Rebellion in West Sumatra} (New Haven, CT: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1994).}
audiovisual media comprising drama, traditional art performances, Japanese paper picture shows (kamishibai) and movies. The main aim was to eradicate Western influence in Indonesian society and implant Japanese ideas. This anti-Western sentiment was strengthened by the establishment of organizations supporting the Japanese, for example the Keibodan (auxiliary police) and the Heiho (auxiliary forces) for young Indonesians, and courses for rural Islamic teachers in an effort to approach the masses in the villages. Such propagandistic measures allowed the Japanese to indoctrinate Indonesian people en masse to be sympathetic to the Japanese, and eventually contributed to the Japanese war effort against the Allies.

The period of the Japanese regime was also a time when Indonesians suffered greatly. Among other atrocities were widespread instances of forced labor, with the coerced workers (romusha) working in inhumane conditions for Japanese war interests; sexual slavery (‘comfort women’ or jugun ianfu); and numerous forms of violence displayed by the Japanese military and police. The Japanese also harshly punished any anti-Japanese movements initiated by locals. Above all, the Japanese propaganda machine strengthened anti-Dutch sentiment among the Indonesians while encouraging a sense of nationalism. This paved the way for the seeds of Indonesian national unity and revolution.

On 15 August, 1945, the Japanese surrendered to the Allies. The older nationalist leaders wanted to wait for the Japanese to declare defeat, whereas the youth want to proclaim independence as soon as possible, via an armed coup if necessary. The Republic of Indonesia was finally declared by Soekarno on 17 August, 1945.


Although Indonesian independence had been proclaimed, the Republic of Indonesia suffered at the time, according to M.C. Ricklefs, from ‘poor communications, internal divisions, the weakness of the central Indonesian leadership, and ethnic diversity’. These serious problems had to be solved immediately. Propaganda was the main strategy in promoting the Republic of Indonesia and its legitimacy as well as calling for popular participation in backing the newly-born state, as will be explained in the following sections.

The Badan Penerangan of KNIP

The proclamation of Indonesian independence was immediately followed by the establishment of Republican institutions, including ministries formed on 19 August, 1945, and, pending the convening of a house of representatives, a temporary legislative body, the KNIP (the Central Indonesian National Committee, Komite Nasional Indonesia Pusat), on 29 August, 1945. In terms of chronology, the Republic’s Kementerian Penerangan (Ministry of Information, hereafter Kempen) was founded before the KNIP’s propaganda institution, the BP (Information Agency, Badan Penerangan). In the first months of the Republic, however, the BP was in the forefront as the Republic’s main propaganda organ, thanks to the proliferation of the KNIP into lower levels of society, accompanied by the extension of the BP beyond Jakarta. Whereas the ministries were centered in the Republic’s capital of Jakarta, the KNIP was tasked with expanding their branches into local levels, down to the villages themselves. This extension was not merely to display the Republic’s presence outside Jakarta, but also and more importantly to promote the Republic’s continued existence and garner popular support. To fulfill this task, the KNIP created a section called Badan Penerangan, which quickly

\[ ^{6} \text{M.C. Ricklefs, } A \text{ History of Modern Indonesia, p. 249.} \]
began producing propaganda to further the Republic’s interests in the early months of the revolution.

Since its inception, the BP was prepared by the KNIP to extend its reach across Indonesia, following in the wake of the mother organization as it expanded into many new areas of the archipelago. By the end of August, 1945, local branches of the KNIP, also known as the KNID (‘D’ stands here for daerah, or region), had been established in many provincial capitals and residencies in Java and Sumatra. BP personnel consisted mainly of local KNI members. This meant that the BP could extend its efforts down to the village level. In the areas where the BP had not been established yet, the BP in the nearest region was tasked with seeing to the propaganda efforts. By October, 1945, for instance, the BP KNIP had been established in Java’s main cities, but not in Bali. The BP of the closest residency, Banyuwangi in East Java, was in charge of propagating messages regarding the Republic and independence there.7

In addition to its work with the general public, the main tasks of the BP were concerned primarily with information and persuasion among government employees. More specifically, its official tasks were to ‘extend information under orders from the President’ (memberi penerangan atas perintah Presiden) and to ‘answer questions posed by society’ (memberi djawab atas pertanyaan-jang dimadjoekan dari kalangan masjarakat).8 This included the dissemination of information and instructions from KNIP in Jakarta to the KNID and announcements from other Republican institutions.9

7 ‘Radja-radja di Bali tetap berdiri tegak dibelakang Repoeblik Indonesia’, Soeara Rakjat, 26 October, 1945.
9 ‘Tjara bekerdja Badan Penerangan K.N.I.’, Soeara Rakjat, 18 October,
The BP regularly issued press releases under the header ‘An Announcement from the BP’ (*Pengoemoeman Badan Penerangan*), which were until the beginning of September, 1945 often published, by Japanese-controlled newspapers (at which most of the employees were Indonesians), and after that date by various pro-Republic newspapers. One of the BP’s earliest announcements was on 31 August, 1945, when it conveyed government decrees to raise the Indonesian flag all over Indonesia. It also encouraged Indonesians to greet their fellow countrymen with a ‘national greeting’ (*salam nasional*) in each encounter by yelling ‘free!’ (*merdeka*). The government also announced, via the BP, other developments on the Republican side, such as the appointment of ministers, governors, and other highly-placed officials of the Republic. This made the BP one of the Republic’s first official heralds, bringing to the general public the news that the Republican authorities had immediately begun effective action.

The BP was, similarly to its umbrella organization the KNIP, among the few Republic organizations via which the state could exercise its control down to the local level during the early phase of the revolution. As such, the BP conducted propaganda activities aimed at the general populace. The BP assured virtually every member of Indonesian society that the its tasks were actually the manifestation of the people’s wish for independence from foreign rulers. For example, in dealing with the government’s plan to hold the KNIP’s first meeting in Jakarta on 29 August, 1945, which was in

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1945. For example, on 6 September, Soekarno announced through the BP that he preferred to be called ‘Bung Karna’, instead of ‘Padoeka jang moelia’ (Your Majesty), except during a very formal session. See ‘Pengoemoeman Badan Penerangan’, *Asia Raya*, 6 September, 1945.


essence more relevant to the KNIP members than to the public in general, the BP announced:

How should Indonesian people welcome such an important day?

[The answer is] by all simultaneously raising the Red-and-White flag to show that the people have a burning desire, namely to live in this world as a free nation, and no longer be enslaved.

The Red-and-White flag is the symbol of unity for 70 million Indonesian people.

Please honor that unity by raising the Red-and-White flag tomorrow morning.12

A network of local nationalist activists was indispensable for the extension of the BP beyond Jakarta. For instance, the effort to establish the BP at residency level in West Java was initially endorsed via a radio broadcast on the Republican radio station RRI (Radio Repoeblrik Indonesia) Bandung in January, 1946. Poesat Badan Penerangan Bandung (the Central Information Agency of Bandung), which operated under the KNI of West Java (also known as KNI of Priangan), persuaded local leaders in residencies and districts throughout West Java to establish a BP of their own. This establishment should be reported to the Central BP of Bandung, reflecting the Central BP’s intention to maintain supervision over how the BP worked at lower levels.13 The main task at the residency level of the BP was to ‘objectively give information to the people and become their educators regarding political matters’ (memberikan penerangan kepada rakjat setjara objektief dan pendidik rakjat dalam soal kepolitikan).14 This call was successful, as eventually, in the second week of February, 1946, branches of the BP at residency


level in West Java, namely in Sumedang, Garut, Tasikmalaya and Ciamis, were established.\textsuperscript{15}

In addition to its coordination with the Central BP in Bandung, the management of the residency-level BPs was also under the civil government of West Java province. There was an additional plan to place these branches under the Kempen in February, 1946, which indicated the reduction of the BP’s propaganda campaign as well as the beginning of more effective action by the Kempen. These connections indicated that the BP’s structure, like that of other Republican organizations in the early months after the proclamation, was loosely organized and was characterized by cooperation among different organizations rather than by those groups working independently. This was a practical solution, given the constraints the Republic faced concerning the lack of facilities, insufficiency of competent manpower, and extensive geographical areas.

Soon after the residency-level BPs of West Java were established, a central program was coordinated. The West Java BP’s main activity was a radio program called ‘The BP’s Broadcast’ (\textit{Pantjaran Badan Penerangan}), which was aired nightly on RRI of West Java. The main goal of the broadcast was to ‘disseminate the meaning of people’s sovereignty and other matters, \textbf{[and]} to function as a source of information for us in West Java in particular, and for Indonesia in general’ (\textit{mendengoeng2kan apa arti kedaulatan rakjat dan lain2nja goena penerangan bagi kita choesoesnja di Djawa Barat oemoenmija diseloeroeh Indonesia}).\textsuperscript{16} The residency-level BPs also conducted visits to their regional sub-districts, bringing along the head of the local BP and representatives of other local organizations such as the


political party.\textsuperscript{17} The West Java BP took part in locally-organized events as part of their effort to promote Indonesian independence, such as the commemoration of independence in the city, where large numbers of people gathered, including representatives of the Arab and Chinese communities in the city.\textsuperscript{18}

In this regional context, the BP played an active role in connecting local nationalist activists, including KNID members, with local executive bodies such as the governor, and with the local population. The BP often published news of the various meetings held by local nationalists, including progress reports for each meeting, lists of speakers, and the contents of the speeches.\textsuperscript{19} When a governor issued an order, often very concisely and strictly worded, the BP explained in a more publicly accessible way. For example, initiatives by individuals or militia groups in Bandung aimed at collecting money and other contributions were presented as being for the public good. The government responded by voicing its concern that there could be parties who might seek to take advantage of this. Such suspicions were logical because violent conflict among individuals or organizations was not uncommon. Differences in ideology combined with competition to show off or garner popular acclaim usually created a tense atmosphere. It was routine for each organization to claim that its own one-sided actions, including unsanctioned attacks on those regarded as immoral or corrupt, were heroic. In fact, such actions were entirely self-serving.\textsuperscript{20} The governor of West Java issued, therefore, on 25 February, 1946, an edict stating that anyone planning to collect

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contributions should first report to the government. To explain this edict to the people, the BP of West Java used popularly well-known rhetoric, rendering the message more understandable, accentuating particularly that the purpose of the edict was to prevent ‘any efforts by those wishing to fish in muddy water’ (**oesaha2 orang2 jang hendak memantjing diair keroeh**)\(^\text{21}\).

At the local level, the BP also organized meetings at which pro-Republic sentiments were promulgated and strengthened. The local nationalist activists and the people of the area were assembled for these. The former then delivered persuasive speeches aimed at the latter. Such a gathering, a so-called ‘informative meeting’ (**pertemoean penerangan**), was usually held in the provincial capital and surrounding residencies. One, for example, in September, 1945, was held in Central Java’s capital Semarang and its nearby regencies, such as Grobogan and Demak. The regents (**bupatis**) conducted presentations and delivered their ‘advice’ (**nasehat**) about the latest political situation. The most important goal of these meetings was, according to the KNID, to strengthen the role of KNI ‘as an institution which will consolidate the national aims of Indonesia’ (**sebagai badan jang akan mengokohkan tjita2 Kebangsaan Indonesia**) and to ‘create a firm unity among different groups in the society’ (**mentjapai persatoean jg erat antara golongan2 jg berbeda2 pendiriannja**)\(^\text{22}\).

The BP’s serious lack of communications media obviously affected its ability to disseminate propaganda nation-wide. In response, the BP reinforced its political messages through good deeds, in particular by participation in providing for the local people’s material needs. One example from West Java best illustrates this. By cooperating with other local organizations, its representatives visited residencies and villages and met with peasants to deliver the

\(^{21}\) *Berita Repoeblick Indonesia*, 15 March, 1946.

\(^{22}\) ‘Roda penerangan moelai berdjalan’, *Sinar Baroe*, 10 September, 1945.
Republic’s messages. The BP backed these political addresses up with the provision of clothing and textiles to the impoverished peasants.\(^{23}\) This combination of speeches calling for support of the Republican government and generous good-will was intended to prove to the villagers that the Republic was not solely about talk, but also worked to fulfill its political promises.

\textit{Ministry of Information}

At its meeting on 19 August, 1945, Panitia Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia (The Preparatory Committee of Indonesian Independence, PPKI) decided to create 12 departments (ministries), of which one was the Kempen. According to PPKI’s decision, the task of the Kempen was to ‘take care of matters concerning information, propaganda, youth, and etcetera’ (mengoeroes hal-hal Penerangan, Propaganda, Pemoeda, dll.)\(^{24}\) No further explanation was provided regarding the Kempen’s role. The mandate to focus on information, propaganda, and youth appeared to replicate Japanese-sponsored propaganda efforts. Unsurprisingly, leading figures of the PPKI were previously key figures in Japanese-founded organizations aimed at mobilizing the masses, in particular the pemuda; these included the PPKI’s chairman, Soekarno, who was known as an advisor to Jawa Hokokai (whose main task had been to rally male youngsters to carry out war-related actions) whereas its vice chairman, Mohammad Hatta, was a leader of Putera, whose propaganda activities had centered on persuading Indonesian nationalist activists to help the Japanese war effort.


One immediate priority for the Indonesian Republic after the proclamation was the counteraction of the image created by the Dutch, which labeled the Republic a state created by the Japanese. It had already been clear during the Japanese occupation that Indonesia’s leading figures, such as Soekarno and Hatta, had collaborated with the Japanese and shared the Japanese’s anti-Allies sentiments. In anticipation of problems surrounding this, the PPKI sought a figure for minister of information whose background was free of Japanese connections. This body chose Amir Sjarifoeddin for the office. Several factors contributed to his appointment. Sjarifoeddin was an experienced newspaperman during the late colonial period, when he assumed several important positions in the Indonesian press, among them vice-editor of Toedjoean Rakjat, which focused on domestic and international issues; permanent assistant (pembantu tetap) at Kebangoenan newspaper; and a member of the editorial board of a prewar literary magazine concentrating on promoting the Indonesian language, Poedjangga Baroe.25 His background in press publication enabled him to acclimatize quickly to the use of various techniques used in mass persuasion, and he expanded his network with other leading nationalists and men of letters. In addition, Amir had previously led a left-wing party, Gerakan Rakjat Indonesia (the Indonesian People’s Movement, Gerindo) during the late thirties, and during the early months of the Japanese occupation he used 25,000 guilders he had received from Charles Olke van der Plas, a high-ranking colonial official, to establish a clandestine anti-Fascist network made up primarily of leftist-leaning people. Amir was subsequently arrested by the Japanese and, after Soekarno and Hatta intervened, given a life sentence in place of the death penalty faced by other anti-Japan activists.

Amir’s distance from contamination with collaboration with the Japanese made him the most suitable person to lead the Republic’s information service. Amir was indeed, in the words of Benedict Anderson, one of ‘the well-known prewar politicians who had the kind of wartime record likely to impress the Allied authorities.’ At the same time, his clandestine network was definitely a factor in the government’s decision to appoint him, as he could persuade it to be a mouthpiece for the Republic. Amir was, however, not in Jakarta when he was appointed because he was in a Japanese prison in Malang, East Java, until the end of September, 1945, serving his life sentence. On 1 October he was finally released, and he went straight to Jakarta to lead the Kempen. Between his appointment on 19 August and his return to fill his position on 1 October, Amir’s position was held temporarily by Ali Sastroamidjojo, the deputy minister of information.

When British troops entered Java in September, 1945, as part of their mission to disarm Japanese troops and free prisoners of war, the Kempen’s first task was to persuade Indonesians to trust these foreigners and cooperate with them. Indonesian authorities considered Amir suitable to this task, as he was regarded as having no history of anti-British sentiment, unlike most nationalist leaders who, during the occupation, had perpetuated the Japanese ruler’s anti-British propaganda. Amir used newspapers, such as Surabaya-based Soeara Rakjat, to express his thoughts. He strongly urged the Indonesian people to have trust in the British troops. He emphasized that it was his impression that by October, 1945, the Americans had come to sympathize with Indonesia’s struggle and the British had realized that


cooperation with Indonesians was inevitable. He said that Indonesians should ‘keep that sympathy alive’ (mendjaga soepaja symphatie itoe tetap ada), and that when the Allied forces landed in Surabaya, Indonesians must ensure that ‘there was no anti-Allies incident’ (djangan sampai ada insiden Anti-Serikut).\(^{28}\)

The Kempen was kept viable throughout the revolution, but the minister was replaced periodically as a result of internal political dynamics. At the beginning of the revolution, Amir had been chosen as minister due solely to his ‘pure’ background, as the Republic was at that time focused on purifying the image of the Japanese collaborator.\(^{29}\) After Amir, ministers were appointed in a way which reflected the specific composition of political parties in the coalition cabinet of the day. The minister after Amir, Mohammad Natsir, for example, was from the Masyumi Party, an Islamic party established on 7 November, 1945, a cooperative formation of Islamic organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, Persatuan Umat Islam, and Persatuan Umat Islam Indonesia, whose branches were widespread, particularly in Java and Sumatra.

In addition to his background in the Masyumi Party, Natsir’s experience in propaganda and his network were no less important to his appointment. As a modernist Muslim politician, Natsir fought against absolutism as represented by the Japanese. During the Japanese occupation Natsir formed a study group with other young intellectuals. According to George McTurnan Kahin, Natsir’s group


was among a few anti-fascist clandestine movements. Another group, which had branches in several cities, was headed by Sjahrir.\(^{30}\) Thus, Natsir may had contact with Sjahrir during the occupation. As Prime Minister from 14 November, 1945, to 3 July, 1947, it was Sjahrir who appointed Natsir, his anti-Japanese comrade, as minister of information on 12 March, 1946. Sjahrir apparently considered Natsir’s anti-Japanese stance, his network, and finally his background, which represented the biggest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, as main reasons for his selection.

On 14 November, 1946, a parliamentary cabinet was formed, with Sjahrir as prime minister. Amir Sjarifoeddin, in addition to retaining his post in the ministry of information, assumed a new position as minister of security.\(^{31}\) On 3 January, 1946, Mohammad Natsir was appointed the new minister of information, and Amir remained as minister of security.\(^{32}\) Previously, Natsir had been the vice chairman of the Working Committee of the KNIP. When the Dutch gradually assumed control of Jakarta at the end of 1945 and forced the President, Vice President, and most of the Republican institutions to move to Yogyakarta, the Kempen’s central office remained in Jakarta, apparently in an effort to maintain close contact with the British HQ there.\(^{33}\)

In October, 1946, a new cabinet was formed under Prime Minister Sjahrir. Within the Kempen, another post was created directly under the minister, to handle practical and daily ministry matters. Natsir was still in his position as minister, but a new post was created, namely *menteri moeda penerangan* (literally meaning young

\(^{30}\) George McTurnan Kahin, *Nationalism and revolution in Indonesia*, p. 113.


minister of information, which was equal to a junior minister). A.R. Baswedan, both a nationalist figure of Arab descent and a former journalist, was appointed as the first Young Minister of Information. This appointment was also conceived as a measure taken to appeal to the minorities, especially those of Arab descent, who in October, 1946, were persuaded by the Dutch via the so-called Pangkal Pinang Conference (1-12 October, 1946) to help them create federal states in Indonesia.\textsuperscript{34}

Baswedan’s appointment was largely based on his closeness with Sjahrir, his mixed Indonesian-Arab background, and his experience as journalist. Baswedan had been involved with the press since 1932 as an editorial member of a Surabaya-based Sino-Malay publication which advocated Indonesian nationalism, \textit{Sin Tit Po}. He also took part in discussions on the social position of locally-born foreign people (\textit{peranakan}) and foreign-born people (\textit{totok}) within the Arab community in Java. He urged local Arabs to accept Indonesia as their home rather than the Middle East. He did this primarily via a party he launched in 1934, Partai Arab Indonesia (Indonesian Arab Party, PAI).\textsuperscript{35} These activities allowed him to establish a network within the Indonesian press and with Arab communities throughout Java, and also familiarized him with various techniques of political communication, among

\textsuperscript{34} Lt. Gen. Hubertus van Mook, the head of Dutch civil authority in Indonesia, NICA, held three conferences (Malino Conference, 15-25 July, 1946, Pangkalpinang Conference, 1-12 October, 1946, and Denpasar Conference, 7-24 December, 1946) to appeal local rulers and minority groups such as Chinese and Arabs in Sumatra, Java, Borneo, Celebes and eastern Indonesia. Van Mook initiated the establishment of federal states which would function under the supervision of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The Denpasar Conference decided the establishment of the first federal state, the State of East Indonesia (Negara Indonesia Timur). See A. Arthur Schiller, \textit{The Formation of Federal Indonesia, 1945-1949} (The Hague/Bandung: W. van Hoeve, 1955).

them mass gatherings and the use of publication in the press.\textsuperscript{36} The government apparently intended his appointment to appeal to three elements simultaneously: the press, those of Arab descent, and, significantly, as was proven later in 1947 when several Arabic nations acknowledged the \textit{de facto} Republic of Indonesia, Arabic countries in the Middle East.

Public reaction to the government’s choice of Baswedan was positive. This can be seen from several pro-Republic newspapers, such as \textit{Merdeka} and \textit{Ichtisar}. The Arabs throughout Java and Sumatra, according to the newspapers, welcomed his appointment warmly, even interpreting it as proof of brotherhood between Indonesians and Arabs. These interpretations of such appointments showed that they were seen as a proof of the Republic’s attention to minority groups. The press’ good attitude toward Baswedan’s appointment increased public awareness about close cooperation and unity between the Republican government and minorities.\textsuperscript{37} Baswedan himself stated that he was a genuine son of Indonesia, hereby once again strengthening the pro-nationalist view he had been promoting since the 1930’s.

According to Baswedan, the junior minister of information’s main task was to be ‘the one who gathers information’ (\textit{toekang mengoempoelkan keterangan}).\textsuperscript{38} This task included maintaining a presence as a representative of the government at assemblies held by the militia, and mingling with the general populace to assess situations.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{36} For example, he deliberately sparked public debate about the need for Arabs in Java to adopt Javanese culture by publishing his own picture, as an Arab, wearing Javanese clothes.


\textsuperscript{38} ‘A.R. Baswedan: menteri moeda penerangan’.

\textsuperscript{39} ‘Kongres K.R.I.S.’, \textit{Mimbar Merdeka}, 10 October 1946; ‘Menteri moeda
According to his biographer, Suratmin, Baswedan had two practical tasks: conveying the Republican government’s point of view to the people and listening to their opinions about the government. An example of the latter was his behavior during President Soekarno’s public speeches. Instead of staying with Soekarno on stage, he would stand among the crowd, listening directly to the public response. He reported both supportive and dissenting opinions to the president. In addition, given his Arab background he was tasked with writing pamphlets and letters in Arabic, aimed at the Arab community in Java, especially in Surabaya. In comparison to other areas, Surabaya had a considerable Arab community, some of them wealthy.

Structure of the Kempen

The Kempen was divided into several sections. Firstly, the Foreign Relations (sic) section, the main task of which was to receive representatives of foreign countries and institutions and guide them during visits intended to familiarize them with Indonesian society. The Foreign Relations section was expected to serve as a bridge between Indonesia and the international community. The primary aim was to promote positive images of Indonesia through receiving, welcoming, accompanying, and hopefully impressing guests from abroad, which group comprised mainly foreign correspondents and representatives of foreign organizations. They hoped to engender cooperation with these visitors and to intensify the spread of information about

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41 Suratmin, Abdul Rahman Baswedan, p. 108.
Indonesia from the Indonesian point of view in the foreigners’ respective home countries.43

The Foreign Relations section was able to use its encounters with foreigners to collect opinions about how the outside world saw Indonesia, and then analyze and use this knowledge to construe the most effective way to enhance the international world’s positive image of Indonesia. Concerning foreign correspondents, this section showed a preference for offering assistance and facilities to the so-called ‘progressive journalist’, a term coined by Henk van Maurik, a Dutch journalist from Gewestelijke Katholieke Pers in Gelderland. This term referred to those journalists who, in their work, represented both Dutch and Indonesian views regardless of their country of origin and notwithstanding the uncertainty about the degree of authority the Republican leaders actually had. The Republic aspired to show its kindness toward foreigners and demonstrate its ability to manage the country well to the world via these journalists.44 The section learned that a critical journalist, notwithstanding his or her disparagement of how the Indonesians were running their country, would still convey to the world that there were many good aspects to Indonesia’s struggle for independence.

The second element in Kempen’s organizational structure was the Djawatan Publiciteit (Publication Section). Its main task was to publish various propaganda materials generated by the Indonesian authorities, including print versions of the Republican leaders’ speeches regarding the independence, or summaries thereof. Other publications included information and persuasive arguments concerning contemporary problems faced by the Republic. This section was, moreover, responsible for disseminating instructions


and new regulations issued by the government to the public at large.\textsuperscript{45} It also distributed the Indonesian authorities’ views on domestic and international matters to the local presses. One example of this was felicitations from the Indonesian government on the celebration of the first anniversary of the states of India and Pakistan in 1948.\textsuperscript{46} The section also assessed public opinion by collecting information on how the domestic press treated pro-independence sentiments in society, and it also reported the headlines in the press to other Republican authorities.\textsuperscript{47}

Other sections of the Kempen included: 1) Dokomentasi (sic) (the Documentation Section), tasked with maintaining an archive of printed material for the Kempen, encompassing both the Kempen’s internal communications and propaganda materials from the Dutch, particularly pamphlets and placards in the Indonesian language and in Javanese, and 2) Urusan Daerah (the Regional Matters Section), whose primary task was to receive reports from regional branches of the ministry concerning public opinion at a regional level.\textsuperscript{48}

Whereas in Java the ministry reached down as far as the regency level, in Sumatra the Kempen’s information-gathering activities

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were concentrated at one main office, the Office of the Ministry of Information in Sumatra, headquartered in Bukittinggi, West Sumatra, and, to a smaller degree, a Kempen office in Kutaradja (Banda Aceh). The Bukittinggi office was tasked with reporting the state of public opinion from all Sumatra to the central Kempen, including the opinions of the Sumatran natives and those groups perceived as still being in doubt about independence, such as the Chinese community.\textsuperscript{49}

On 16 December, 1945, the Indonesian government established a body specifically to approach the Indonesian Chinese, called the Kantoer Oeroesan Bangsa Tionghoa (the Office for Chinese People’s Affairs). According to the Kempen, this organization was to ‘seek and establish the closest possible relationship between the government and the Chinese population in all matters’.\textsuperscript{50}

The extension of the Kempen beyond Java intensified in August, 1946, following the intensification of communication and coordination among Republican supporters in Java and Sumatra. Minister Natsir ordered the establishment of branches of the Ministry in Sumatra. The main office in Sumatra was located in Bukittinggi, where communications media were rife and nationalist sentiment apparent. Smaller branches were planned for various places in North, Central, and South Sumatra. These branches were intended to deal with communications media such as the press and radio, and also to assess public opinion in their respective regions. The new recruits for these branches, especially the high-ranking officials, were experienced local journalists and former civil servants, which reflected

\textsuperscript{49} Communication between Kempensum (Kementerian Penerangan Sumatera) Bukittinggi and Kutaradja and Kementerian Penerangan Jogjakarta, September, 1947, ANRI: Kempen, Nr. 208.

\textsuperscript{50} Letter from Kementerian Penerangan to Perdana Menteri (Prime Minister) and Menteri Keamanan Rakjat (Minister of People’s Security), ‘Kantoer oeroesan bangsa Tionghoa’, 16 December, 1945, ANRI: Kempen, Nr. 202.
the Republican government’s association with professional media workers and capable administrators in their respective regions.51

In addition to this provincial level, the Kempen also followed the path of the BP in extending its reach to the village level, although it was less effective than the BP, which had set up branches in villages themselves. The Kempen sent its envoys to villages not just to promote independence but also to train the villagers to be what it called ‘effective’ propagandists. What the ministry referred to as ‘effective’ was ‘once we talk to the people, the people’s hearts should be caught immediately’ (sekali bitjara, hati rakjat haroes dapat kami reboet). Every ministry’s employee in the villages was also issued an identity card in order to reassure the villagers about their credibility and legitimacy.52

The appointment of heads of the Kempen’s local branches was heavily dependant on communication ability. That said, the nationalist records of the candidates were also examined. Other qualifications which were required, according to Minister of Information Setiadi in 1947, were the ability to work in a team, ‘competence’, ‘wisdom’, ‘skill in serving foreign guests’ and a ‘dynamic and progressive’ (dynamisch progressief) personality.53 The final decision about each such appointment was, however, often based on compromises between the minister and the governor. The candidate was thus supposed to be a nationalist, and more importantly, a locally-known nationalist who was close to the regional government but also capable in the field of public persuasion.

51 ‘Wakil pemerintah oeroesan oemoem dan penjelidikan Sumatra’, Berita Repoeblik Indonesia, 1 August, 1946.


The Kempen investigated and disseminated edicts issued by other ministries; in this it mirrored one of the BP’s activities. When such an edict was issued in technical phrasing and lacking context, or was interpreted differently by local authorities, the Kempen would examine it and fit the edict into a broader context, and emphasize the requirement that local authority follow orders from Jakarta as exactly as possible.\textsuperscript{54} In this regard, the Kempen acted as a coordinator in disciplining local authorities, which often undertook unilateral initiatives concerning public matters based solely on their own assessment of the local situation.

\textit{Challenges}

The Kempen, like other institutions in the nascent Republic, suffered from a lack of facilities and financial support. When it was launched, its office, located at Jalan Tjilatjap 4, Jakarta, was practically empty. Even the tables had to be borrowed from another office. When the Minister and his staff transferred later to Yogyakarta, after the capital of the Republic was moved there, it had essentially no office at all. Work was carried out in various locations, from a hotel to a borrowed room in Kepatihan, within Yogyakarta Sultanate, usually used only by officials of the Sultanate. The writing of pamphlets was often hindered by the fact that the electricity was always shut off at 10 p.m. in order to save energy. With no alternative they had to use candles which was not caused a great deal of strain on their eyes.\textsuperscript{55}

The Dutch military also formed a serious obstacle for the Kempen. On 10 December, 1945, the Kempen office in Jakarta

\textsuperscript{54}‘Penerangan dan pendjelasan Makloemat Pemerintah Repoeblik Indonesia tgl.: 24-10-1945 tentang soal makanan rakjat’, \textit{Djiwa Repoeblik}, 27 October, 1945. Apart from further explaining the edict, the ministry also acted to spread circular of other state institution, for example from the attorney general. See ‘Kepoelisian Kehakiman’, \textit{Soeara Merdeka}, 10 January, 1946.

\textsuperscript{55}Suratmin, \textit{Abdul Rahman Baswedan}, p. 108.
was attacked by Dutch troops, who passed the office in a truck flying the Dutch flag. Some cars in front of the office were hit by gunfire, but nobody was wounded. Considering the lack of injuries, it could be construed that the attack was intended to disrupt work. It occurred amid increasing hatred of Dutch troops among citizens of the Indonesian Republic. The Republic was at the time arguing to the public that the Dutch troops were responsible for various violent incidents in Java; simultaneously, the Dutch press, army commander, and army propagandist steadily portrayed the Republic as Japanese-manufactured fascists. Just six days before the 10 December attack, the Amsterdam-based newspaper *De Volkskrant*, which may have contributed to Dutch dislike of the Republic, wrote, ‘Soekarno speaks to the youngsters in Yogyakarta with the brutal mouth of Hitler, the jaw of Mussolini, and the methods of Japanese warlords’. This view reflected the notions of some Dutch who refused to acknowledge the Republic’s existence as a political fact. It was not known whether the 10 December attack was officially ordered by the Dutch commander in Jakarta, but it was apparent that in the middle of rising tension and a propaganda war, the Kempen and other mouthpieces of the Republic were among the top targets for shutdown, to bring an end to pro-Republic and anti-Dutch propaganda.

Dutch attacks peaked when, on 28 December, 1945, Minister Amir’s car was shot at by Dutch soldiers. An Indonesian newspaper described the perpetrator as ‘a party happy with disorder’ (*pihak jang senang keonaran*). Amir himself escaped unharmed. The

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British forces, realizing that attacks on Indonesian institutions had the potential to worsen the situation, decided to take action, sending troops to guard the office of the ministry at the beginning of the next year.\textsuperscript{59} It is possible that this deployment was at the request of Indonesian authorities in Jakarta. They felt threatened by the Dutch troops, and had a relatively good connection with the British headquarters there.

Another problem faced by the Kempen came from fellow Indonesians. Dynamics in Indonesian politics also affected the Kempen’s daily work. Given that Republican authorities allowed and even encouraged the general population to take part in social and political organizations rather than be embedded in a state party, the central government lacked tight and total control of its people. Disputes within the population were becoming widespread, as there was no strong and dominant authority. As of early 1948, communist elements were increasingly present in Indonesian politics, becoming more radical particularly with the return of Muso, a leader of Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI) in the 1920’s. After the failure of the 1926/27 communist rebellion against the colonial regime, Muso had escaped to Europe in May of the same year. Following the Madiun incident of 1948, the communists opposed the Republican government, which they accused of trying to erase them from Indonesian politics as a concession to the United States as part of the so-called Renville Agreement, struck in January, 1948. The conflict between the two peaked with assorted acts of violence, most commonly kidnapping, in the communists’ stronghold, East Java.

This dispute, however, also took another form, that of a schism within the Republican institution, as its staff tended to support the communists rather than the Republican government. For example,

\textsuperscript{59} ‘Kementerian Penerangan didjaga militer Inggris’, Merdeka: Suara Rakjat Republik Indonesia, 2 January 1946.
based on an internal examination concerning the work of the Kempen in Yogyakarta in March 1948, it was known that there were several problems with the Ministry. Its office in Yogyakarta was initially established by local nationalists in the early days of the revolution as the Djawatan Penerangan (literally meaning the Department of Information). When the Kempen began its extension into provincial levels, it took over this department. The department was under political pressure. In 1948, the communist group was among the most important elements in Indonesian politics, both for their rising numbers of supporters and their sharp criticism of the Republican government. This situation also influenced the Kempen, since active communist propaganda in Yogyakarta caused complications, particularly when the communists began to exert more influence on the ministry’s local office. As a consequence, the Kempen’s employees, who were spending more time in the field approaching the people instead of remaining in the office with their colleagues, were used by political parties (for example, according to one report, by the ‘left wing’) to voice the party’s aspirations in place of Republican government’s propaganda.

A considerable number of the Kempen’s regional employees, such as those in Yogyakarta at the beginning of 1948, were heavily under the influence of the communists’ labour organization, the SOBSI (Central Organization of All-Indonesia Workers Union). This caused conflict within the Ministry because these employees did not follow instructions, instead forming political circles among the workforce. The Kempen’s internal surveillance report described this situation as ‘disadvantageous to the Government’s efforts’, as now any such information issued by the Kempen ‘looked like the [communist] organization’s information [propaganda]’, meaning it made it appear that the government supported the communists.

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This problem, along with others such as a lack of discipline among the employees and a shortage of facilities in the office, weakened the Kempen; now the ‘enemies’ of the state, namely the communists, had occupied an institution which was supposed to voice the state’s interest.\textsuperscript{61} This also demonstrated that, in some cases at least, the communist propaganda was more appealing to the masses than the Republican propaganda. However, the Kempen’s internal reports mentioned nothing about whether these employees managed to influence public opinion nor reported what happened to them during and after the Republican government put down the communist rebellion in September, 1948.

\textit{The Kempen on Duty}

In undertaking its work, the Kempen underlined the need for coordination between itself and its local branches. In order to further such coordination, the local branches forwarded the collected Dutch-made pamphlets, which were directed at Indonesians as well as the Dutch and had been written in Indonesian, Dutch, and Javanese, to the Kempen so that the content could be assessed and counterpropaganda created.\textsuperscript{62} These pamphlets were usually collected by the Tentara Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Army, TNI) and the Republican police. The TNI was an active partner of the Kempen, not only because of its activities collecting Dutch-made pamphlets but also because it had requested the Kempen’s assistance in influencing the masses and preventing them from being swayed

\textsuperscript{61} Kementerian Penerangan Dinas Provinsi Djawa-Tengah to Kementerian Penerangan Jogjakarta, ‘Laporan Hatsil Penilikan’.

by the enemy’s efforts, such as the anti-Republic placards allegedly spread by pro-Dutch parties.\textsuperscript{63}

The Kempen asked local authorities to report ‘directly and as soon as possible every incident which disrupts order and deviates from the usual situation’.\textsuperscript{64} This was cited as important because it was for the sake of ‘the public and for bringing information to the outside world’. The Kempen, aiming to boost coordination between the government and local authorities, called a meeting involving key government officials and local authorities. The gathering included civil servants and militia leaders from various regions, and leaders including the vice president, the minister of defense, and the secretary of state. The leaders outlined the government’s main concerns, particularly regarding things which could lead to misunderstandings among the populace, such as the meaning of ‘people’s sovereignty’, which some people interpreted as freedom to do anything they wanted.\textsuperscript{65}

Additionally, the Kempen collaborated with the publishers of print media who, technically speaking, had more printing facilities than did the Kempen. This cooperation revealed a lack of total power. The government held a position of supervision and guidance toward the media, exercised through continual emphasis on persuasive rhetoric concerning common purpose. For example, both the Kempen and the publishers were at the forefront in promoting the independence. This type of soft control was required because the publishers were in the main private companies, without government involvement. The government was also disinclined to take action; throughout the revolution, it had remained convinced that the majority of the mass media steadfastly supported the government. Punishing disobedient

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item ‘Makloemat Kementerian Penerangan bagian Perkabaran’, Berita Repoeblik Indonesia, 1 January 1946.
\item ‘Arti kedaulatan rakjat’, Soeara Merdeka, 28 January 1946.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
journalists or prohibiting certain publications occurred, therefore, only very rarely.

The government limited its role in this area to ongoing coordination, offering suggestions to the publishers on how best to manage print media in an age of strife. The Kempen requested each publisher to send the ministry a minimum of 3 copies of every publication. These copies allowed the Kempen to check the contents of all publications and also to assess the degree of compliance of each publisher. This enabled the Kempen to supervise and, then, to guide the press. It cited the collection of the copies as crucial because it was the most effective manner by which the ministry ‘could always follow people’s voices’ (senantiasa dapat mengetahoei soeara-soeara rakjat).66

The ministry also provided guidelines to unify the views of editors of print media.67 It produced its own brochures in a series entitled Pepora (People’s Political Information, Penerangan Politik Rakjat), which addressed certain important ideas such as the meaning of democracy and the importance of political parties.68 These brochures were then distributed to the newspaper editors, who received them gladly as they now finally had an insight into the government’s thinking. They were subsequently distributed to the general public, via both the newspapers and the Kempen. Some were free, others could be purchased.

State Radio

Radio had been used in the Dutch Indies since the early 1920’s by the Dutch government for the purpose of maintaining direct,  

66 ‘Ma’loemat Kementerian Penerangan kepada sekalian penerbit harian dan madjallah’, Berita Repoeblik Indonesia, 1 January, 1946.


68 For example, Arti partai politik didalam demokrasi: Serie ‘Pepora’. 2. (Jakarta: Kempen, 1945).
real-time communication with its colony. Consequently, radio in Indonesia was at first a technology used only by government officials, mechanics, hobbyists and wealthy Dutch. During the second half of the 1920’s its use broadened to include advertising and entertainment. The government of the Dutch Indies started managing radio broadcasts in the Indies in 1934, when it issued the Indies Radiowet (Radio Regulation), by which it took control of which broadcasts were permitted. In the same year it granted Nederlands-Indische Radio Omroep Maatschappij (NIROM), a privately-established radio station, a license to broadcast in the Indies. Major financial support from the Indies government helped NIROM expand rapidly into Java’s main cities.\(^{69}\) NIROM’s growth occurred in the midst of the rise of Indonesian nationalism in the 1930’s. The fact that NIROM’s primary focus was on simply broadcasting the Indies government’s voice sparked challenges by Indonesian nationalists, who saw radio as a possible new means of continuing their struggle, augmenting the newspapers which they had been using.

The first Indonesian involvement in radio was, however, for cultural reasons. Before NIROM was established, a radio organization was founded in Surakarta Palace by the palace’s noblemen, who broadcast Javanese art performances such as Javanese theatre (ketoprak) and Javanese dance and drama shows (wayang orang) for the common people who gathered in the palace. In order to expand radio programming, the initiators established Solose Radiovereniging (Radio Association of Solo, SRV) in 1933 and opened branches in Jakarta, Bandung, Semarang, and Surabaya.\(^{70}\) In subsequent years, these branches grew independently and their programs and aims diversified. More Indonesians were becoming involved in founding new SRV branches in Java’s main cities.

\(^{69}\) Sedjarah radio di Indonesia (Jakarta: Kempen, 1953), pp. 10-12.

\(^{70}\) Sedjarah radio di Indonesia, p. 13.
The Japanese exploited radio largely as a means to propagandize, applying it to their goal of mobilizing the Indonesian people, especially in Java, to support Japan’s war in the Pacific. To increase the appeal to Indonesians, the Japanese allowed more Indonesian elements to be broadcast. Indonesians responded to this opportunity by airing more programs related to Indonesian culture, using Malay extensively and taking jobs as broadcasters in Japanese-sponsored radio stations. Dutch-language radio programs were banned. Radio in Java was now broadcasting more Javanese and Sundanese songs alongside the political speeches and announcements. The lack of popular access to radio was solved by installing loudspeakers in the streets of Java’s key cities. Conversely, the Japanese banned all Indonesian-run private radio stations and centralized radio management under a department called Hoso Kanri Kyoku, with branches in Java’s main cities (Jakarta, Bandung, Purwokerto, Yogyakarta, Solo, Semarang, Malang and Surabaya) and residencies. Other radio stations were founded in Sumatra and Sulawesi, still under the supervision of the Japanese Navy.

Many Indonesians working in Japanese-sponsored radio stations were young and educated. Some even had backgrounds in journalism school, while others had worked previously as newspapermen during the late colonial period. Under orders from Hoso Kyoku, local workshops checked people’s radios and blocked them from receiving foreign broadcasts, particularly from the Allies. Indonesian broadcasters working in Japanese radio stations, however, managed to listen secretly to foreign news. It was by this means that they learned later, in August, 1945, that Japan had surrendered. Many nationalists

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72 Sedjarah radio di Indonesia, pp. 21-22 and 27.
also listened secretly to Allied broadcasts. According to one estimate, there were during the Japanese occupation approximately 50,000 clandestine radio receivers in Indonesia.\(^{73}\)

From a propagandistic point of view, radio was seen by the Indonesian nationalist activists as the most effective means to spread the news about Indonesian independence quickly, thanks to the voluntary participation of sympathetic young Indonesian broadcasters who had established relationships with other broadcasters in other cities, as well as with pemuda groups. Only hours after the proclamation of independence, several pemudas stole a radio transmitter, using it to broadcast the news beyond Jakarta. In the afternoon of the same day, other pemudas snuck into a Japanese-held radio station in Jakarta, went to the broadcasting room, turned off the Japanese broadcast, and once again aired the text of the proclamation.\(^{74}\)

The first event marking the beginning of the institution of Republican radio occurred shortly after the Japanese shut down a radio broadcast on 17 August in which Indonesian youths read out the text of the independence declaration. After this closure, the Indonesian youths moved their mobile radio transmitters to another building, where they continued broadcasting. They called it Radio Indonesia Merdeka (Radio Free Indonesia).\(^{75}\) As with other non-state pro-independence media institutions during the revolution, this radio station began with personal initiatives rather than via a command from the central government in Jakarta, then preoccupied with administrative matters of state management. On 11 September, 1945, Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) was created.

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\(^{74}\) ‘Radio Indonesia di Djakarta’, *Merdeka*, 17 May 1946.

Its slogan, ‘Sekali di udara, tetap di udara’ (once on air, always on air), still in use today, was formulated after a meeting in Jakarta, attended by representatives of eight ex-Japanese radio stations in Java who were sympathetic to the Republic-declared independence.\textsuperscript{76} On 12-13 January, 1946, representatives of radio stations all over Java held a conference in Solo, where they decided to ‘propose to the government that all radio stations and their employees be put under the management and supervision of the Ministry of Information’ (mengoesoelkan kepada Pemerintah soepaja semoea pemantjar radio dan pegawainja dioeroes serta diawasi oleh Kementerian Penerangan) and ‘establish a centralized office for radio broadcasting’ (mengadakan Kantor Poesat siaran Radio bertempat disocatoe tempat).\textsuperscript{77} It was only on April 1, 1946, that RRI was granted official recognition by the Indonesian government as an official government body.\textsuperscript{78}

On 23 August, 1945, Soekarno delivered his first radio speech since proclaiming Indonesian independence. He campaigned, as did others, for the establishment of a national party to serve as an umbrella to all political entities in Indonesia, and for calling on former members of Peta and Heiho to join the Republican army.\textsuperscript{79} This first radio speech was followed by other nationalist leaders addressing various audiences including civil servants, the pemuda, and the populace in general. Radio was also used to disseminate new decisions or orders from the government and the KNIP ‘so that common people would soon know about the decisions’ (soepaja pendoedoeok selekas moengkin mengetahoienja).\textsuperscript{80}


\textsuperscript{77} ‘Poetoesan konperensi djawatan radio’, Soeara Merdeka, 17 January 1945.


\textsuperscript{80} ‘Peratoeran pemerintah negara Repoeblik Indonesia’, Djıwa Repoeblik, 29
In October, 1945, the Kempen, the ministry of transportation (whose main tasks concerned the post, telegraphy, and communications), and local Republican leaders made an arrangement with regard to the structure of radio broadcasting in Jakarta and elsewhere. At the national level, the Kempen was in charge of handling the government’s official broadcasts. The Indonesian authorities gave the Republic-appointed governors the authority to manage radio broadcasting in their respective provinces. Under the governors, the regents were responsible for matters relating to radio. This structure therefore resembled that of the KNIP, which had a central committee and thereunder local committees down to the regency level.

Whereas radio had been used to propagate independence to the population, it was also used to persuade the group of people whose support and contributions were indispensable for ensuring that leaders’ voices kept being transmitted: the employees of radio stations. The first official appeal from the government to rally Indonesians working in radio stations behind independence was at the beginning of October, 1945. Instead of calling for blind loyalty or coercing them, the government turned to the rhetoric of independence. On 3 October, the Minister of Transportation Abikoesno Tjokrosoejoso delivered a radio speech addressed to the employees of PTT (Post, Telegraaf, en Telefoon) and the radio and train companies. Starting his speech with ‘merdeka’, he stated, ‘My fellow brothers! [...] do your respective jobs, and contribute your power to establish an Independent Indonesia. PTT and the radio and train companies must be in the hands of Indonesians. Therefore I request you all to defend this right and prevent these institutions from being taken over by another nation [...] Merdeka!’.

October 1945.

81 ‘Residen diserahi mengoeroes siaran radio-daerah’, Warta Indonesia, 4 October 1945.

82 See ‘Seroean Menteri Perhoeboengan Repoebliek Indonesia kepada pegawai
Using higher ideals in such an appeal, however, also represented an effort to recruit more Indonesians to work in radio and use it in the struggle for independence. One week later, a Republican government official advertised in a newspaper, calling on ‘radio operators and radio mechanics able to work for the government’ (radio-operators and radio-monteurs jang sanggoep bekerdja kepada Pemerintah) to register their names with the government office for radio matters in Jakarta.\(^{83}\)

**Non-state Actors**

There was a blurred boundary concerning state and non-state radio institutions, as the existing radio stations were interchangeably used by state officials and militia members. The latter consisted mainly of nationalist youth and operated outside state parameters. Nearly all pro-independence radio stations used the name ‘Indonesia’, and most of their programming reflected pro-independence sentiments. Every nationalist radio station was considered Indonesian property to be used for the broadcast of pro-independence news and speeches.

This may be illuminated with a description of how three radio stations in East Java worked. These were RRI, a KNID-run radio station, and a radio station run by a revolutionary organization in Surabaya, the capital of East Java. Surabaya’s RRI already existed in October, 1945. Its workforce was made up of natives of the city and Indonesian Chinese. It was organized into the following divisions: chief, day chief, broadcast, head of broadcast, administration, and technical. The station had no more than 15 employees.\(^{84}\) In order to disseminate information about its program and introduce itself to the

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P.T.T., radio dan pedjabat kereta-api’, *Soeloeh Merdeka*, 4 October, 1945.

\(^{83}\) ‘Panggilan’, *Soeara Rakjat*, 11 October, 1945.

\(^{84}\) ‘Soesoenan pengoeroes Radio Repoeblik Indonesia Soerabaja’, *Soeara Rakjat*, 16 October, 1945.
public, it advertised regularly in the newspapers and called on readers to help spread news about matters concerning the radio station itself, for example wavelength changes.\textsuperscript{85}

Outside the city of Surabaya, the KNID played a role in using radio as one of their main means of communication at the residency level. For instance, in the first week of November, 1945, the KNID of Bojonegoro (East Java), established Poesat Penerangan Rakjat Indonesia (Indonesian People’s Information Center). It was the main pro-independence body, tasked with maintaining a steady stream of information regarding the latest political developments. The agency focused mainly on three media: radio, a weekly magazine, and face-to-face meetings with the people (\textit{rakjat}).\textsuperscript{86} The broadcasting day only began at 18.30, reflecting a lack of the resources needed to establish a full-day program.

In addition to the RRI and KNID-run radio stations, there were stations managed by revolutionaries. Some freedom fighters joined the government while others established their own organizations. The latter had no official affiliation with the authorities, yet both maintained constant communication with one another. This situation arose largely from the fact that in the early days after the proclamation, radio facilities were mainly in the hands of Indonesians working in Japanese-controlled radio stations, the \textit{pemuda} and paramilitary organizations. One group which used radio with a decidedly pro-Republic tone was the Pimpinan Pemberontakan Rakjat Indonesia (The Head of the Rebellion of the Indonesian People, PPRI) in Surabaya under the leadership of Soetomo, also known as Bung Tomo, a former journalist based in Jakarta, and his associates. This organization claimed to be ‘an extreme organization, which, along with the common people, would provoke rebellion and draw blood


if the sovereignty of the Republic was besmirched or the honour of the leaders, now negotiating [with the Allies], was threatened’.\textsuperscript{87} Its aim was to broadcast ‘the Indonesian people’s demand, namely the establishment of world peace, which is now being disturbed by the NICA and their conspiracy’.\textsuperscript{88} It also declared that it had a ‘revolutionary radio transmitter’ \textit{(revolutie-zender)}, which was called the Radio Pemberontakan (Rebellion Radio).\textsuperscript{89}

In a bid to attract more listeners, the PPRI announced, ‘in the name of the common people, would those who own radios turn them on (to our wavelength) at the mentioned time, and persuade people who do not own radios to listen as well’.\textsuperscript{90} One of the earliest important programs in their broadcast schedule consisted of propaganda aimed at those who had not decided their political stance. This was primarily the Indians, Ambonese, Menadonese, and Eurasians. They also appealed to the international world, particularly to the Allies, hoping to garner support for independence and to denounce the Dutch. The PPRI called upon those ‘who have the spirit of rebellion and can speak foreign languages (English, French, etc.)’ \textit{(jang mempoenjai semangat pemberontakan dan dapat berbahasa asing [Inggeris, Perantjis, d.l.l.]}) to broadcast for them.\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{87} ‘\textit{badan extreem, jang bersama-sama rakjat djelata akan menimboelkan pemberontakan, akan mengalirkan darah, bila kedaulatan Repoebliek tersinggoeng atau bila kehormatan para pemimpin jang sedang mendjalankan diplomasi terantjam}. See ‘Pimpinan Pemberontakan Rakjat Indonesia’, \textit{Soeara Rakjat}, 13 October, 1945.


\textsuperscript{89} ‘Pimpinan Pemberontakan Rakjat Indonesia’.

\textsuperscript{90} ‘\textit{diharap atas nama rakjat djelata, mereka jang mempoenjai pesawat radio pada waktoe-waktoe tsb mengambilnja dan mengadjak rakjat jang tidak mempoenjai radio ikoet mendengarkannya}’. See ‘Pengoemoeman Pimpinan Pemberontak Rakjat Indonesia’.

\textsuperscript{91} ‘Pengoemoeman Pimpinan Pemberontak Rakjat Indonesia’.
Most programs broadcast by Radio Pemberontakan were concerned with political and military developments on the Republican side. This included reports on the battle of Surabaya from October, 1945, onwards. These were often cited as main sources for pro-independence newspapers in Java and Sumatra. Radio was also a means to call upon more pemuda from outside Surabaya to flood the city to back up the struggle there, a call which was heartily appreciated and responded to by pemuda from as far away as Semarang in Central Java. Even when British troops managed to take over an Indonesian-held telephone company in the city, thereby cutting off telephone communication between Jakarta and Surabaya, Radio Pemberontakan remained one of the limited sources of information available to nationalists in Jakarta.

**Radio at Work**

By the end of the period of Japanese rule, the Japanese were in control of radio broadcasting devices. Privately-owned radios were extremely rare and most of them were sealed by the Japanese authorities, to prevent access to foreign broadcasts. The pemuda groups also had radios, which were used in secret to avoid heavy Japanese penalties. Therefore, one of the most immediate challenges faced by the Indonesians after the Japanese surrender was to take these devices and related facilities over. The Indonesians procured a number of radio stations as they assumed control of public offices from the Japanese. One typical case happened in Surabaya. As of

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early October, 1945, local nationalists in Surabaya had managed to take over many public facilities in the city, including power plants, factories, and the city’s radio station, Radio Surabaya. Only hours after the takeover, the radio station was used, under orders from the city’s mayor Soedirman, to broadcast speeches by local nationalist leaders, including Soedirman himself and the representatives of KNIP.\textsuperscript{95} Given the lack of sources, radio programs were infrequent.\textsuperscript{96}

Radio devices were also obtained through searches of Japanese-held facilities. Sometimes the \textit{pemuda} or Indonesians who had worked previously as broadcasters at Japanese-controlled radio stations could procure transmitters and other facilities, including broadcasting rooms, through negotiation or by intimidating desperate Japanese, who handed such things over to avoid a bloodbath at the hands of the already agitated and armed \textit{pemuda}.\textsuperscript{97} In one case, however, Indonesians raided a Japanese radio station, destroying the building and taking away the equipment.\textsuperscript{98} When Dutch troops arrived and established military posts, attacks by Indonesians trying to seize the radio equipment led to its withdrawal again from such sites. Seizure of devices was justified by the armed Indonesians as confiscation in the name of security: it was believed that the Dutch used them to provoke anti-Republic sentiments.\textsuperscript{99} Similar developments also took place in Sumatra, where in the second week of October, 1945, Indonesian nationalists managed to secure a radio station and other communication facilities in Medan.\textsuperscript{100}

\textsuperscript{95} ‘Pengoperan kekocasan ketangan bangsa Indonesia’, \textit{Soecara Rakjat}, 1 October, 1945.

\textsuperscript{96} ‘Siaran Radio Repoeblik Indonesia Soerabaja’, \textit{Soecara Rakjat}, 2 October, 1945.


\textsuperscript{100} ‘Repoeblik Indonesia di Soematera berpoetar’, \textit{Soecara Rakjat}, 10 October, 1945.
Another effort by the Indonesian authorities to acquire more radio equipment was unprecedented. They called for a voluntary handover of radios by individuals. The issue of national solidarity was utilized by the authorities to appeal to Indonesians who owned radios. The government spoke warmly, for example, of contributions from ‘generous people’ who ‘donated’ their radio transmitters to the government ‘without expecting profit’.¹⁰¹ Private auctions were another method used to acquire radio technology.¹⁰²

During the Japanese occupation and continuing into the first days after the proclamation of independence, Japanese-founded radio stations broadcast news primarily in Japanese, Indonesian, and local languages such as Javanese and Sundanese. There was also entertainment, including western, Arabian, and Balinese songs.¹⁰³ This made it clear that the Japanese still controlled radio broadcasting during the early days of the revolution; Indonesians could only occasionally use radio for their own purposes, and then only by secretive means such as those employed by Adam Malik, an Indonesian member of staff at a Japanese-founded radio station, Domei. He used radio clandestinely to spread the news of the proclamation only hours after the fact.

Another effort was subsequently made to take control of radio, this time gradually, so as to disseminate more broadcasts about Indonesian independence. The Surabaya branch of Barisan Pelopor, the youth wing of the Jawa Hokokai (a Japanese organization tasked with mobilizing the Javanese populace during the occupation), planned from the day of the proclamation to hold a monthly radio speech ‘in

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¹⁰² ‘Lelang oleh kantor lelang “Mercurius”, Min Pao, 1 November, 1945.

order to inflame the feelings of nationalism and patriotism’.\footnote{104} Radio stations were also becoming the forum wherein pro-independence sentiments could be voiced, for example by airing the celebration ‘welcoming Indonesian independence’, including the singing of Indonesia Raya, Indonesia’s national anthem.\footnote{105}

Another milestone in the exploitation of radio for the sake of Indonesian independence was Soekarno’s first broadcast speech on 23 August, 1945. This speech was lengthy, and in contrast to radio programs during the occupation, this was the first time an Indonesian had been able to dominate programming for something so long, signifying an Indonesian conquest over a once Japanese-dominated medium. The broadcast was promoted beforehand in pro-Republic newspapers.\footnote{106} It was said to have attracted a satisfying degree of attention from the people. It also spurred other prominent nationalists to appear on the radio. Among them were Vice President Hatta, a representative of civil servant R.A.A. Wiranatakusumah, and a pemuda leader, Muhammad Ibnu Sajoeti.\footnote{107} As of August, 1945, Indonesians were habitually listening to programs concerning independence instead of Japanese progress in the battlefield. Compared to other mass media, radio allowed Indonesian leaders to convey their views and instructions instantaneously to various parts of Indonesia, accelerating and extending the reach of pro-independence sentiments.

\footnote{105} ‘Perajaan menjamboet kemerdekaan Indonesia’, \textit{Soeara Asia}, 18 August, 1945.
The Japanese authorities soon discovered that radio broadcasts by Indonesian politicians caused an upsurge in pro-independence sentiment. They ordered the cessation of all broadcasts by all Javanese radio stations on 30 August, 1945, stressing that this was an element of the Japanese Emperor’s agreement with the Allies.\(^{108}\) Indonesian listeners were disappointed as up to that day they had been thrilled by the speeches from the nationalist leadership from Jakarta.\(^{109}\) Despite this order, however, Indonesian authorities continued their efforts to take control of the radio, approaching, for example, Indonesians who worked in Japanese institutions. The theme of independence was once again employed to appeal to these fellow Indonesians. The authorities stressed the need to remove any doubt concerning Indonesian independence.\(^{110}\)

Incidents related to the establishment of local Radio Republic Indonesia stations occurred in the absence of Republican authorities. Government intervention was unnecessary. The Indonesian radio station employees, being as they were close to the pemuda, already felt that their best hope of contributing to independence was through gaining control of the radio. On 2 September, 1945, Radio Repoeblik Indonesia Semarang was launched by local nationalists. It only broadcast for several hours a day, less than Japanese radio but now none of their programs reflected Japanese interests.\(^{111}\) This radio station became the medium by which Indonesian local leaders circulated their views about independence. Its mobile transmitter was even sent to cities outside Semarang so that the nationalists there could conduct broadcasts.\(^{112}\)


\(^{109}\) ‘Mendengarkan radio’, *Soeara Asia*, 31 August, 1945.

\(^{110}\) ‘Republik Indonesia merdeka ialah negara bangsa Indonesia’, *Tjahaja*, 4 September, 1945.


\(^{112}\) ‘Pertempoeran di Magelang berhenti’, *Tjahaja*, 5 September, 1945.
4 September, another initiative came from the Indonesian employees at Japanese-run Bandung Radio: they held an internal meeting at which one of the decisions made was to change the station’s name to Radio Repoeblik Indonesia. A number of former employees of Japanese-founded radio stations in Jakarta established the RRI of Jakarta, which began its broadcasts on 12 October, 1945. The RRI Jakarta, via a newspaper advertisement, called upon ‘all people to turn on their radios and set the wavelength to RRI Jakarta’.

Radio, now increasingly in the hands of Indonesians, brought new ways to nurture and disseminate the sense of merdeka among its Indonesian listeners by initiating a new ritual. For the two-month celebrations of the proclamation of independence, RRI Surabaya introduced a celebratory program. It called upon all civil servants, companies and workshops to follow the programs and orders. These included the singing of the Indonesia Raya and other so-called ‘spirited songs’ (lagoe bersemangat), the reading of the text of the proclamation, and suggestions concerning the struggle for independence.

Indonesian employees of various institutions followed suit. National leaders’ speeches, broadcast over the radio, were seen as a source of feelings of brotherhood among diverse societal groups.

Radio was also used to broadcast mass gatherings live, allowing those at home to monitor the leaders’ speeches. Radio served as a medium which could bring the crowd and its dynamics, such as

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114 ‘Siaran Radio Repoeblik Indonesia moelai bergerak’, Warta Indonesia, 12 October 1945.
118 ‘Rapat raksasa’, Warta Indonesia, 12 November, 1945.
singing the national anthem together, vibrant speeches by national and pemuda leaders, and thunderous applause and yells from the audiences, directly into the homes of many Indonesians.

**Problems with Radio**

The Republic’s increasing efforts to confiscate radios and radio facilities went hand-in-hand with enemy attacks. Enemies of the Republic—first Japanese soldiers and later British and Dutch soldiers—deliberately targeted those radio stations or transmitters used to disseminate pro-Republic sentiments. The Japanese wanted to reassure the Allies that they were in control. In Bandung, after pro-Republic broadcasters managed to confiscate radio facilities from the Japanese in August and September, 1945, Japanese soldiers, instructed by the Allies to maintain control of the city where the Allies would land, struck back in October, arresting Indonesian broadcasters and retaking the facilities.\(^{119}\) In Medan in the second week of December, 1945, local Republican authorities, in cooperation with the city’s KNI, officially announced the establishment of Pemantjar Radio Repoeblik Indonesia Soematra (RRI Sumatra’s station).\(^{120}\) This station was, however, short-lived. According to an Indonesian source, it was completely destroyed by British shelling on the fifth day of its existence.\(^{121}\) In another case in North Sumatra, in the same month, when British troops retaliated against the pemuda’s who had attacked them they did not just burn the pemuda’s headquarters or people’s houses, but also any radio equipment they found.\(^{122}\)

\(^{119}\) *Sedjarah radio di Indonesia*, p. 52.

\(^{120}\) ‘Pemantjar Radio Repoeblik Indonesia Soematra’, *Soeloeh Merdeka*, 12 December, 1945.

\(^{121}\) ‘Pemantjar Radio Repoeblik Indonesia Soematra moesnah’, *Soeloeh Merdeka*, 18 December, 1945.

This action of destroying the Republic’s propaganda facilities is a striking characteristic of both British and Dutch attacks on Republic-occupied territories. One deliberate Dutch attack on a Republican printing house in Jakarta on 2 May, 1946, had a parallel in the attack on the Republic’s radio facilities. On that day, two companies of Dutch troops surrounded and attacked the Republic-occupied printing house, used by pro-Republic journalists to publish *Merdeka* newspaper. According to a Dutch soldier who participated in the attack, the troops suspected the office of being the hiding place of Indonesian paramilitaries who had in previous days been involved in ‘disturbances’ (*ongeregelt heden*), including shootings, in the neighborhood.\(^{123}\) It was not known whether there were indeed armed Indonesians inside the building. Yet the Dutch troops attacked it vigorously, in the process damaging the Republic’s propaganda capabilities.

In addition to the destruction of radio facilities, confiscation was a problem faced by Indonesians. Seizure of radio equipment (including house and office searches conducted by Dutch troops hunting armed Indonesians) was not restricted to the battle between Indonesians and their enemies.\(^{124}\) It was also rife during a calmer period of the Dutch-Indonesian conflict, during the negotiations. To maintain mutually agreed cease-fires, Dutch officials often criticized unofficial pro-Republican radio stations (in particular the revolutionary-run stations) for their provocative broadcasts. Sometimes the Dutch acted beyond voicing criticism. In one incident, they confiscated pro-republic radio transmitters, justifying this action by declaring that the broadcasters had broken the cease-fire agreement. They searched the radio stations, arrested the employees, and seized radio equipment.\(^{125}\)

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\(^{125}\) ‘Pembeslagan pemantjar radio’, *Soeloeh Ra’jat*, 20 December, 1946.
In Jakarta, although relations between Republican authorities and British troops were relatively good, Republican radio broadcasting activities remained problematic. For instance, in the early months of the revolution, the RRI office in Jakarta was not completely under Republican control. It was guarded by British-Indian troops and the British flag was raised in front of the building. Only the Indonesian flag on top of the building indicated to the public that Indonesians were also present inside. This situation—two flags on one office—could be traced back to events at the end of August, 1945. At that time, Allied forces obtained permission from Soekarno to use that radio transmitter to broadcast Allied news. Soekarno agreed on the grounds of ‘public need’. The station’s Indonesian employees agreed to help the Allies. Nevertheless, the situation put the Indonesian employees in an awkward position: they had declared the station to be Indonesian but they also let the British broadcast their news. Sometimes the Allied broadcaster used terms such as ‘Nederlandsch Indie’ (the Dutch Indies), which soon led to tension inside the office when the Indonesian employees responded immediately with criticisms leveled at the British. More pressure came from Indonesian listeners who protested the dualism at RRI. This forced the Indonesians and British men to clarify the separate nature of the Indonesian and Allied broadcasts.

In addition to the external difficulties mentioned above, there were also various inherent problems with the Republic’s radio propaganda. The most obvious was the shortage of radio equipment at Indonesian institutions. As discussed above, Indonesians attempted to procure radio technology by myriad means. One applicable solution was to borrow radio transmitters, but this generated new problems when requests outstripped supply. For example, when the

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127 ‘Radio Indonesia di Djakarta’.
city of Purwokerto (Central Java), where the Republican police were headquartered, was taken over by the Dutch in October, 1947, the police established a new headquarters in Yogyakarta and they needed a lot of resources, including radio transmitters. They requested radio equipment from PTT of Yogyakarta. The latter loaned them two Philips radio devices, but when the police asked for more, PTT could not help as they were also now short on supply.\(^{128}\)

While it was very difficult for Indonesians to get new radio equipment, it was far easier for the Dutch, via Amacab (Allied Military Authority, Civil Affairs Branch), a replacement for the NICA, which prevented new radio devices from falling into the Republic’s hands. The Dutch monopoly on sea transport facilitated radio supply and distribution. It was possible for Indonesians to buy radio equipment from Amacab, but the requirements imposed rendered the process increasingly difficult. Radios were priced at f 296.50, and anyone wishing to buy one from Amacab must first register his or her name, address and occupation. The background of the potential buyer was always scrutinized.\(^{129}\) As a consequence, enemies of the Dutch, including Republican officials and those associated with them, were unlikely to be given permission to buy new radio equipment.

Another obstacle was the professional quality of the employees. The situation at RRI Jakarta, one of the main Republican radio stations, might best illustrate this point.\(^{130}\) Indonesian news writers often made multiple textual errors. The broadcasters did not always have a background in journalism; some worked as teachers by day and


\(^{130}\) ‘Radio Indonesia di Djakarta’.
broadcasters by night. One was even a senior student in high school. Most Indonesians involved in radio were doing it out of personal interest, such as a need for supplementary income or as a voluntary act of patriotism. The employees consisted of native Indonesians and Indonesian Chinese. Constant recruitment of new broadcasters and employees was unavoidable as many left their positions to seek other work or to join the armed struggle.

The degree of difficulty faced by the employees is illustrated by the fact that they rarely went home, sleeping instead on the office floor where, according to one report, ‘mosquitoes gathered’ (*njamoek berkeremoen*) around them. They stayed so that they could broadcast the latest news very early the next day. They were largely dependent on people around the office for their daily food, being given rice and curry nearly every day. Their radio equipment was about 8 years old, which made them ‘thankful that they [the devices] were still working’ (*bersjoekoer semoea ini masih bisa djalan*). Displaying portraits of President Soekarno in the offices underlined the support for the Republic.131

While the focus was supposed to be on the struggle for independence and the end of colonial intervention, internal divisions were evident as well. Over the course of the Indonesian revolution, political parties and paramilitary groups tried to utilize the RRI to voice their own interests, particularly at times of political commotion within the Republic itself. In most of the major political events within the Republic, workers were urged to take sides with those opposing the Republican government: the events of July 3rd, 1946 (when an opposition group under the influence of Tan Malaka forced Soekarno to meet their demands concerning the struggle against the Dutch); the Madiun affair in 1948; and disputes over the Republic’s decision to sign the Renville Agreement in 1948 and to enter Round Table

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131 ‘Radio Indonesia di Djakarta’. 
Conference in 1949. RRI employees were sometimes threatened and forced to cooperate at gun point.  

Controlling the Air

Indonesian central authorities in Jakarta attempted to control radio broadcasting, but this was a largely local affair. Such controls were enacted, usually, when a region was flooded with conflicting rumors. In that case, control was used to avoid public confusion. On 1 November, 1945, Governor Wongsonagoro of Central Java attempted to control radio broadcasting by issuing orders to register radio devices. To generate income, the governor also asked those registering to pay a fee. These and other, related, measures were, according to the government, for ‘the good and the continued progress of radio broadcasts’ (kebaikan dan kemadjoan isi siaran).

Within a week, local authorities in Yogyakarta adopted a stricter methodology: censorship. The authorities in Yogyakarta declared in November, 1945, that they had a Censorship Agency (already in existence since September of that year), whose authority covered the entire city. The limits of this agency’s scope are not known.

Republican authorities in Yogyakarta, wishing to avoid rejection from a people just now finding freedom from the many restrictions imposed during the Japanese occupation, announced in January, 1946, that such censorship ‘was never aimed at weakening the pillars of the people’s sovereignty’. The censorship, according to the authorities, was an effort to ‘prevent [such media] from a] causing misunderstanding, b] causing chaos, or c] having a provocative nature’.

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132 *Sedjarah radio di Indonesia*, p. 5.

133 ‘Makloemat pemerintah Repoeblik Indonesia tentang pengawasan dan idzin memakai radio di daerah2 Semarang, Pati dan Pekalongan’, *Warta Indonesia*, 5 November, 1945. This also happened in Medan. See ‘Pendaftaran radio’, *Soeloeh Merdeka*, 7 February 1946.
A higher philosophy, it was stated, which the various media sources should consider was that their work should ‘be based in nationalism, with the aim to assist in the establishment of the State of the Republic of Indonesia’. In other words, the topic of nation-state building rather than independence alone had entered Republican propaganda.\(^{134}\)

Another type of control was based on cooperation between Indonesian and Dutch officials. On 18 February, 1946, Indonesian, Dutch, and British authorities agreed to unify the delivery of information. They wanted to avoid the spread of provocative broadcasts from non-government radio. The three authorities cited this as a requirement for the preparation of mass media for the upcoming negotiations between the three countries. Thanks to this coordination, each country now had only one official mouthpiece, thus negating the issue of conflicting statements. Radio broadcasters were now required to reference only the appointed government institutions as reliable sources. Additionally, a joint information committee was planned and tasked with, among other things, the organization of a joint press conference and given a managing role regarding the question of which journalists would be granted access to said conference.\(^{135}\)

Confiscation was a harsher control measure. It was not only the Dutch who seized equipment. The Indonesian republican police was also involved. They did not limit themselves to the seizure of radio equipment; they also made arrests, taking individuals such as those thought to be associated with opposition groups and those believed to have taken a course in radio technology. It was feared that such people could use their knowledge to create new radios for themselves or to sell to other parties which might threaten the Republican authorities.\(^{136}\)

\(^{134}\) ‘Makloemat Nr. 1’, *Berita Repoeblik Indoesia*, 1 January, 1946.

\(^{135}\) ‘Koordinasi penerangan’, *Soecara Merdeka*, 18 February, 1946.

\(^{136}\) *Djawatan Kepolisian Negara to Kepala Kepolisian Daerah Istimewa*
Newspapers: the Re-emergence of the Nationalist Press

The first vernacular publication in Indonesia was a Javanese-language paper, *Bromartani*, established and circulated in Surakarta from 1855. The proliferation of Western-style education in the second half of the 19th century provided new readership for newspapers. Despite the widespread use of the Malay language, most of the publishers and editors remained Dutch and Eurasians. Only in the last quarter of the 19th century did native Indonesians and Indonesia-born Chinese begin to participate in publication, thanks to opportunities provided by the Dutch and Eurasian editors.  

Nevertheless, it was the Japanese authorities who used newspapers extensively to win the sympathy of the masses during wartime. Upon their arrival in Indonesia in 1942, the Japanese military closed down almost all of the country’s newspapers, replacing them quickly with new papers to propagate a view of Japan as the liberator of the Indonesian people from the yoke of colonialism. Given the language barrier and common notions about an independent Indonesia, the Japanese recruited many pre-war Indonesian journalists for these new papers. This cooperation not only enabled Indonesians to play a bigger role in print publication, but also further nurtured the anti-Western view shared by the two parties. When the Japanese surrendered in August, 1945, these Indonesian journalists, in cooperation with the *pemuda*, were among the first groups to respond to the surrender by

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showing their sympathy to the Republic through the newspapers at which they worked.

In the first days after the proclamation, news regarding it was disseminated indirectly so as to avoid Japanese punishment of those who infringed upon the *status quo* but also to show the public the nationalist character of the journalists. 139 Japanese journalists and supervisors eventually retreated from all Indonesian-language, Japanese-sponsored newspapers, in particular in the second half of August and early September, 1945. 140 The Indonesian journalists, along with the nationalist *pemuda*, took over the media facilities, including printing and newspaper offices. 141 During September and October, 1945, these journalists also established new pro-Republic newspapers, particularly in Java’s main cities, such as Jakarta, Bandung and Surabaya.

Some older pre-war journalists, among them Abdul Wahab from the Japanese-run *Soeara Asia* in Surabaya, reemerged in nationalist


140 The takeover of newspaper offices and facilities was a chaotic process. Some Japanese deliberately retreated from the offices, whereas the rest were forced to withdraw by their Indonesian employees. An instance of the latter was the Jakarta-based official newspaper of Japanese authority, published since 1942, *Asia Raya*. Indonesian employees, mainly journalists, of *Asia Raya*, had already adopted a pro-Republic stance since the proclamation day of August 17, 1945. Yet, they did not show it openly since the Japanese troops were still patrolling the streets to maintain the *status quo* after Japanese capitulation. The newspaper was finally shut down by the Japanese on September 10, yet the Japanese employees still occupied the newspaper’s printing house called De Unie. In the midst of uncertainty and fear, an *Asia Raya*‘s journalist, B.M. Diah, took the initiative to take over De Unie. After mobilizing a number of Jakarta-based journalists, he and his colleagues visited De Unie and demanded the Japanese to leave. They did, and the printing house was then used to publish a pro-Republic newspaper, *Merdeka*. See J.R. Chaniago, et. al., *Ditugaskan Sejarah: Perjuangan Merdeka, 1945-1985* (Jakarta: Pustaka Merdeka, 1987), pp. 24-25.

press publications. The outbreak of the revolution marked the beginning of cooperation between nationalist activists and journalists. One of the earliest cooperative efforts began when the young journalists, along with the pemuda, took part enthusiastically in preparing the proclamation of independence and its dissemination.

There were increasing efforts to forge links between politicians and the press, as each side realized it needed the other. Journalists and politicians were brought together, uniting under the title of ‘fellow Indonesians’. Practical reasons may also have played a role here. The journalists needed support and protection from the authorities to continue their work after their workplaces were closed by the Japanese. On the other hand, the Republican government wanted the journalists to promote the existence of the Republic as the only legitimate authority in Indonesia. Cooperation was also an attempt to counteract Dutch propaganda. Not long after the proclamation, the Dutch began promulgating the view that Indonesian independence had been made possible by the Japanese and that some Indonesians, who had collaborated with the Japanese, were war criminals.\footnote{142 ‘Kita sudah menentukan nasib djadi Bangsa Merdeka, tak mau didjadih lagi’, \textit{Sinar Baroe}, 31 August 1945; ‘Soekarno pada masa jang akan datang’, \textit{Penjoeloeh}, 27 September, 1945; ‘Belat-Belit “Brewok Besar”’, \textit{Warta Indonesia}, 9 October 1945.}

The label of Japanese collaborator, therefore, troubled President Soekarno and Vice President Hatta, as well as former journalists in the Japanese-controlled media. One of the first tasks of those who used to work with the Japanese was to amend this image; cooperation among them was thus inevitable.

An explicit agreement between the two explains the journalists’ voluntary participation in pro-independence propaganda: on 2 September, 1945, a number of Indonesian journalists from all over Java gathered at President Soekarno’s house in Jakarta. This meeting resulted in two main decisions: that the journalists would ‘stand behind
the government of the President of the Republic of Indonesia’ and ‘strive, in complete unity, to maintain the independence of the nation and homeland’.  

According to Andi Suwirta, the Indonesian press during the revolution could be divided into two categories, namely those associated with sociopolitical institutions, especially political parties, and the ‘free’ press, meaning the newspapers which had no affiliation with specific institutions. There were several types of newspaper management at the beginning of the revolution. Examples of some papers may best illustrate this point. Published by the Republic’s Ministry of Information, the Berita Repoeblik Indonesia (Jakarta) was its foremost official publication. Meanwhile, Soeloeh Merdeka (Medan) was published through cooperation between the Republican Governor of East Sumatra Mohamad Hasan and pro-Republic journalists in the region. Other newspapers, including Merdeka (Jakarta), Minggoean Merdeka (Jakarta), Soeara Merdeka (Medan) and Soeara Rakjat (Surabaya), were published by journalists formerly at Japanese-controlled newspapers, who sympathised with the Republic. The pemuda also had a role in publication; the Berita Indonesia, for instance, was issued by the pemuda from Ika Daigaku, a Japanese-founded medical school in Jakarta, which had close associations with other nationalist pemuda organizations with whom they organized pro-independence propaganda during the months leading up to the proclamation. Additionally, political parties had their own publications.

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143 ‘Poetoesan permoesjawaratan kaoem wartawan’, Tjahaja, 3 September, 1945.
144 Andi Suwirta, Suara dari dua kota, p. 57.
145 ‘Rentjana “Soeloeh Merdeka”’, Soeloeh Merdeka, 4 October, 1945.
147 No data is available on the circulation of Indonesian publications in the early months of the revolution. Publication was often sporadic. Only for the later
Meanwhile, the minority-group press, formerly active during the colonial period, reemerged, including the Sino-Malay press. Before the occupation, the Sino-Malay press in the Indies was largely divided into two orientations. The first comprised papers advocating ties between Indonesian Chinese and mainland China, represented primarily by *Sin Po* (established 1910), a Jakarta-based Chinese paper whose Chinese edition was soon widely read by Indonesian Chinese in Java’s main cities. The other was the more moderate press, which promoted the assimilation of the Chinese into Indonesian society and was largely represented by the Sino-Malay newspaper *Keng Po*. This division showed that the most important issue in the Sino-Malay press, just as those of other minority groups such as the Arabic press, was citizenship. This issue resurfaced with the birth of the Republic of Indonesia. The Sino-Malay press suffered under prohibition during the Japanese regime, but their orientation was far more distancing than their Indonesian counterparts, likely due to the violence perpetrated by the natives towards the Chinese community. Rather than welcoming Indonesian officials’ call to promote unity between the Chinese and Indonesians, these two Chinese presses endorsed separation between native Indonesians and the Chinese community. This view was evidenced by the Chinese’s opposing views toward the

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phase of the revolution is such data available; in 1948, there were 45 Indonesian newspapers with 227,000 daily copies. See John H. Sullivan, ‘The press and politics in Indonesia’, *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 40, 1967, p. 100, as quoted in Edward Cecil Smith, *A history of newspaper suppression*, p. 112. By 1 March, 1949, the circulation of *Berita Indonesia* was 4-4,500 copies, whereas the *Merdeka* was at 6,000. This circulation reflected a moderately large number, among the highest when compared to other Indonesian newspapers whose circulation ranged from only several hundreds to several thousands. These figures were, however, strikingly lower when compared to the Dutch-initiated publications which had better access to paper and printing presses. The daily copies of one of the most widely read Dutch-language newspapers published in Jakarta, *Het Dagblad*, for example, reached 21,000. See *Perslijst Indonesië* (Jakarta: RVD, 1949).

Republic’s independence ideals, although there were also Sino-Malay presses which advocated closeness between native Indonesians and the Chinese.  

Cooperation and an Attempt at Control

The Republican government applied both soft and hard approaches to make sure that all published news was beneficial to the Republic. The former consisted of cooperation, appreciation, and persuasion. The latter involved censorship and so-called ‘guidance’.

The government persuaded the press and the general public to use the Republican-founded publications as their main source of information. The *Berita Repoeblick Indonesia*, for example, announced in one of its editions that ‘all contents of this newspaper may be quoted and broadcast by whatever means possible, so that [its contents] are evenly distributed to the people’. Moreover, the government openly praised specific newspapers when they published stories which approved of and supported the government’s view. This was a sign that such newspapers deserved support and protection from the government, thereby guaranteeing a wider readership and a multiplication of the government’s message. In addition, this represented an effort by the government to create an image of the kind of newspapers it liked, the type which should be imitated by other newspapers. This is more typical of a revolutionary strategy of legitimization than of an ‘open society’. In other words,

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150 ‘segala isi penerbitan ini boleh dikoetip dan disiarkan lagi setjara bagaimanapoen djoega, soepaja dapat merata selocas-loeasnya di kalangan rakjat’. See *Berita Repoeblick Indonesia*, date unclear, but likely the third week of September, 1945.

the government invited non-state actors’ involvement in propaganda, but it also deliberately designed how such involvement should work based on the state’s interests.

The association between the press and the Republican government was also based on efforts by journalists to gain a closer, more protective relationship with the officials and to garner support for the continuation of their work in an age in which sourcing materials such as paper was increasingly difficult. The press’ continued existence was in jeopardy during the whole war of independence, owing both to political and military pressures and to the lack of equipment and paper. Enemy searches and bombings often targeted Republican communications facilities, including radio stations and newspaper offices, with the intention of stopping the dissemination of Republican-favorable information. Moreover, such installations also suffered from looting by angry, anonymous mobs, who plundered valuable materials inside the building amid the lack of public security. Some journalists reacted to overt threats by ceasing publication, while others chose to evacuate to the hinterlands, bringing the printing presses along, which understandably affected the newspapers’ circulation. In some cases, Dutch troops forced Indonesian journalists to censor reports regarded as detrimental.

The press faced significant material problems: lack of paper, printing presses that had been looted or destroyed, and fuel shortages, all causing a decrease in circulation and an increase in

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152 In Semarang, for example, looting and robbery were widespread in the city and kampungs nearby during the first months after the proclamation, resulting in the destruction of public offices, including the office of pro-Republic Warta Indonesia newspaper in the city. See Rosihan Anwar, *Kisah-kisah Zaman Revolusi: Kenang-Kenangan Seorang Wartawan, 1946-1949* (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 1975), p. 24.

153 *Surat kabar Indonesia*, p. 136.

subscription price.\textsuperscript{155} The paper problem in particular was acute and worsened periodically. This led the Kempen to assume control of the publication process, especially in Jakarta, via a ministerial decree. It ordered every printing house to ask the Kempen for permission before printing anything, indicating that the publication process, including informational content, had become yet more reliant on the authorities’ aid and approval.\textsuperscript{156}

At times the Dutch military also intimidated individual journalists by visiting them at home, as in the case of a journalist working for the English-language pro-Republic magazine \textit{The Voice of Free Indonesia} (Jakarta). He was visited at home by Dutch military police in mid-April, 1946, and asked to come to police headquarters. The police stressed that this had been done because they considered the content of the magazine detrimental to the morale of the Dutch people and they wanted to ensure that such articles would not be published again.\textsuperscript{157}

Cooperation with journalists played an important role in the Republican government’s effort to standardize published views. In other words, the government dictated what to write. The government recruited former journalists to run the Kempen and to approach other journalists working outside government pervue.\textsuperscript{158} One notable example is Parada Harahap, a North Sumatran-born nationalist who was active as a journalist in pre-war Malay-language newspapers published in Jakarta. In October, 1946, he led a meeting between the Kempen and representatives of the Indonesian press, including B.M. Diah, founder and chief editor of \textit{Merdeka} and Jawoto from

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{156}‘Kementerian Penerangan Djakarta’, \textit{Berita Repoeblik Indonesia}, 1 February, 1947.
\item \textsuperscript{157}‘M.P. Belanda tjoba2 main-sensor’, \textit{Gelora Rakjat}, 18 April, 1946.
\item \textsuperscript{158}\textit{Surat kabar Indonesia}, p. 133.
\end{itemize}
Antara, along with several Indonesian Chinese journalists in Jakarta. Given that the Chinese community was still politically inactive as far as widely supporting the Republic was concerned, one focal point of this meeting was the encouragement of both Indonesian and Indonesian-Chinese journalists to write reports beneficial to strengthening the relationship between native Indonesians and Indonesians of Chinese descent. Therefore, employing well-known figures in the press community was a method of ensuring the trust and loyalty of the journalists. Government-initiated meetings, perhaps best described as press briefings, were an opportunity to measure and foster such feelings.

Most pro-independence newspapers were first published in September, 1945, when the Japanese finally acknowledged their defeat after keeping it a secret from the Indonesian public for several weeks. The newly-emerging newspapers commonly shared several elements. They mostly regarded themselves as national newspapers which based their work on the people’s sovereignty with the main aim of establishing an independent Indonesia. Therefore, three closely-interrelated elements were constantly emphasized: Indonesian nationalism, the people, and independence. Indonesian journalists obviously regarded their newspaper as more than a source of information. They viewed it as a ‘torch’ (penjoeloeh) to guide ‘the people’ (rakjat) to an independent Indonesia.  


160 These elements were apparent in most of the first editions of the new newspapers in which the editors elaborated on their vision and the position of the newspapers in what they perceived as the new Indonesia. See for example ‘Kata pengantar’, Soeara Indonesia, 1 September, 1945 and ‘Kata penghantar’, Soeara Rakjat, 1 October, 1945. Requirements for the new journalists strengthened this view. For instance, newspaper Soeara Indonesia stated that they would only recruit Indonesians who ‘possess vibrant nationalistic spirit and are ready to sacrifice themselves for the beloved homeland’ (mempoenjai semangat kebangsaan jang bernjala-njala serta sedia mengorbankan diri bagi tanah air jang tertjinta) as their
Subjectivity in the news was readily admitted and justified from the start. From the very early beginnings of the revolution, most Indonesian journalists felt they had a moral responsibility to Indonesian society and the world. This view was apparent in their first editorials introducing the birth of their newspapers during late August and September, 1945.¹⁶¹ This idea had already been voiced since the birth of nationalist press which fought Dutch colonialism in 1920’s, but now it was complemented by the act of taking inspiration from the current world situation, as well as using views promoted by the Allies, such as the ideas of democracy and justice. Indonesian journalists claimed that this attitude allowed the production of more extensive news articles concerning Indonesia and its people. They opined that a perpetual world peace could only be established if there was justice and equality in communication among peoples and nations. Justice and equality must allow voices from the people of a newly-born state to be heard. The journalists justified their pro-independence stance by saying it was inevitable, both because they were serving Indonesian society and because this was what ‘world justice’ had demanded. In this way they defended their work against potential accusations of blunt propaganda by appealing to a higher objectivity.¹⁶²

Although relatively rare, some journalists also participated on the battlefield, being embedded in the Indonesian lines. They witnessed attacks launched by armed Indonesians and later wrote articles clearly indicating pro-independence viewpoints. One Soeloeh Merdeka journalist, for example, was present during a pemuda-initiated attack on the kampung (a village or urban neighborhood) Sidodadi (near Medan) in the middle of December, 1945. In his report about the

¹⁶¹ ‘Kata pengantar’, Soeara Indonesia, 1 September, 1945.
¹⁶² See ‘Kata pengantar’, Soeara Rakjat, 1 October, 1945.
raid, in referring to his fellow countrymen who failed to support the Republic, he used terms such as ‘traitor’ and ‘Indonesians with Dutch souls’ (bangsa Indonesia jg berdjiwa Belanda).163

The editors deliberately cast the news in a decidedly pro-Republic light in almost every item they published. Indonesian journalism during the revolution, thus, was marked more by active and voluntary participation than by self-representation as independent and objective.164

Antara and IPPHOS

Indonesian journalists were largely dependent on information provided by the Indonesian news agency Antara. Initially established in the late colonial period by young Indonesian journalists, Antara was amalgamated into Domei during the Japanese occupation, and was reborn on 3 September, 1945. Antara was subsidized in the beginning, but was finally taken over completely by the government and put under the auspices of the Kempen, ensuring that the government could control which reports were considered suitable for distribution to the public. This move, allowed the government to direct public opinion.165

Antara’s main task was to disseminate news about the latest developments in Indonesia to all local newspapers. Its main office was in Jakarta, and branches were opened in Bandung, Semarang,


164 More on how Indonesian newspapers viewed and published on various acts of violence, especially those perpetrated by the Dutch and British troops and the anti-government communist groups during the Indonesian revolution, see my article, ‘“Trust Me, This News is Indeed True”: Representations of Violence in Indonesian Newspapers during the Indonesian Revolution’, in Bart Luttikhuis and Dirk Moses (eds.), Colonial Counterinsurgency and mass violence: the Dutch empire in Indonesia (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 214-239.

165 Surat kabar Indonesia, pp. 137.
Surabaya and Yogyakarta and in the surrounding residencies as well, ensuring the presence of a journalist in each residency. Antara even had a correspondent in Cairo, Egypt. Compared to other journals which could often only cover a specific region, this extensive network allowed Antara to produce a great amount of information on a daily basis. The press could select the information it wanted to use from this abundant source.

Images of Dutch violence frequently first found their way into publication in Antara’s reports, meaning that Antara had already shaped the opinions of the editors and journalists regarding violent acts committed by enemies of the Republic. A good example is an Antara report dated 1 June, 1946, which consisted of reports about the events of the previous few days. Obviously, Dutch are portrayed in the report as the antagonist, strengthening the view already adopted by the journalists that the Dutch were responsible for most of the crime in Indonesia. Concerning criminal activities in particular, Antara’s June 1st report mentioned that the Dutch in Banyuwangi (East Java) ‘shot indiscriminately’ (menembak-nembak setjara serampangan), and Dutch troops in Bandung committed ‘robberies and lootings’ (perampokan2 dan perampasan2) against the city’s Chinese community and engaged in ‘deceit’ (memikat2 hati) toward the city’s population.

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166 ‘Kantor Berita Indonesia “Antara” mendjelma kembali’, Sinar Baroe, 4 September, 1945.


168 For example, on 1 June, 1946, Antara issued 28 reports, the majority of them concerned with four main issues: recent political and military developments in the conflict between Indonesia and the Dutch, increasing support for the Republic from all over Indonesia, the progress the Indonesians made in the battlefield against the Dutch, and the Dutch atrocities toward the Indonesians. See Antara, 1 June, 1946.

169 Antara, 1 June, 1946.
Antara often received reports from the Kempen and would then issue press releases to be quoted in Indonesian newspapers.\textsuperscript{170} In this way, the Kempen framed stories of the struggle for independence within the Republican government’s conception of an anti-foreign-aggressors war. When Surabaya was heavily attacked by the British, for example, militia leaders in the city did not contact only Soekarno in their effort to coordinate and report the city’s current situation, but also the Kempen to inform them of the progress the Indonesians had made. This report, understandably, focused on the persistence and heroism of Indonesians, violence committed by the British, the British ‘defeat’ at the hands of the Indonesian resistance, and the victims on the Indonesian side.\textsuperscript{171}

In order to further nurture pro-Republic sentiments among the common people as well as to attract a wider readership, pro-Republic newspapers did not publish text alone, but also photographs. Given, however, that not all newspapers were able to procure photographic equipment or hire professional photographers, they obtained their pictures from the Indonesian Press Photo Service (IPPHOS), the only Republican press photo agency in Indonesia.

IPPHOS was established in Jakarta on 2 October, 1946, by a group of Indonesian photojournalists: Frans Soemarto Mendur, Alexius Impurung Mendur, Justus Umbas, Frans Umbas, Oscar Ganda and Alex Mamusung. Frans Mendur was the photographer who captured the historic picture of the proclamation of independence. Both his brother Alexius Mendur and he initially worked as photographers for the Republican newspaper \textit{Merdeka}.\textsuperscript{172} They resigned from \textit{Merdeka} and established IPPHOS, but maintained contact and


\textsuperscript{171} ‘Medan pertempoeran Soerabaja’, \textit{Warta Indonesia}, 16 November 1945.

\textsuperscript{172} Rosihan Anwar, \textit{Kisah-kisah Jakarta Menjelang Clash Ke-I} (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 1979), p. 98.
cooperation with *Merdeka* and other Republican journalists. The opening of IPPHOS in Jakarta was attended by Indonesian and foreign journalists.\(^{173}\)

IPPHOS’ nationalist character was perfectly reflected in the pictures its photographers took. The main pro-republican newspaper, in particular *Merdeka*, used its photos. IPPHOS and *Merdeka* carefully selected unequivocally pro-Republican pictures professionally taken and artistically presented. The photos can be classified into three categories. First, military. In such photographs, Indonesian military personnel were frequently depicted as neat, disciplined and fully armed, indicating a modern and well-organized army (see picture 1.1.).\(^{174}\) This differed from the portrayal of the Indonesian military in Dutch propaganda, depicting it as a band of unorganized, armed men,. Second, popular support.\(^{175}\) Popular support of the Republic was almost always depicted by an identical scene: hundreds or thousands of common people gathered around a Republic leader, waving their hands, seeming very keen to approach their leaders despite the crowd and intense midday sun. In such scenes, almost \(\frac{3}{4}\) of each photograph was dominated by a sea of people, the rest depicting the leader and/or his vehicle (see picture 1.2.). And the third and final category: friendly international relationships. The Republican

\(^{173}\) ‘Pemboeakan IPPOS’, *Antara*, 2 October, 1946.

\(^{174}\) See, for example, the picture of Soekarno, as Supreme Commander of Indonesian Army, commemorating Army Day in Yogyakarta in *Merdeka*, 26 October, 1946, and the picture of a parade of Indonesian navy and artillery personnel, *Merdeka*, 31 October, 1946.

\(^{175}\) See the photo of a large number of Jakartan people gathering to welcome the Indonesian Army Chief Commandant General Soedirman in *Merdeka*, 2 November, 1946. The people were depicted as very enthusiastic about Soedirman’s arrival, suggesting that the army was extensively backed by the people. The scene in the picture might also have been intended as a model to be duplicated by people in other areas, showing how the unity between the military and the people should look. See also the picture of the return of Soedirman to Yogyakarta via Maggarai Station, Jakarta, in *Merdeka*, 6 November, 1946. The scene was very similar, namely a vast number of people surrounding the train that brought Soedirman to Yogyakarta.
leaders were portrayed as warm, peace-loving, and intelligent, as seen from their decent gestures, modern clothes, and self-assured posture while giving speeches or holding talks with foreign delegates. This category also served as a confidence-booster for the Indonesians and diminished their feelings of inferiority in the face of seemingly powerful foreigners (see picture 1.3.).

Picture 1.1.
President Soekarno at the commemoration of Army Day in October, 1946 in Yogyakarta (Merdeka, 26 October, 1946)

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See the picture of Indonesian delegates among Dutch and British delegates at a meeting prior to the Linggardjati Agreement (11-12 November, 1946) in Merdeka, 2 November, 1946, a picture of Indonesian delegates with the Dutch delegates after the agreement in Merdeka, 18 November, 1948, a picture of dinner for the Indonesian, Dutch and British delegates in Sjahrr’s house in Merdeka, 19 November, 1946, and a picture of Prime Minister Sjahrr delivering a speech before the British troops at their farewell party in Merdeka, 27 November, 1946.
Picture 1.2.
General Soedirman being welcomed by the crowd on his arrival in Jakarta
(Photograph by IPPHOS, published in Merdeka, 2 November, 1946)

Picture 1.3.
Minister of Defense Amir Sjarifoedin, the representative of the Netherlands in the Linggardjati Agreement and former Dutch Prime Minister Willem Schermerhorn, President Soekarno, and the secretary of British mediator Lord Killearn, Michael Wright
(Photograph by IPPHOS, published by Merdeka, 19 November, 1946)
In 1949, IPPHOS launched a publication of its own, a bimonthly magazine, the *IPPHOS Report*. At the time this was the only periodical that dedicated most of its space to photographs rather than text. As with all the other periodicals, it paid close attention to the political situation. Published in Jakarta, its circulation reached Java’s main cities, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi and the Moluccas, while its photojournalists were posted as far as Medan (North Sumatra) and Manado (North Sulawesi). Its profits came mainly from advertisements from various enterprises, such as export-import (for instance ‘N.V. Handel Mij. Nasional’), textiles (Ragusa Fréres, ‘In welcoming the birth of the United States of Indonesia, we provide you a variety of clothes’), tea (imported tea by Kian Gwan Import, ‘the finest tea’), herbs (Djamu Tjap Djago, ‘pioneer of Javanese herbs’), even cigarettes (‘the famous cigarette Tjap Pompa’). Such advertisements often occupied several full pages of the magazine. The advertisements also provided photographs which showed that the advertised enterprises were run and, more importantly, led by Indonesians. These details reflect their main readership: urban, educated but pro-Republic Indonesians and businessmen.

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177 See for instance *IPPHOS Report*, March and December, 1949 (KITLV collection)


179 Advertisements of Chinese business enterprises were of no less importance. Ie Tek Hok was the owner of Kadipolo Restaurant, which located at Bouquetlaan 6, Jakarta, and Kadipolo Street 167, Surakarta. He advertised his restaurant in *IPPHOS Report* by stating that ‘In order to welcome the birth of the new state [The United States of Indonesia], Kadipolo Restaurant would like to say: congratulation to the glorious, prosperous and sovereign United States of Indonesia’. There was a reciprocal relationship between Ie and his Indonesian customers. Ie used comments from his Indonesian customers to attract more visitors. One Indonesian official who visited Ie’s restaurant said, ‘We are really satisfied! When we start eating, it is very difficult to stop!’. At the same time, a Chinese printing house in Jakarta, named Nam Yong, said in a full-page advertisement, ‘We are happy with the establishment of the United States of Indonesia. We are ready to assist it’. These advertisements signified that there were *peranakan* Chinese business enterprises which indirectly supported the revolution. On the other hand, Indonesian journalists utilized such
IPPHOS Report’s editors realized that a bimonthly magazine would have difficulties in keeping pace with the daily newspapers, which reported numerous new political developments in Indonesia. As an alternative, disregarding concerns about being out-of-date, the editors choose to focus on past events. From a visual point of view these events were sufficiently dramatic to enthuse the readers.

The photographs they published were scrupulously selected. The photographs in the magazine could be categorized into two themes: ‘unity images’ and ‘development images’. In the first category, it appeared that all groups within Indonesian society, even foreigners, worked hand in hand to contribute to an independent Indonesia. The photographs included Republican leaders surrounded by their people, for instance Minister of Defense Hamengkoe Boewono IX in the middle of a crowd and President Soekarno among the masses (see picture 1.4.), also addressing anti-colonialism mergers between Indonesia and other former colonized states, as seen in a picture of Vice President Mohammad Hatta and the leader of Indian independence, Jawaharlal Nehru.\textsuperscript{180} The second category, ‘development images’, show the passion of both state officials and the common people in working for Indonesian development in various fields. Among these were pictures of young members of the armed forces enthusiastically taking part in military drills, government employees exuberantly carrying out their work, shop owners heartily serving clients, and students happily doing exercises in a field. The key message was obvious: Indonesians of all ages, genders, and occupations were wholeheartedly devoting their efforts to a better independent Indonesia.\textsuperscript{181}

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\textsuperscript{180} IPPHOS Report, December, 1949 (KITLV collection)

\textsuperscript{181} IPPHOS Report, December, 1949 (KITLV collection)
Between Government Control and Press Freedom

As an effort to form and control public opinion, the Republican government published several newspapers of its own. In November, 1945, in Jakarta, the government began publication of a newspaper called *Berita Repoeblik Indonesia*. Its tagline was ‘the official publication of the government of the Republic of Indonesia’. See *Berita Repoeblik Indonesia*, 17 November, 1945.

In Medan, *Soeloeh Merdeka* newspaper was published by the local government. *Soeloeh Merdeka*’s tagline was ‘pro-Indonesian Republic daily newspaper’ (Harian Pendjoendjoeng Repoeblik Indonesia’). *Soeloeh Merdeka*, 4 October, 1945.

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183 Its tagline was ‘the official publication of the government of the Republic of Indonesia’. See *Berita Repoeblik Indonesia*, 17 November, 1945.

184 *Soeloeh Merdeka*’s tagline was ‘pro-Indonesian Republic daily newspaper’ (Harian Pendjoendjoeng Repoeblik Indonesia’). *Soeloeh Merdeka*, 4 October, 1945.
these Indonesian newspapers were distributed free in order to attract new readers.\textsuperscript{185} Also, via the Kempen, the government established a Dutch-language newspaper called \textit{De Pionier}, aimed primarily at what the Kempen called ‘new citizens’, (\textit{warga negara baru}), namely those Eurasians, who ‘have not yet come to completely understand the Indonesian language’ (\textit{beloem mengerti betoel Bahasa Indonesia}).\textsuperscript{186}

The Kempen’s grip on the Indonesian press was extremely narrow. They needed to maintain a good relationship with the press. Those journalists working outside the state possessed media facilities, particularly printing presses, while the Kempen was still struggling to procure them. This rendered the press independent.

Instead of exercising complete control over the newspapers, sometimes the Kempen allowed the newspapersmen to freely air criticism of the Ministry. One of the criticisms directed at the Kempen was that they ambitiously claimed authority and responsibility, but were unable to live up to that.\textsuperscript{187}

In Jakarta, control of the press moved progressively from relative autonomy to increased discipline. In October, 1946, for instance, nationalist leaders in the city met with a number of journalists. The leaders expected the journalists to utilize the press as a means of

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{185} ‘Harian “Kota Djakarta”’, \textit{Merdeka}, 28 November, 1946.
\textsuperscript{186} ‘Soerat kabar “De Pionier”’, \textit{Merdeka}, 16 November, 1946.
\textsuperscript{187} One case concerned radio speeches by political leaders. This kind of speech was broadcast on a regular basis, more often during emergency situations such as when the enemy attacked Indonesian positions. However, the employees of the Ministry were never ready to provide the print versions of the speeches, very important for the press, who wanted to publish them the next day. When the presses sent people to get the text, they were given only a summary, sometimes even written in English, which meant that the newspaper itself still needed to translate it. This happened quite often. In response, the press stressed that ‘this shows impotence and the absence of ability of such an institution to perform the huge tasks we face together’ (\textit{jang demikian ini menoendjoekkan impotensi, ketiadaan kesanggoepan daripada instansi terseboet oentoek melaksanakan pekerdjaan besar jang kita hadapi semoea}). The Ministry was, according to the press, ‘unreliable’ (\textit{ta’ bisa diharapkan}). See ‘Ta’ bisa diharapkan’, \textit{Merdeka}, 20 November, 1946.
\end{flushleft}
providing clear information about the struggle for independence in Jakarta as well as the management of the local government there.\textsuperscript{188} Later, this persuasive tone changed to direct orders. In January, 1947, the minister of information declared that ‘in dealing with the necessities, and in order to maintain rational arrangement of [the Kempen’s] responsibilities, and because of the serious lack of paper’, every publisher of printed media (newspapers, magazines, books, etc.) under the authority of the Ministry in Jakarta must get permission from it to publish. Such permission would only be granted if the publishers provided information about the physical details of the printed medium in question: breadth of circulation, number of subscribers, etc. Non-technical considerations could also play a role in securing permission, as there was in the letter of permission also a column about the nationalities of the publishers. The Ministry also declared its right in refusing to grant permission.\textsuperscript{189}

For the journalists’ part, they increased their efforts to stand on two sides, firstly as constant and voluntary supporters of the Republican government and secondly as independent newspapermen free from control and censorship from any of the contending powers. They believed in the freedom of speech as well as in their nation’s independence, and that the government should support this. Journalists referred to fascist rule and Japanese censorship and to the pre-war Dutch colonial regime and its policies to curb the vernacular press. Independence for journalists therefore meant freedom from Japanese and Dutch colonial-style press.

The press envisaged what they called ‘a good press’ (\textit{persoeratkabaran jang baik}). The newspapermen criticized the Kempen, asking it to serve as a bridge between the press and the

\textsuperscript{188} ‘Para wartawan didjamoe’, \textit{Merdeka}, 12 October 1946.

\textsuperscript{189} ‘Kementerian Penerangan Djakarta’, \textit{Berita Repoeblik Indonesia}, 1 February, 1947.
government instead of as a tool of pressure. They called for ‘a free and completely privately-owned press’, which they saw as a logical part of a democratic country such as Indonesia. Government-sponsored newspapers as well as government control of the press were rejected. They reacted strongly and negatively when the press was regulated by such control mechanisms as ‘is requested’ (diminta) and ‘is suggested’ (diandjoerkan), let alone ‘is forbidden’ (dilarang). Rather, the ministry should ‘approach, guide, and help’ (mendekati, membimbing dan membantoe) the newspapers. A good relationship between the state (via its ministry) and the press was, according to the journalists, an equanimous and active relationship in which none imposed its will upon another. In the view of the press, these were the conditions which would make the Indonesian press stronger in times to come, both in terms of a better quality of journalism and an increase in circulation.\(^{190}\)

Indonesian authorities seconded the journalists’ call for a free press, indicating that they recognized the basic principle of free press. They were apparently very dependent on the journalists and intended to maintain this good relationship instead of bringing it to the level of domination. However, there was also a need to regulate the press, and this was expressed by exposing the journalists not to the interests of the government, but to a higher ideal: an independent Indonesia. The authorities wanted to escape from what they called the ‘fake democracy’ (demokrasi-palsoe) of the colonial regime (in which the regime had seemed democratic by allowing the proliferation of the vernacular press, while in fact it was the anti-colonial government press) and ‘corpse discipline’ (disiplin-bangkai) of the Japanese rulers (where journalists must blindly follow the regime’s commands).

The journalists’ accentuation on the freedom of the press and the government’s covert limitation of the press meant that the

\(^{190}\) ‘Sekitar soal penerangan’, Minggoean Merdeka, 31 May, 1946.
position in which the journalists found themselves was becoming increasingly precarious. The journalists often insisted that the Indonesian Constitution guaranteed freedom of expression, and the government assured them that they would keep this in mind. However, the authorities stressed that such freedom ‘should not cause anarchy or weaken the legitimate government’. They went so far as to warn the press that such bad consequences would not only endanger the government, but, more importantly, would become ‘a sharp weapon for the colonialists to use to destroy the Indonesian nation’s independence and restore the colonization, worse than ever’. Therefore, those who worked in the press were requested to act as ‘a torch for society’ (penjoeloeh masjarakat) and to employ ‘self-correction, self-discipline, positive patriotic feelings, and a willingness to respect and prompt each other, so that the colonialists would have no chance whatsoever to make us fight one another’.\footnote{The original quotation reads: ‘zelfkoreksi, zelf-disiplin, dan rasa tjinta tanah air jang positif dan kehendak oentoek saling menghormat dan saling memperingati, sehingga kesempatan bagi kaoem pendjadjah oentoek menga-doe-menga-doe kita, moesna sama sekali’. See ‘Makloemat Djaksa Agoeng Nr. 6: Hal ketjintaan wartawan, penerbit dan pentjetak pada Indonesia’, Berita Repoebliek Indonesia, 1 July, 1946.} Put another way, the Indonesian government attempted to rule the press, but with a soft and reciprocal approach. Both sides agreed that total control was unwelcome. They disagreed on one point, however; the journalistic world aspired to a totally free press whereas the government stressed a participatory, free, but always pro-Republic press. The inclusion of such governmental ‘suggestions’ in the running of the ‘free’ press implied that the suggestion was backed by force. Such a threat of force toward the journalists had the potential to influence the way they publish their news.

In October, 1945, in response to public questions about the government’s view of mass media and whether the Kempen would act as the government’s tool against publications opposing the
government, the minister of information issued an announcement entitled ‘Guaranteeing the Freedom of the Press’. The minister stated that a free press was assured and supported by the government, but he also stressed that ‘We are neither performing “the press control” like that applied by the Dutch Indies government, nor applying the “censorship” such as that implemented by Germany-Japan, but we will exercise “good supervision”’. During the exploratory discussion about this ‘good supervision’ (pengawasan jang sehat), the Kempen stressed that this term actually referred to a ‘guide’ (toentoenan). The Kempen emphasized that it had no intention of suppressing the press in any form; what they wanted was ‘to provide guidance so that there would be no provocation which may destroy the young Republic’. Therefore, according to the Kempen, such supervision was not equivalent to ‘brakes’ or ‘obstacles’.

The intention to apply censorship arose with other state institutions, for instance State Police. In March, 1947, Indonesia was flooded with foreign journalists who wanted to cover the ongoing negotiations between Indonesia and the Netherlands, to attend various meetings held by Indonesian authorities, and to see daily life in Java. Indonesian authorities felt urgently that they needed to impress them with positive images showing how well the country was being managed. This plan was often difficult to carry out, since the curious foreign journalists noticed not only the natural beauty of Indonesia and the warm welcome from the Indonesian populace, but also the lamentable condition of the impoverished people stranded on the city’s streets. A letter from the State Police to the Minister of Information pointed out that a journalist from the Jakarta-based


Dutch-language newspaper _Het Dagblad_ ‘seemed to take pictures of the displaced people (the poor people)’. ‘Considering the Dutch propaganda machine, always working away at discrediting the Republic of Indonesia in the eyes of the international world,’ the State Police was afraid that such photographs ‘were very likely to be used in propaganda, which would definitely harm the Republic of Indonesia’. Therefore, the State Police requested the Minister to ‘arrange rules so that the work and methods of such foreign journalists could be limited (beperkt)’. The inclusion of Dutch word ‘beperkt’ alongside the Indonesian word showed that Republican officials were convinced that in some cases duplication of the colonial method of censoring news content for the sake of the regime might be useful.

**Conclusion**

Two Republican-founded propaganda institutions, the BP KNIP and the Kempen, played an exceptional role in the Republican propaganda machine. Via the BP, which expanded to village level within months of the proclamation, the Republican government was able to familiarize the people with its position as the new and legitimate authority in Indonesia. By cooperating with local nationalists well-known to the their own people, and by sometimes complementing the propaganda with the provision of daily needs, the BP rapidly came to represent the Republic outside Jakarta and, most importantly, to the common people such as peasants and villagers.

The Kempen’s cooperation with the nationalist journalists, its approach to minority groups, and its amiable approach to foreign newspapersmen enabled it to garner crucial sources of support for the Republic. With the establishment and expansion of the Kempen,

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as well as its activities, public opinion could be continually measured and influenced for the Republic’s sake.

As a consequence of an ‘open society’, nationalist journalists and radio broadcasters could participate voluntarily in Indonesian propagandistic activities. They were the first groups of Indonesians to intentionally use the media they operated to spread word of the proclamation and also the Republic’s propaganda. Had they not assumed this role, the Republic would have remained a political entity occupying a small circle in Jakarta and several of Java’s main cities with no wider popular backing. Due to the nationalist characteristics of the journalists and radio broadcasters and their cooperation with the pemuda, these media professionals took over the facilities and utilized them for the Republic. The Republic’s close cooperation with journalists gave a guarantee and confidence to the Republic that it could control, or at least influence, the media.

Despite competition with non-state actors and the various challenges it encountered with regard to propaganda institutions, the Republic influenced virtually all elements of the media available in Indonesia. For the Republic, state-run propaganda efforts were characterized by the voluntary participation of sympathetic media professionals, while at the same time maintaining reciprocal communication between media and state. The Indonesian state tried to find a compromise between two seemingly contrasting ideas: the freedom of the press and the state’s effort to guarantee the constant support of the press for the government. What the state did, therefore, was create a form of freedom of the press with minimal, soft controls.