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

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CHAPTER 3

‘Let Us Kill the Killer. The Devilish Dutch!!’: Propaganda and Violence, 1945-1948
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The birth of Indonesia was followed by unprecedented and extraordinary violence in the country. The Dutch-Indonesia conflict was multifaceted, consisting as it did of armed clashes between different parties—between the Indonesians and the Japanese; between the Indonesians and the British and their auxiliaries; between the Indonesians and the Dutch; and finally, among the Indonesians themselves. Other types of violence—murder, robbery, and abduction—targeted minority groups, among them the Chinese and Eurasians, but the vast majority of victims in all of this were Indonesians. A recent estimate by Remco Raben suggests that 100,000 Indonesians died during the five years of the war for independence.¹

¹ Remco Raben, ‘On Genocide and Mass Violence in Colonial Indonesia’, Journal of Genocide Research (2012), 14, (3-4), September-November 2012, p. 487. The figures concerning the Dutch, Eurasians, and Chinese victims should not be underestimated. There is an ongoing, heated debate as to how many were killed. According to Jeroen Kemperman, historical research has shown different numbers of Dutch and Eurasian victims: historian Loc de Jong counted 3,400-3,500, H. Th. Bussemaker calculated 3,500-20,000, and William H. Frederick estimated 25,000-30,000. The most spectacular figure was declared by the head of the Dutch organization for former overseas internees and repatriated people, Bond ex-Geïnterneerden en Gerepatrieerden van Overzee (BEGO), who indicated 60,000-80,000 lives, including victims of the Japanese occupation. Given difficulties in finding the most accurate number due to fragmentary numbers in the archives and the inclusion of Dutch and Eurasian victims during the Japanese period, as well as Indonesian and Chinese victims, Jeroen Kemperman believes that the most realistic figure is 5,500, which when broken down consists of 3,500 ‘documented deaths’ and 2,000 missing people. For further reading, see Jeroen Kemperman, ‘De slachtoffers van de Bersiap’, 16 May, 2014, in http://niodbibliotheek.blogspot.nl/2014/05/deslachtoffers-van-de-bersiap_16.html (last accessed 8 September, 2014).
Indonesians occupied two contrasting positions with regards to violence: as perpetrators and as victims. As perpetrators, Indonesians were involved in clashes against retreating Japanese in an effort to secure weaponry, against the British and British-Indian troops to maintain possession of arms and cities, against the Dutch to defend the Republic itself, and against the Eurasians, regarded as Dutch supporters. Indonesians additionally perpetrated acts of violence against other Indonesians (case in point, the Republic’s anti-communist campaign in 1948, about which more later).

As victims, Indonesians faced homicide on daily basis, arrest, torture, seizure, arson, and forced expulsion. During the battle of Surabaya (October-November 1945) alone an estimated 6,000 Indonesians died. Skirmishes in other parts of Indonesia also claimed multitudinous lives. The largest number of civilians to fall victim to Dutch brutality was, based on a Republican tally, when nearly 30,000 civilians in South Sulawesi succumbed to the Dutch campaign in the region’s kampungs in 1946-1947. This included the infamous

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2 These figures of the number of casualties (30,000, and later increasing to 40,000) were counted based Republic’s estimation. The Dutch version is far lower. A report made by a commission tasked by the Lieutenant General of the Dutch East Indies in 1947 to investigate what happened in South Sulawesi in 1946-1947, known as Enthoven report, mentions that between July 1946-July 1947 around 3,114 were killed. See Jan Bank (ed.), *De Excessennota* (Den Haag: Sdu Uitgeverij Koninginnegracht, 1995), p. 41-42. Historians like Willem Ijzereef, who based his counting on Dutch military reports, writes that the total victims of the Dutch campaign from the beginning of 1946 to the middle of 1947 is approximately 6,500. See Willem Ijzereef, *De Zuid Celebes Affaire* (Dieren: De Bataafsche Leeuw, 1984), p. 141. Robert Cribb and Audrey Kahin doubted with 40,000 and says that such a figure ‘is probably inflated’, but they are sure that the number reached ‘several thousands’. See Robert Cribb and Audrey Kahin, *Historical Dictionary of Indonesia* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2004), p. 453. 30,000 or 40,000 are perhaps too high. Given that the Westerling operation only lasted about three months, it is difficult to imagine that he and his troops killed more than 10,000 in a month. Yet, it was obvious that Westerling operation killed a large number of people, as confirmed by both Republican and Dutch officials. From the point of view of propaganda, however, it is important to use the highest possible estimation of the number of victims because it could emotionally affect the Indonesian people and the international world, persuading them to believe that Dutch violence had
Westerling operation which took place between December, 1946, and February, 1947, which claimed a large number of lives. These tallies are likely to increase, considering the frequent less-known and less-documented killings of civilians on both sides.

In connection to violence, Republican propagandists were charged with achieving two goals. Firstly, persuading people to fight against the enemies of the Republic. Indonesian propagandists needed to convince the common people that the Republic’s war was their war too, and mobilize them to defend the new secular state even as its legitimacy was still being established. Secondly, it was necessary to make it clear to Indonesians and the wider world that the suffering of Indonesians was caused primarily by the brutality of the British and, more importantly, the Dutch.

This chapter focuses on how Indonesian propaganda dealt with the violence which took place during the revolution. The questions I pose are: 1) How did Indonesian propaganda justify the Republic’s involvement in the armed conflict and the violence committed by Indonesians? 2) How did Indonesian propaganda call upon the citizenry to fight the Republic’s enemies? How were victory and defeat depicted in order to further the aims of the Republic? 3) How was enemy savagery portrayed? How did Indonesian propaganda already reached its most brutal form.

draw public attention to victims on the Indonesian side, without jeopardizing the revolutionaries’ morale or frightening the populace?

*Peace as the Ultimate Aim of Independence*

Several days after Soekarno proclaimed Indonesian independence, violence broke out in Java’s main cities. There were some armed clashes, but Japanese power was overall too great. Launching massive attacks on the Japanese was not possible given the discrepancy in weaponry and manpower. Republican authorities, however, knew about the imminent arrival of the Allied forces, who would disarm the Japanese military, and they strove to secure support and acknowledgment from the Allies. To this end, Indonesian propaganda concentrated on campaigning for a peaceful transfer of authority following the Japanese surrender. The Republic believed that this strategy was in line with the Allies’ aims, as they promoted their war against the Japanese as a war to establish world peace. President Soekarno, in his first radio speech on 23 August, 1945, told Indonesian listeners to stay calm, to avoid chaos. He argued that this was now an age of peace, given that the Second World War had ended. Therefore, he said, maintaining peace and order in Indonesia was in accordance with the global situation. He stressed, ‘every age has its own mode of struggle’, which meant that ‘we must fight according to the dynamic of the age’. Furthermore, ‘While in the past, the focus of our struggle has been aimed at establishing an independent Indonesia in the age of war, nowadays our forces strive for an independent Indonesia in the age of peace’.⁴

Dissemination of this idea of a lasting peace dwindled away in October, 1945, as the rhetoric to justify Indonesian involvement in violence reacted to the reality of the gradual arrival of British

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troops and various actions by Japanese troops considered by the Indonesian authorities and pemuda as disruptive. The behavior of the newspapers, now in the hands of Indonesians, in rationalizing Indonesia’s participation and calling for popular support for the war was striking. Negative images of the Japanese began increasingly to appear. The press made reference to the Japanese retreat from Java’s main cities even before they were disarmed by the Allies and transported back to Japan. The Indonesian press interpreted these movements as smuggling weapons to ‘disrupt security’. One newspaper report mentioned that in Pekalongan, in Central Java, the once-feared Japanese secret police, the Kenpei, attacked the rakjat, resulting in numerous casualties. These Japanese actions were reported by the newspaper as ‘apparent desperate and enraged acts’ by the Japanese troops. These and other, highly similar reports were apparently intended to convince Indonesian readers that the Japanese were ignoring the Republican authorities and attacking common people.

Subsequently, local Republican governments realized that promoting peace no longer fitted the current situation, with Indonesians under attack and their possessions taken by force. In scrutinizing the dynamics of Indonesia’s propaganda concerning violence, one should consider the different viewpoints, as well as the conformity between central and local government. The case of Surabaya might best illustrate this multifaceted perspective. In September and October, 1945, tension escalated between Indonesian revolutionaries and Dutch and Eurasians just released from Japanese camps. According to William H. Frederick, such tension was the result of ‘a sense of outrage, a need for revenge, and a rekindling of old rivalries and prejudices regarding Indonesian nationalism’.

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5 ‘Djepang meroesak keamanan’, Soeara Merdeka, 5 October, 1945.

Republican regent of Surabaya, in an interview with a British journalist on 4 October, 1945, published by the city’s pro-Republic newspaper, *Soeara Rakjat*, stressed that clashes between armed Indonesians and the Japanese, Eurasians and Dutch were inevitable. He pointed out that the city’s peace had been shattered by the Eurasians entering the city. One of their provocative actions was the well-known flag incident at a hotel in the city. At the time, Eurasians raised the Dutch flag on top of the hotel but it was subsequently lowered and its blue part ripped apart by Indonesians. The district head (*bupati*) reported that the Eurasians had cooperated with the Japanese in taking the city over from the Indonesians. On the first day of October, the regent said, the Eurasians ‘brought the Kenpei along, armed with tanks’ to take over a public office in the city. This cooperation was described by the regent as inciting ‘the people’s anger’, ‘hampering our interests’ and ‘hurting our feelings’.

When armed Indonesian youths began to engage in bloody skirmishes against the British and British-Indian troops at the end of October, 1945, the Indonesian press helped frame the British and their auxiliaries as enemies of Indonesia alongside the Japanese, the Dutch, and the Eurasians, in line with the official position of the Republic’s government. The main contention was that the British troops’ presence in Indonesia supported Dutch colonialism by disarming and destabilizing Indonesians to allow a Dutch takeover of Indonesia. The Indonesian press underlined that in the beginning, the British landings were welcomed in Surabaya, particularly because the British military commander there agreed with Indonesian civilian leaders that only the Japanese troops should be disarmed. The press then leveled the

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7 A Eurasian leader was killed by Indonesian youths in this incident. See William H. Frederick, ‘The killing of Dutch and Eurasians’, p. 362.

8 ‘Perdjoeangan kemerdekaan tidak dapat dipadamkan: interview wartawan dari departemen propaganda New Delhi (India)’, *Soeara Rakjat*, 4 October, 1945.
accusation that a pamphlet made at the British headquarters in Jakarta, dated 27 October, rendered the situation ‘muddy’ and ‘dangerous’. The pamphlet claimed that all rakjat (people) who possessed arms also fell under the British disarmament policy. Furthermore, the press blamed the British for the clashes in the city by underlining the British troops’ actions in Surabaya, which had begun to irritate Indonesians, in particular the takeover of the city’s public facilities and the expulsion of Indonesians from such places.

The press declared various British actions to be ‘hacking people’s sovereignty’ and ‘hurting people’s feelings’. The escalating violence in Surabaya involving British troops was the turnaround of the Indonesian press’s position regarding the monopoly of violence, from the Japanese to the British. The press also reported various British actions as acts of approval and support of the restoration of colonial order, including the disarmament of the rakjat, which, as the press put it, meant that ‘the people no longer had the means to eradicate the NICA’. Another negative British act, according to the press, was their pressure on Indonesians guarding the city’s prison to release the Dutch prisoners and ‘the NICA’s henchmen’ held there.9 With many stories like this, the press established and spread the view that the British had not only abandoned their initial intentions, but had gone far beyond that, acting with total disregard for the Indonesians’ sensitivity to the Dutch presence.

Republican propaganda in Jakarta did not reflect these negative local sentiments, apparently because there were no such serious anti-Allies incidents there. They persevered in trying to ease tensions instead of incite mass anger. In his radio speech on 31 October, 1945, President Soekarno called upon armed Indonesians in Surabaya to cease fighting the British because ‘currently we have no legitimate reason to fight the Allies’ and also because ‘the Allies are not our

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9 ‘Hasil pertempoeran di Soerabaja’, Warta Indonesia, 31 October, 1945.
enemy. NICA, NICA which opposes the independence [is our enemy]. Soekarno acknowledged that there were misunderstandings and disputes between the British and Indonesians in Surabaya, but he also requested the people not to use these as grounds to attack the British. Instead, he asked the people to report every British-related incident to Jakarta, so that Jakarta could decide on an appropriate reaction. Soekarno demanded that the people obey this, believing that this obedience would send a message to the international world that there was a legitimate government and disciplined people in Indonesia, once again reiterating his belief in a need for peace and negotiation rather than armed conflict. This was a further indication that there were two views concerning public order, the pro-peace view endorsed by the Indonesian authorities in Jakarta, which wanted to display Indonesia’s good image to the world and to establish a good relationship with the British, and the pro-war view voiced by local leaders, who thought that leaving the enemy’s violence unaddressed could well destroy the fledgling Republic.

On the night of 9 November, the governor of East Java took to the airwaves on the pro-Republic station Radio Surabaya, defending the involvement of Indonesians against the British. He reasoned that it was necessary to ‘maintain state sovereignty’ because ‘all of our efforts at negotiation failed’. This conveyed the idea that the Indonesians had done their best to solve the disputes peacefully through negotiation, and that the British had not welcomed Indonesia’s good intentions, continuing instead with provocative orders to disarm Indonesians. He, like other nationalists in Surabaya, deemed the preservation of arms in the hands of Indonesia necessary to preserving order in the city, especially against the NICA.


11 ‘Sikap rakjat Soerabaja: Lebih baik hantjoer dari pada didjadjah’, Berita Indonesia, 10 November, 1945.
Demonizing the Dutch

Indonesian propaganda efforts to justify war against the Dutch were far more complicated than those targeting the Japanese and the British, as pre-war sentiments against the Dutch colonizers and feelings of insecurity about their return (widely seen as the beginning of an effort to recolonize Indonesia) were complicating factors. The anti-Dutch rhetoric can be placed into two main categories: 1) Dutch troops undertook various actions which disregarded Indonesian independence and the Indonesian government, and 2) large numbers of Indonesians were victims of Dutch atrocities.

Indonesian authorities claimed that the Dutch persistently behaved as if the only authority in Indonesia was the colonial government, the reestablishment of which was on its way. This could be seen from a radiogram sent in the first week of October, 1945 by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmad Subardjo, to Fenner Brockway, the secretary of Independence Politics of the English Labour Party, who was concerned with issues surrounding the resumption of colonial order. This radiogram soon reached the public, broadcast by pro-Republic radio stations and published by the Indonesian press. Subardjo argued that the Dutch troops’ attitude showed that the Dutch paid no attention to the fact that Indonesia had proclaimed its independence in August, 1945, and that de facto Indonesia was therefore the only legitimate authority. Subardjo cited as proof ‘deploying arms from Dutch Red Cross airplanes to Dutch former internees, distributing paper money signed by the Dutch Indies government, establishing a supreme court to punish those opposing the NICA—or in other words, the Dutch are acting as if they are a legitimate authority in Indonesia’.12

Other evidence was put forward and disseminated publicly by pro-Republic entities at lower levels. At a public meeting held in

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Madiun, East Java, in October, 1945, representatives of the KNID, the Indonesian army, and the pemuda (youth) came to the conclusion that ‘the Dutch who came again from outside Indonesia have undertaken attempts to control Indonesia as a colonizer’. The indications were, they said, ‘establishing NICA and recruiting former Dutch internees as its employees, trying to persuade Indonesians to support them, issuing NICA currency, and setting up a NICA court in Jakarta’.\footnote{‘Mosi rapat raksasa rakjat Madioen’, Soecara Rakjat, 10 October, 1945.}

The government and other pro-Republican bodies concluded that a response, possibly including violence, should be forthcoming, to prove that Indonesia itself was the sole authority.

Another stratagem to justify Indonesia’s involvement in the war was appealing to people’s sense of security and safety by stressing that the widespread violence enacted by the Dutch deliberately targeted the common people, and not only those related to Indonesian authorities. This statement referred to several kinds of violence toward armed and civilian Indonesians, but one typical example was shootings. When the Japanese threat eased as they retreated and the Allied forces gradually arrived, the front lines started to shift. A new battlefield between Indonesian militias and NICA troops arose. The earliest clashes took place in Jakarta in the first half of October, 1945. The Indonesian press reported these clashes in a decidedly pro-Republic way. The Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmad Soebardjo, was quoted, from his letter to Fenner Brockway: ‘Yesterday, fully-armed Dutch troops wearing British uniforms arrived in Jakarta and launched a strike against Indonesian Nationalist groups and the common people’. The emphasis on Dutch troops wearing British uniforms in a battle against Indonesians was intended to show Dutch deceit and to appeal to to the British to support Indonesia by convincing them that the Dutch could not be trusted, therefore the British should
not supply the Dutch troops. Dutch armed action was criticized by Soebardjo as ‘causing unrest and chaos’.

Soebardjo, perhaps wary that his report might be taken as mere propaganda, added: ‘Trust me, this news is indeed true’. His reference to ‘nationalist groups and common people’ fingered the Dutch as initiators of violence against Indonesians just wanting to preserve their freedom. Ordinary Indonesians, it was argued, faced acts of cruelty by Dutch troops wanting to reoccupy Indonesia by any means necessary, including brutality and deception, and were thus forced to defend themselves.

The newspaper reaffirmed the government’s view, particularly concerning shootings by Dutch troops. The emphasis was that such shootings did not hurt and kill only those related to Indonesian authorities, but also ‘innocent’ Indonesians who had nothing to do with the independence movement. Pro-Republic newspapers often reported Dutch shootings of civilians and unarmed Indonesians. This sort of report became a ‘genre’ in its own right, as they were so often reproduced and took up such extensive amount of print space. The tone of the reports was often similar: civilian and unarmed Indonesians carrying out their daily life, Dutch troops appear and act reprehensibly by shooting indiscriminately, causing civilian deaths and severe injuries. The press repeatedly framed these reports in the context of Dutch acts of destruction of public security, accusing the Dutch of terrorizing ordinary Indonesians. This reporting genre was maintained for years and was considered acceptable by the Indonesian press.

14 ‘Menteri loear negeri Indonesia memprotes tindakan “NICA”’, Soecara Rakjat, 10 October, 1945.


16 The Dutch partly confirmed various clashes with Indonesians, yet they denied responsibility. Whereas the Indonesian press blamed the Dutch for
Among the reported news was what were considered to be more infamous Dutch actions, for instance their tendency to use Indonesian civilians who sought refuge as human shields in skirmishes with the armed pemuda. An Indonesian newspaper cited this as proof that Dutch troops imitated ‘methods used by the Nazis when they raided the Netherlands’. This depiction suggested that Indonesian nationalists should move to stop such hostilities to prevent Indonesia from ending up like the Netherlands under the Nazis, when the country was occupied, the people suffered, and freedom was no more.

causing the incidents, the Dutch papers published in Jakarta, conversely accused the Indonesians of provocations that led to the armed conflict. The Dutch and their allies (Ambonese and British soldiers) were depicted as using weapons only to respond to attacks launched by armed Indonesians. Sometimes the Dutch press used British sources to strengthen their claims. The Dutch ability to resist Indonesians’ attacks and the high number of victims among armed Indonesians were two key emphases in the Dutch press. The Dutch press barely mentioned Indonesian civilians as victims of Dutch violence, and concentrated on praising the endurance and underlining the suffering of Dutch civilians, in particular women, amidst chaos involving Indonesians. See for instance ‘Onrustige Zondag: In Batavia vele schietpartijen’, Nieuwsbrieven, 19 November, 1945; ‘De vrouwen van Soerabaia: Boodschap van Generaal-Majoor Hawthorn’, Nieuwsbrieven, 20 November, 1945; ‘Spanning in Bandoeng’, Nieuwsbrieven, 21 November, 1945.

Another kind of violence reported as a serious public menace was robbery (see picture 3.1.). Indonesian newspapers published stories increasingly portraying the Dutch as thieves, strengthening the image established by the Indonesian authorities that the Dutch were responsible for the trouble and chaos in Indonesia. Dutch troops were depicted by Indonesian newspapers as ‘robbers’ (perampok),19 ‘Dutch villains’ (pendjahat bangsa Belanda),20 ‘Dutch gangsters’ (gangster2

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18 NL-HaNA, 2.10.14, inv. nmr. 5465.


Belanda) and ‘thieves’ (pentjoeri). Dutch robbery was said to occur often, and the Bandung-based pro-Republic newspaper Soeara Merdeka even put forward, in a report published in January, 1946, that Dutch ‘robbery and brutality’ took place in Jakarta ‘every day’.

Dutch troops were portrayed as having stolen property from Indonesian authorities and militia, as well as civilians. Stolen items included everything from valuable or rare things such as cars from Indonesian-guarded garages to simple items such as clocks and daily requisites like rice owned by (sometimes armed) Indonesian traders. The cynical view of Dutch robbery escalated when it was reported that Dutch troops armed with Tommy guns even stole bananas from Indonesians in the kampungs.

Acts of robbery perpetrated by Indonesians were also widespread during the revolution, as Cribb, Ibrahim, and Keppy suggest, but rarely reported in the Indonesian press, partly out of fear of retaliation by the perpetrators against the journalists. In this way, the self-censorship policy concerning violence perpetrated by ‘fellow Indonesians’ prevented a damaging public image of armed Indonesians.

Most of the stories of Dutch brutality were presented in a similar context: the Dutch troops suddenly appeared in the Indonesians’ houses or offices, seized the locals’ property by force, sometimes

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beat or shot them, and finally fled. The abundance of this sort of story obviously contributed to the readers’ belief that Dutch troops targeted Indonesian authorities and common people alike, armed or unarmed, so long as they possessed valuable property, whether it be militarily valuable or just handy for the daily requirements of the troops. The press argued that the Dutch stole because they lacked daily requisites, and that so as long as the Dutch were in Indonesia, they would continue such criminal behavior.

These appeals enabled Indonesians to consider harsh measures when dealing with the Dutch. The press reminded the Indonesians of the days when the Dutch ruled Indonesia, when the Indonesians suffered. The news was tailored to lead readers to believe that armed involvement was unavoidable, as it was by definition a strike against the bad things associated with the Dutch: colonialism and oppression in the past, and a contemporary repetition of these barbarous acts. Such stories warned Indonesian readers that the Dutch had never changed their attitude, and that now was the appropriate time to show the Dutch that Indonesia was ready to fight back.

One might wonder how the Republican press dealt with non-Indonesian victims. Whereas violence committed against Indonesians by the Dutch was extensively reported by most Indonesian newspapers in late 1945 and subsequent years, violence perpetrated by Indonesians against Dutch civilians was given scant attention. One case of violence in Surabaya, the largest city in East Java, highlights this negligence. During September and October, 1945, when Allied troops landed in Java, Dutch internees were released from the Japanese camps and returned to Java’s main cities, around the same time that the pemuda managed to secure considerable caches of firearms. Tension began to rise and led, inevitably, to assorted acts of violence in Surabaya, including extensive murders of Dutch and Eurasian civilians by armed Indonesians. In a recent article, William H. Frederick indicates that these killings were deliberate and organized, and directed against those regarded
as enemies of the Republic (meaning that the Dutch and Eurasians constituted the majority of the victims, followed by those perceived to be their associates, particularly the Ambonese and Timorese).

These events remain largely unexplored in (Indonesian) historiography. One reason for this lack of historiographical attention is simply that this story and others like it were not widely reported in Indonesian newspapers at the time, and in fact barely saw print. Frederick mentions at least three separate events highlighting the scope of the brutality seen in these killings. These are the murders at the Simpang Club, those at the former residence of Arab leader A.R. Baswedan, and those near Gubeng Station. A careful examination of the Surabaya-based pro-independence newspaper, *Soeara Rakjat*, between 15 and 31 October—excepting 21, 28 and 29 October, which issues were apparently not archived—shows that these three events barely rated mention in the newspaper. Instead, it concerned itself with various developments surrounding the establishment of Indonesian independence, particularly the takeover of public facilities and offices from the Japanese, instructions from the central government in Jakarta, popular contributions to the struggle for independence, and reports of Indonesian victims in various skirmishes against Japanese, Dutch and British troops throughout East Java. Dutch victims only appeared in the newspapers when referred to as NICA agents, and most of the reports portraying them as victims related to events occurring in other parts of Java, even though the events in Surabaya can hardly have been ‘overlooked’. This demonstrates how ethnocentricism and patriotism dominated journalistic reporting, determining which victims deserved more attention in the limited space of a newspaper’s

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26 See, for instance, ‘17 orang NICA dibekoek batang lehernja’, *Soeara Rakjat*, 16 October, 1945.
pages, and also as a matter of political strategy. Indonesians were seen as more worthy of attention, as victims of violence, than were other nationalities, because this fit the narrative, which held forth that Indonesia was defending itself in a struggle against oppressive foreign aggressors. On the one hand, Indonesian newspapers claimed themselves independent from the Republican government’s intervention. On the other hand, they continually justified Republican views concerning the Dutch as perpetrators of violence.

Propaganda War against the British

The end of the Japanese occupation and the proclamation of Indonesian independence were followed by the arrival of British and British-Indian troops, who intended to disarm the Japanese troops and release the internees in the Japanese camps. Clashes had increased since the end of October, 1945, when the former’s effort to rescue Dutch and Eurasian internees was interpreted by Indonesian nationalists as an act of aggression representing an attempt to take over Indonesian cities, and an inception of Dutch involvement in Indonesia. On 30 October, fighting broke out in Semarang, Magelang and, later, Ambarawa. Skirmishes also began in Surabaya in October, peaking with the disputed death of a British local commander, Brigadier General A.W.S. Mallaby, on 31 October, and the resulting Battle of Surabaya which began on 10 November.28


28 It began with the arrival of British and British-Indian troops, as well as a Dutch evacuation team, in Surabaya in the third week of September, 1945, to rescue prisoners of war and internees in the city. The Indonesian nationalists there managed to take over the city’s public facilities and weaponry from the Japanese troops. Several agreements were made between the British commanders and the city’s Republican leaders to maintain law and order, but on 27 October the British Divisional Headquarters in Jakarta sent a Dakota aircraft to Surabaya, from which pamphlets were dropped ordering all Indonesians to surrender their arms. Negative
To prevent the death of Mallaby sparking all-out war, Indonesian propaganda from Jakarta centered on ending the hostilities and convincing the British about the Indonesians’ innocence in the incident. At 19.30 on 31 October, President Soekarno delivered a radio address in which he highlighted that the British troops’ presence in Indonesia was related only to disarming the Japanese and releasing prisoners of war, not fighting Indonesians. He praised Surabaya as ‘a center of our nationalist power’ where the nationalist army, the pemuda, and the dock workers were well-organized. But he also insisted the rakjat accept the Indonesian government in Jakarta as the central government whose orders must be followed. He emphasized, ‘I order: cease all battles with the Allies!’ His closing words reinforced his order: ‘Follow my order. Merdeka.’ This indicated that he still tried to maintain his pro-peace view amid worsening situation in Surabaya (see picture 3.2.)

According to contemporary British journalist David Wehl, the Republican radio station in Surabaya, Radio Surabaya, broadcast mixed messages; it worked to persuade Indonesians to end the clashes, sentiments toward the British troops predictably increased on the Indonesian side. Skirmishes between the two began on 28 October. On 29 October, a ceasefire agreement was reached but the next day, the situation worsened after the death of the British Brigadier General A. W. S. Mallaby. The British blamed Indonesians for Mallaby’s death, but Indonesian revolutionaries accused the British of initiating an armed clash in which Mallaby and his comrades were trapped and eventually killed by unknown perpetrators. In the meantime, another meeting between the two warring parties failed and on 9 November, pamphlets were once again dropped by British aircraft, ordering Indonesian civilians to surrender their arms. Indonesian militias refused, and from 10 November onward a massive battle ensued in the city. The disparity in the number of victims on each side is extreme: at least 427 out of 4,000 soldiers of the 49th Indian Infantry Brigade died, whereas on the Indonesian side a total of 6,000 deaths is estimated. This story of the battle of Surabaya is largely drawn from Richard MacMillan, The British occupation of Indonesia 1945-1946: Britain, the Netherlands and the Indonesian revolution (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 31-58. See also M.C. Ricklefs, A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200 (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), p. 267.

but it also described the death of Mallaby as a symbol of Indonesian victory.\textsuperscript{30} On the streets of Surabaya, loudhailers urged continuation of the fighting. Another radio message came after midnight, when K’tut Tantri, probably via the Republican radio station \textit{The Voice of Free Indonesia}, called upon her Indonesian listeners to prepare for defense against ‘foreign aggression’.\textsuperscript{31} Responding to British accusations regarding Mallaby’s death, the Indonesians, according to K’tut Tantri’s broadcast, ‘pointed out that they had nothing to gain and much to lose from the murder’ and that the killing was related to ‘Dutch agents hoping to undermine relations between the British and the Indonesians’. In short, despite the fact that Indonesians were involved in the incident which led to the death of Mallaby, Indonesian propagandists insisted that Indonesians should not be blamed. At the same time, it was seen as unwise to blame the furious British, although Indonesians were widely convinced that British troops had triggered the incident. The Dutch, therefore, once again became the target of accusations.\textsuperscript{32}


\textsuperscript{31} Richard Macmillan, \textit{The British Occupation of Indonesia}, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{32} K’tut Tantri, \textit{Revolt in Paradise}, p. 186.
On 9 November, 1945, the British HQ distributed a leaflet accusing Indonesians of killing Mallaby.\textsuperscript{34} Seeing no alternative other than preparing for all-out war, Indonesian propagandists in Surabaya, consisting mainly of nationalist leaders and the pemuda, mobilized

\textsuperscript{33}‘Verzameling Republikeinse pamfletten en vlugschriften’, KITLV, 1947-1948.

\textsuperscript{34}Richard Macmillan, \textit{The British Occupation of Indonesia}, p. 26. Another meeting between Major-General Mansergh and the civilian leader of Surabaya, Soerio, on 6 November failed due to differing views about many security issues. The communication stopped there, and a plan to take over the city was prepared by the British. On 9 November, the British issued leaflets to the Indonesians. The leaflets accused the Indonesians of ‘treacherous’ attacking the British, who had come to Surabaya to fulfill their duty, on 23 October, and stated that the Indonesians had committed killings, including that of Brigadier Mallaby, and interned women and children, that Indonesians had broken the truce, and that such ‘crimes’ must be punished. Mansergh gave orders to all Indonesians unauthorized to bear arms, such as non-TKR and police, to surrender their weapons. Sea, land, and air forces were prepared to enforce obedience. Bloodshed was a strong possibility should Indonesians not follow orders. The Indonesian translation of the pamphlet was also distributed alongside the English version. See Richard Macmillan, \textit{The British Occupation of Indonesia}, p. 54.
the masses. They urged the Surabayan people to participate in a battle which seemed unavoidable. The mobilization was ordered via direct approach and radio broadcast. The pemuda visited the kampungs and persuaded people to prepare for battle. The Republican Governor of East Java, Soerio, delivered a speech on the radio. Addressing his oration to the people of Surabaya, he referred to the dropped leaflets. He stated that the Republic had sought all possible alternatives to find a peaceful solution. In contrast with the policy described above to blame the Dutch, he indirectly blamed the British for the deteriorating situation, and told the Surabayans that war was the only means available:

All efforts to negotiate have failed. In order to maintain state sovereignty, we must strengthen our determination, we must dare to face any possibility. It is better to be ruined than to be colonized again.

K’tut Tantri also went on the air. Her propaganda was aimed primarily at the British troops, the troops originating from the same country as herself. She warned the British that they ‘could make no greater mistake than to bomb Surabaya’. She emphasized that ‘the Indonesians will never accept your terms, even if you bomb Surabaya to the ground and kill every man and woman and child. Your ultimatum is an insult to the Indonesian leaders and to their intelligence.’ She sought to engender patriotic feelings in her fellow countrymen by adding that ‘if you go through with it, you will add a black page indeed to British history’.


36 See ‘Sikap rakjat Soerabaja: Lebih baik hantjoer dari pada didjadjah’, Berita Indonesia, 10 November, 1945.

37 K’tut Tantri, Revolt in Paradise, p. 187.

38 K’tut Tantri, Revolt in Paradise, p. 187. Whereas nationalists in Surabaya were already agitated, Jakarta was still maintaining the need for a peaceful solution. President Soekarno, who was kept informed about the events in the city, sent
Mobilization for total war was carried out, a war that in the minds of Indonesian revolutionaries in the city would affect all echelons of society and therefore should be fought by all *rakjat*. The *pemuda* called upon the people to erect barricades on Surabaya’s main thoroughfares to hamper British movements. The women were asked to prepare a communal kitchen and provide food for the fighters. In the middle of the night of 9 November, Soerio delivered a radio speech in which he informed listeners about the failure of a British-Indonesian meeting in Jakarta and called upon the people of Surabaya to be ready for any possibility. He urged the people to maintain solidarity with the TKR, the police, and other groups in the city such as the *pemuda* and the militia. Finally, he stressed that Surabaya would fight to the end.

Shortly before the battle of Surabaya began, Soetomo, one of the city’s leading revolutionaries, called upon the youngsters of Surabaya, via Radio Pemberontakan, not to leave the city. He was perhaps the most important orator and voice of propaganda in the battle of Surabaya. His words were artistically arranged while his sonorous voice was undoubtedly moving. He lamented the lack of ‘cannon crewmembers’ (*tukang tembak meriam*) in Surabaya. TKR telegraphs abroad, seeking world attention for the British presence and attitude in Surabaya. See *Republik Indonesia: Propinsi Djawa Timur*, p. 917. In addition, Soekarno, via the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmad Soebardjo, tried to persuade his British counterparts in Jakarta to withdraw the ultimatum to surrender. The meeting between Subardjo and Christison failed, and Soekarno then informed Surabaya of the failure and gave the leaders there the chance to to decide on their next move. During the negotiations in Jakarta, the mobilization in Surabaya was actually continuing, reflecting strong anti-British sentiments and the aspirations of some Indonesians in Surabaya, already preparing for battle.


40 Benedict R. O’G. Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution*, p. 165. In addition, The *pemuda* called on the people to erect barricades in Surabaya’s main thoroughfares to hamper British movements. Meanwhile, the women were asked to prepare a public kitchen and provide food for the fighters.

41 Nugroho Notosusanto (ed.), *Pertempuran Surabaya* (Jakarta: Mutiara
Headquarters in Yogyakarta responded by sending one commander and more than twenty cadets. In another speech, Soetomo addressed his oration to ‘fellow Indonesian youngsters now fighting in Surabaya’. He stated that ‘a lot of our friends have fallen’, ‘blood has flowed in this city’, and ‘many of you will never see your friends again, they cannot come home again’. Regarding Indonesian victims, Soetomo assured his listeners that ‘their flesh, blood and bones will become fertilizers for an independent nation’. Soetomo then called on them to ‘continue the struggle’ because ‘we are dead, disappeared from this earth, but the time to come will be full of wealth and justice’. In conclusion he asserted that ‘victory will be ours’. Soetomo closed this touching speech with the cry ‘Allah is Great! Allah is Great! Allah is Great! Merdeka!’.

Calls for popular participation in the conflict continued through the night of 10 November, 1945, and afterward. Indonesian propagandists were at this time involved with several issues, including the call for more involvement by the people of East Java, especially those not yet on the Republican side, such as the Chinese community and the ‘young Indonesian females’ (*poeteri*2 *Indonesia*). During the night of 10 November, Radio Pemberontakan requested the Chinese community in the city to establish their own army to protect themselves, because tremendous numbers of Chinese had fallen in the British attack. This put the Chinese community on a level with the Indonesian civilians, victims of British savagery all. The British, the common enemy, should be fought by the Chinese and the Indonesians alike, and in particular by the *pemuda*. The broadcaster underlined:

> Heavy British bombardment claimed a great many victims among the Chinese population living in the Kramat Gantoeng [one of the Chinese Sumber Widya, 1985), p. 129.

42 Nugroho Nitosusanto (ed.), *Pertempuran Surabaya*, p. 130.
quarters in the city]. The leaders of the people’s rebellion army, therefore, call upon all Chinese throughout Java to set up a ‘Security Force of the Chinese Population’ and to raise the Chinese flag as the flag of war. ⁴³

Appeals were not made to the Chinese community alone, but to other groups as well, among them religious leaders and young Indonesian women, to make it clear to the public that this was not solely the pemuda’s and the army’s war, but a total war affecting everyone. Javanese Moslems, both devout and nominal, were approached. Radio Pemberontakan, for example, urgently called upon the ‘Islamic teachers’ (Kiai dan alim oelama) and ‘those with supernatural power’ (orang2 sakti) to come provide spiritual support to the people of Surabaya. In the following night’s broadcast, a young woman was given the opportunity to broadcast her plea. She described the roles of young women in the battle to defend Surabaya. She called upon all females in Surabaya and beyond to fight furiously. She described what she felt were the most important tasks for women in this struggle: ‘be aware, establish strong rearguard lines. And, if necessary, go, go to the front lines!’ ⁴⁴

Radio Pemberontakan also broadcast speculation about Indonesian advances in the war, indicated by continued Indonesian resistance and foreign support to Indonesia. This was intended to boost morale in the face of the increasing British attacks, and to inspire confidence about Indonesian power and optimism about an Indonesian victory. The announcer informed listeners that the Indonesian ‘dare-to-die army’ had launched a ‘large-scale attack’ on the ‘nest’ of the British and Gurkha troops.

This radio station also provided airtime to representatives of foreign attachés in the city, provided they defended Indonesia; these


⁴⁴ ‘Dengan membabi boeta Inggeris menjerang Kota Soerabaja’.
represented Russia, Denmark, Switzerland and Hungary. They delivered their speeches in their native languages, quickly translated into English. All of them denounced the British attack, which had caused the deaths of women and children. The representative of Russia went even further, stating that the battle ‘was not between soldiers, but a mass killing’. He called on the Russian government to protest such attacks in the name of ‘humanity’ (peri kemanoesiaan). This emphasis on Indonesian strength in resistance and reports of foreign support were employed to isolate the British and the Gurkhas as condemned malefactors, who could garner no support nor find any sympathy from either Indonesian people or foreigners.

‘The Second Amritsar’: Republican Press and the Battle of Surabaya

Indonesian newspapers reported the Battle of Surabaya from a Republican point of view. They did not publish the events alone, but cast events in a patriotic light framing the battle as an event in which Indonesians wholeheartedly sacrificed their lives for the struggle against a foreign enemy trying to endanger Indonesia’s independence. Representations of the battle in the Indonesian press, therefore, employed the approved propaganda of the Indonesian revolutionaries in Surabaya. Editors, particularly from outside Surabaya, used the broadcasts of two nationalist radio stations in the city, Radio Pemberontakan and Radio Surabaya, as sources and converted them directly into their newspapers’ headlines. In Surabaya itself, some of the newspapers, including Soeara Rakjat, had to halt publication due to heavy British bombardments.

The way the Indonesian press chose to report the battle was a multi-faceted strike. Firstly, the British attack was interpreted as an atrocity—a former colonial power, the victor of the World War,

45 ‘Dengan membabi boeta Inggeris menjerang Kota Soerabaja’.
employing its military might against a newly born, legitimate state. A Jakarta-based newspaper, *Berita Indonesia*, described the site of the battle, Surabaya, as ‘djadi Amritsar ke II’ (becoming the second Amritsar), a term referring to the massacre of 379 British Indians, who had gathered to voice their political aspirations in Amritsar city, Punjab, India, in 1919, by troops under British orders. For well-informed readers, this imagery kindled the idea that the British were once again perpetrating a bloody massacre against natives merely desiring to be free from foreign domination, and that after more than two decades the British had not changed their imperialistic conduct. The press further condemned the British action by stressing that the attack ‘violated humanity’ (*melanggar segala kemanosiaan* and *mengindjak-indjak peri kemanosiaan*) and that this battle was ‘how the British took revenge for the death of Mallaby, killed by the British troops themselves’.

Another discourse employed by the Indonesian press was to contrast the parties involved. Narratives were constructed to show how far the British, cynically described as ‘gentlemen’, had gone to stifle the struggle for independence in Surabaya. Meanwhile, Indonesian fighters were reported as having ‘fought heroically’, signifying that inexperienced Indonesian revolutionaries had successfully withstood battle-hardened British troops. Radio Surabaya, subsequently quoted by the Medan-based pro-Republic newspaper *Soeloeh Merdeka*, claimed that ‘despite their extensive war equipment, the experiences of World War I and II have proven that the British

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49 ‘Soerabaja djadi Amritsar ke II’.
cannot attain victory unless helped by other nations, because they are cowards’. \(^{50}\) Ascription of horrendous qualities to the British did not stop there; it was said that they ‘did not care about the Atlantic Charter’, that Britain was ‘a big country that never wins’ and that what the British had was merely ‘bluff’ (gertak sambal). \(^{51}\) The Ghurkhas, who fought on the British side, were described as ‘traitors of the Indian nation, who hindered the independence of India’. \(^{52}\)

The press worked constantly to boost morale among the Indonesians involved in the battle. They praised the solidarity of the Indonesian people in the city, especially among the authorities, the militias, and the rakjat. The pemuda were hailed as ‘the flower of the nation’. \(^{53}\) Even the falling rain was interpreted by the newspaper as a symbol of condolence, the universe mourning the death of so many Indonesians in Surabaya. The newspapers repeatedly expressed optimism that such sacrifices from Indonesians would result in ‘victory’ and a ‘golden age’ for the Indonesian nation. In other words, every personal sacrifice by each Indonesian who fell

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\(^{50}\) ‘Pertempoeran2 seroe masih berkeitjamoek teroes’, Soeloeh Merdeka, 21 November, 1945.


\(^{52}\) ‘Konsol jenderal Sovjet Rusia, Swiss, Hongaria, dan Denemarken memprotes’. Some Ghurkha soldiers sided with the Indonesians. The Republic warmly welcomed this and gave them the opportunity to call upon more Ghurkhas to side with the Indonesians. On 20 November, 1945, two Ghurkha soldiers broadcast, via Republican radio in Surakarta in Central Java, their reasons for abandoning their opposition to the Indonesians and instead support Indonesia’s struggle for independence. Speaking in Urdu, they stated that they were merely ‘tools’ used by the British to hamper Indonesia’s independence, that they saw ‘the spirit of battle’ in the Indonesians in various skirmishes in Java, and that it was impossible to defeat ‘70 million Indonesian nationalists whose breasts are full of the spirit of freedom’. Finally they called upon all the Gurkha soldiers in Indonesia to be aware that Indonesia’s struggle for independence was similar to the struggle for independence in India, the Gurkhas’ homeland. Therefore, ‘it is compulsory for us [the Gurkhas] to help them [the Indonesian people]’. See ‘Tinggalkanlah tentera Inggeris’, Soeloeh Merdeka, 21 November, 1945.

\(^{53}\) ‘Renoengan malam minggoe’, Berita Indonesia, 12 November, 1945.
in battle was depicted not simply as a death, but as a contribution to the victory of Indonesia. The newspapers also urged their readers to take immediate action by posing a rhetorical question: ‘Whose young blood could remain cold listening to the latest news [the killing of Indonesians and the destruction of Surabaya by British troops]?’  

Unlike those leading the struggle in Surabaya, opinion-makers in Jakarta did not use radio addresses to call for more involvement in the armed struggle, but rather to urge an ending to the conflict as soon as possible through negotiation. Indonesian authorities expressed grief at the British violence, stating that ‘in the biggest city in Java, when peace had just been restored after the great massacre which took place throughout the world, one of the strongest countries in the world has, with its modern weapons of war, perpetrated massive killing and destruction, devastating to the population and its property’. The government, represented on the radio by Minister of Foreign Affairs Soebardjo, reported that the cause of this atrocity was actually ‘minor’. It claimed that the British, who said they were only in Indonesia to disarm Japanese troops and release prisoners of war, could not comprehend the emotions felt by Indonesians when they saw that wherever the British arrived in the cities, Dutch troops, widely seen by Indonesians as there to stymie Indonesian moves toward independence, moved unimpeded. In other words, it was the view of the Republic that the British made no attempt to deal with the presence of the Dutch and their use of the British as a shield in their perceived move to recolonize Indonesia. Therefore, the Indonesian authorities put forward:

The best move concerning the problem in Surabaya would be to separate the Dutch troops from the Allied forces, thus preventing Indonesians from facing Dutch troops wearing [British] uniforms as disguise to use the presence of the Allies as a shield to hide behind in their effort to

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54 ‘Rapat raksasa’, Warta Indonesia, 12 November, 1945.
reestablish their power. [...] Were this to be done, the relationships between the British and the Indonesians would not deteriorate, and bloodshed and strife could be prevented. [...] The most urgent task now is to face the situation and, as quickly as possible, bring an end to the killing and destruction, which are definitely disliked by both parties. In order to maintain security and peace, good intentions and mutual understanding are more useful than stubbornness.\footnote{See ‘Pidato-radio Menteri Locar Negeri Soebardjo tentang peristiwa-peristiwa di Soerabaja’, Berita Repoeblik Indonesia, 1 December, 1945.}

\textbf{‘Barbaric Brutalities’: On Dutch Violence in South Sulawesi, 1946-1947}

In an effort to counter the revolutionaries in South Sulawesi, a stronghold of the Republic in Sulawesi (Celebes) Island, who continuously attacked Dutch positions in the region in the second half of 1946, the head of NICA, Lieutenant General Hubertus van Mook, and the chief commander of the Dutch troops in Indonesia, General Simon Spoor, sent in the Dutch Red Berets (Depot Speciale Troepen). Captain Raymond Pierre Westerling was appointed commander. From December, 1946, until February, 1947, he and 120 soldiers under his command executed thousands of people, both armed \textit{pemuda} and civilians. A 1968 book about the official history of the Indonesian army claimed that Westerling and his soldiers killed 40,000 Indonesians, a number which is regarded as questionable by some parties.\footnote{Siliwangi dari Masa Kemasa (Jakarta: Fakta Mahjuma, 1968), p. 375. Westerling himself justifies his operation in South Sulawesi in his memoir. See Raymond Westerling, \textit{Challenge to Terror} (London: William Kimber, 1952). For further discussion about Westerling action, see William Ijzeref, \textit{De Zuid-Celebes Affaire}.} This event was, however, only one in a series of pacification operations which were conducted between January, 1946, and March, 1947. Indonesian propaganda published in 1947 claimed that over the course of these fourteen months Dutch troops murdered almost 30,000 Indonesian
civilians. Despite heated debates about which number is actually correct, it is clear from several sources, both Indonesian and Dutch, that the Dutch military campaign in the region claimed a very high number of victims. From a propagandistic point of view, such a high death toll was a vital example of the extreme cruelty employed by the Dutch toward civilians. Further emphasis was put on the fact that most of the victims fell not on the battlefield, but as civilians executed without trial, accused of hiding information about wanted persons. Republican propagandists intended to demonstrate Dutch brutality to the world, with the long-term goal of securing global support for the Republic and the short-term goal of bringing an end to Dutch operations in the region.

Republican propaganda in this case came somewhat late for a few reasons. Firstly, the period of aggression (early 1946-mid-1947) lasted more than a year and only at the end of the killing was the extremely high death toll known. Secondly, during the months of December, 1946–February, 1947, Republican propaganda was still focused on Java, Madura, and Sumatra, where communication was better and where most of the clashes between the Republic and the Dutch took place. Problems of distance and a lack of effective and timely communication between Java and Sulawesi made the situation worse. Most of the surviving Republican propaganda concerning the occurrences in 1946 and 1947 focuses on clashes in Java and Sumatra and on the newly-signed Lingsgardjati Draft of November, 1946. Any mention of Westerling’s action in South Sulawesi was absent at least as far as can be seen from the Republic’s mouthpiece and the Indonesian press’ main source, Antara, which usually published news about any event considered important to the Republic. Consequently, this series of events was also lacking from the pro-Republic press and the radio in Java.

One of the few surviving pieces of primary Republican propaganda concerning the Dutch actions in South Sulawesi is an English-language
booklet published by the Kempen entitled *Massacre in Macasser*.\(^{57}\) It was published in August, 1947, after the Kempen had gathered and compiled sufficient information about the Dutch operations. It should also be noted that this booklet was published not long after the Linggardjati Agreement was ratified in March, 1947, demonstrating that it was intended to draw world attention (probably particularly that of British diplomats like Lord Killearn, who acted as mediator in the Linggardjati Agreement negotiations) to the fact that the Republic had wide support, not solely in Java and Sumatra (where the *de facto* Republican authority was recognized by the Dutch in the Linggardjati Agreement) but also in Sulawesi, and that the Dutch intended to coercively destroy such support.

The booklet described, in the main, Dutch violence in South Sulawesi from January, 1946, to March, 1947, focusing primarily on the Westerling operation of December, 1946, that had claimed most of the victims. As the title and the language of publication suggest, this booklet was aimed primarily at an English-speaking audience. This was the only piece of Republican propaganda to provide a day-to-day chronology of Dutch cruelty in specific locations. It was very detailed in terms of number of victims, methods of violence employed, and degree of loss (see picture 3.3.). Unfortunately, no sources survive to give an indication of its circulation or reach.

The booklet focused on presenting evidence of Dutch brutality in South Sulawesi, where the Dutch claimed to be conducting a counter-terrorism campaign to search for ‘looters and extremists’. It delineated the progression of Dutch violent behavior from January, 1946, until March, 1947. Either a nationalist Indonesian or a foreign reader would have felt an extraordinary sense of horror, extreme anger and sadness: the booklet detailed a variety of acts of violence perpetrated by the Dutch, all of which were depicted as vicious, unlawful, and inappropriate.

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Several elements can be extracted from this booklet, which I classify into six main categories:

1) By making references to babies, women, and other persons unrelated to the independence struggle who fell victim to Dutch violence, the booklet asserted that the Dutch targeted all civilians, regardless of their association with the Republic. It depicted
irrelevant yet brutal actions and cases of ill-treatment perpetrated by the Dutch against the civilians of South Sulawesi.  

2) The Dutch tortured civilians, employing frightful methods such as beating and kicking people, cutting off ears or into thighs, hitting people with rifle butts, burning victims with cigarettes, rubbing victims’ eyes with red pepper, pulling out the captives’ eyes, burning the captives’ faces and facial hair, and pulling out their teeth.  

3) The Dutch were depicted as deliberately showing off their brutality to frighten and caution people, especially in front of villagers or people in the marketplace. For instance, Dutch troops would force villagers to stand in rows, set one person free and let him run, then suddenly shoot him in the leg, set him free again, and continue in this vein until he was eventually shot to death. Those taken prisoner by the Dutch were also treated with great cruelty.  

59 These included gathering all villagers, including babies ‘not quite one month old’, killing a woman ‘who was fetching water for prayer’, ‘entering a mosque’ and ‘tearing up the pages of the Qur’an’ (and when the mosque’s guardsman tried to save the holy book, he ‘was given a kick on his mouth so that all his teeth fell out and then his head was thrust into with a bayonet several times’), inappropriate treatment of women during searches, mistreating Republican captives leading to malnourishment and death, indirectly killing babies by taking their breastfeeding mothers prisoner, torturing or killing family members as extra punishment or to create scapegoats after a failure to find the targeted person, and sexually assaulting women. Much of the claimed violence said to have been committed by Captain Westerling and his troops has proved to be fact. Westerling admitted that he used extreme violence and avoided using trials to judge the suspects. In his autobiography, he justified his acts by stating that ‘I did not want to order any more executions than were absolutely necessary. But those few I intended to make striking, so that the effect of the example would be as great as possible.’ He cited an instance when he shot to death an Indonesian nationalist he accused of spying without first bring him to court. According to the captain, bringing the suspects to the court ‘would not have shocked public opinion’. He did not specifically confirm each method of violence published in the Massacre in Macasser booklet, but he indicated that he frequently used a variety of ruthless tactics in order to what he called ‘pacify’ the region from ‘terrorists’ and ‘bandits’. See Raymond Westerling, Challenge to Terror (London: William Kimber and Co, Limited, 1952), pp. 88-115.  

60 In descriptions, we find ‘prisoners were forced to jump from a swiftly moving
4) The Dutch were portrayed as destroying and burning down people’s properties, both the houses and the contents, burning unhusked paddies, and destroying most of the contents of homes during searches (tables, beds, food, etc.).

5) The Dutch were said to have looted valuables from people’s homes. They took all belongings they found, including jewels, gold, diamonds, money, krisses, clothes, sarongs, etc. The value of such looted property was listed, so as to stress the great loss to the people, amounting to anywhere from a few thousand to several million guilders.

6) The Dutch were portrayed as mistreating dead bodies, including digging mass graves, leaving bodies to be devoured by wild beasts such as feral dogs, and throwing the bodies of shooting victims into the sea.

The perpetrators of these merciless acts were, according to the booklet, mainly Dutch troops, some of whom blackened their faces to avoid recognition. Some Dutch military commanders were accused of responsibility, including Westerling, who was said to be guilty of the deaths of a number of kampung dwellers, both by personally and sadistically killing suspects and by commanding his troops to kill. Their supporters, such as soldiers and spies, were said to include Eurasians and natives recruited by the Dutch, including Ambonese, Menadonese, Javanese and Sundanese soldiers and natives of South Sulawesi who cooperated with the Dutch. The way they were depicted conveyed to readers that their acts were not just ruthless, but also deliberate, well-organized, and sanctioned by the Dutch authority in Indonesia.

car and then shot dead’, and they forced tortured prisoners ‘to say the “Sjahadat” [a sacred formula of the Qur’an] and then shot them in the mouth’. Other allegations included stabbing victims with bayonets until dead, killing children as young as 9 years old, hanging people to death, chopping victims into pieces, and exhibiting the skinned head of the local Republican official before the population, and in one case it was said that an old man ‘was tied with a piece of rope around his throat and pulled by a jeep around the town till he died’.
Few reasons were cited for the atrocities perpetrated by the Dutch and their allies. A number of victims were reported to have been ‘innocent’ or ‘killed at random’. By leaving out any mention of sufficient reason behind the Dutch actions, the publishers thereby enhanced the impression of illegality regarding the Dutch killings.61

The Dutch and their associates were even accused of aggressions which went beyond mere physical violence; peasants, it was said, had been forced to move to the towns, where they ‘succumbed to hunger and misery’. The widespread violations were interpreted to mean that all things related to the Republic were forbidden by the Dutch, including raising the red and white flag or joining pro-Republic organizations.

Above all, Dutch violence was portrayed in a way that implicitly judged it arbitrary, that cast the Dutch as ignorant of appropriate behavior such as exacting punishment only after prior investigation and trial. Only in some cases did the Kempen mention reasons, which then definitely served to accentuate the image of the Dutch as maintaining a strictly anti-independence stance. The booklet was thus used by the Republic not solely to appeal the world to stop Dutch violence against civilians, but also to gain more support for the Republic-initiated independence. Some victims were described as having been members of or otherwise associated with pro-Republic organizations, such as the PNI. Other were molested, it was said,

61 Quasi-legal interrogations and procedures were also reported in the booklet. The method was to threaten villagers in order to coerce them to point out people the Dutch were looking for, saying that otherwise random villagers would be penalized. For instance, a Makassarese witness named Bagala Daeng Toeda stated that on 14 December, 1946, the Dutch troops gathered seven thousand persons originating from a few kampungs in a spot. A Dutch soldier announced to the group that they were looking for certain suspects and would punish the group if no answer was given. According to Toeda, none among the group knew the names. As a consequence, the Dutch prepared to kill three persons taken randomly from the group. Indeed, three persons were draggend from the group, and were finally shot down, and three more were subsequently killed as well. At the end of the ‘trial’, Toeda said that he saw one hundred people shot down. See Massacre in Macasser, p. 2.
because they ‘declared pro-Indonesian-Independence sentiments’. Meanwhile, it was said that all the *imams* (Islamic teachers) in the *kampungs* near Kolaka had been killed because they ‘served the cause of freedom’. The Kempen asserted that until the Dutch arrived in the region and began their sadistic campaign, people there ‘lived in peace in an atmosphere of freedom’, hereby indirectly stating that all Dutch-perpetrated killings were aimed at destroying the peace and independence initiated by Republican authorities.

The methods of violence the Dutch and their supporters employed were described in detail in this book, making it perhaps the first and only published account of these events at that time. It shows clearly that the conflict was not limited to the battlefield, where most victims were soldiers, but reached even into the homes of ordinary Indonesians (as in the Dutch lootings of Indonesians’ houses), who eventually comprised the majority of the victims. Some captives were said to have been set free, but this was rare.

Several identical terms were used by both Indonesian witnesses and the Kempen in the booklet, which strove to depict the Dutch-perpetrated events as extraordinarily violent. These included ‘barbaric brutalities’, ‘arbitrary actions’, ‘despotic acts which violated

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62 Dutch publications did mention the Westerling action in South Sulawesi, yet the focus was not on the misery of Indonesians, but on the success of Westerling in establishing order in the region and on the support of the native population for the Dutch. For instance, *Het Dagblad* (Jakarta) in January, 1947, praised security measures taken by Westerling in the previous month and stated that Westerling’s troops had done an ‘excellent job’ (*uitstekende diensten*). When Westerling’s troops managed to kill several armed Indonesians and arrested the others (including members of the Indonesian army sent from Java), *Het Dagblad* justified these actions as necessary for the sake of public security. The newspaper underlined the ‘active and brave’ (*actief en dapper*) contributions of the local people in helping the Dutch eradicate ‘terrorists’ and ‘agitators’. However, details on how Westerling and his troops tortured or executed Indonesians were not published. See ‘Turco’s merkwaardige troepen’, *Het Dagblad*, 23 January, 1947; ‘Bende onschadelijk gemaakt’, *Het Dagblad*, 28 January, 1947; ‘De toestand in Zuid-Celebes’, *Het Dagblad*, 7 February, 1947.
humanitarian principles’, ‘cruelties’, ‘mopping-up methods’, ‘mass killings’, ‘outrages’, ‘purge’ and ‘slaughter’. According to the booklet, the total number of casualties between January, 1946, and March, 1947, was 29,200 with financial losses amounting to f 5,027,400. Based on these numbers, the Kempen declared that ‘the Dutch colonial army had cleared out the Republican Indonesians’. To convey to the world the urgency of taking action against the Dutch, they stressed that ‘it happened this time’, implying that it could happen again. The site of the event was ‘South-Celebes, Indonesia’; this statement thus implied that Sulawesi was in fact part of Indonesia, whereas at that time, based on Linggardjati Agreement, the Dutch only acknowledged the de facto Republic’s authority in Java, Sumatra and Madura.

Citing the death toll was not the Kempen’s only approach for convincing the public that terrible atrocities had occurred in South Sulawesi. They also used dramatic pictures and catchphrases. In an undated poster (likely dating to some time after mid-1947, as the number of victims had increased considerably), the Kempen of Central Java, in cooperation with several pro-Republic artists in Yogyakarta under the PTPI (Pusat Tenaga Pelukis Indonesia, the Center of Indonesian Painters, an organization of painters sympathetic to Republic established in 1945), responded to a request by pro-Republic elements in Makassar to portray Dutch atrocities in South Sulawesi in drawings to be disseminated as posters.63

One such poster showed a great number of unarmed Indonesian people, gathered by Dutch troops in a field (see picture 3.4.). They were guarded by a small number of armed Dutch troops, backed by armored vehicles. This illustration advocated the idea that the only way the Dutch dealt with people was with violence toward the defenseless, toward commoners with no direct relationship with the Republic. At

the top of the poster are the words, '11 DESEMBER ’46. 40000 KORBAN DI SULAWESI' (11 December, 1946. 40,000 victims in Sulawesi). By coupling this phrase with the picture, the illustrator was saying that the casualties were so high due to the use of extraordinary violence by a trained and modern army toward ordinary people. The number of victims is 10,000 more than mentioned in Massacre in Macasser booklet, showing widespread belief among Republican supporters that the Dutch violence cost more lives than previously estimated. The slogan at the bottom reads: ‘The blood flows and the soul flies. A never-ending, violent and cruel “cleansing”’.64

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64 ‘DARAH MENGALIR DJIWA MELAYANG. “PEMBERSIHAN” BENGIS KEDJAM YANG TAK KUNDJUNG PADAM’. See Lukisan revolusi rakyat Indonesia (Kementerian Penerangan Republik Indonesia, 1949).

65 Lukisan revolusi rakyat Indonesia (Jakarta: Kementerian Penerangan
A State-sponsored Call for War

The first large-scale Dutch military offensive, dubbed a ‘police action’ by the Dutch but considered by Indonesia to be ‘military aggression’, took place between 21 July and 5 August, 1947. The heavily-armed Dutch military took over many parts of the Republic in Java and Sumatra, selecting those related to economic sources, such as harbors and plantations. In Java, the Dutch attacked West Java, Central Java and East Java. In Sumatra the assault reached as far as Aceh, Padang and Palembang.

To extend their reach and inhibit Republican propagandizing, the Dutch took over the majority of RRI offices and utilized them to broadcast their own propaganda. They claimed victory by asserting that the TNI had barely put up any resistance and that the Republic would fall very soon. They hindered the spread of information from the Republican side by issuing a prohibition against the dissemination of information from Republican-held areas, initiating censorship of the newspapers, even occupying newspaper offices. Following

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68 A.H. Nasution, Sekitar Perang Kemerdekaan Indonesia, Volume 5, p. 305. Weakening the Republic’s propaganda capability was the top Dutch priority following their military action. According to Louis Zweers, on the night of 20 July Dutch troops quickly occupied important buildings and facilities belonging to the Republican authorities and their supporters in Jakarta. These included electricity and telephone offices, as well as railroads and radio stations. See Louis Zweers, De Gecensureerde Oorlog: Militairen versus Media in Nederlands-Indië, 1945-1949 (Zutphen, Walburg Press, 2013), p. 50. The office of the pro-Republic newspaper Merdeka, which prior to the Dutch military action frequently criticized the hawkish Dutch response to Republic, was taken over and searched by Dutch troops on that night. As a result, the newspaper was shut down for the next three months. See J.R. Chaniago, et. al., Ditugaskan Sejarah: Perjuangan Merdeka, 1945-1985 (Jakarta:
the offensive, the Dutch forbade the publication of pro-Republic newspapers in Jakarta, a prohibition only lifted at the end of August. Antara was among the institutions severely hit by the ban: in addition to being unable to publish news, their archives were confiscated by the Dutch. Only in October were pro-Republic newspapers again published, including *Merdeka*.

Indonesian propaganda during the conflict showed certain resemblances to that during the battle in Surabaya, especially regarding taking the approach that Indonesia, in a defensive position, was outright attacked by a vicious foreign enemy. Whereas propaganda during the battle of Surabaya had been characterized by differences between Jakarta and the local leaders, the Indonesian propaganda concerning the first Dutch military offensive was directed by government. On 22 July, Prime Minister Amir Sjarifoeddin delivered a radio speech in which he spoke to the world about the Linggardjati Agreement, its origins, and how the Dutch offensive was violating this agreement. He asked the world to stop the Dutch, whose actions, he said, threatened not only the Republic, but more importantly, the values upheld by the world: justice, independence and humanitarian thinking. He argued that the only way to bring peace and security back to Indonesia, and to allow it resume economic activities, was to end this war. He requested help with ‘points related to the current dispute, namely the return and recognition of the *de facto* authority of the Republic in Java and Sumatra’. Amir continued his plea by stressing that any option for a peaceful solution had been eliminated by the Dutch attack.

The Republic now utilized propaganda in connection to guerilla warfare. Pamphlets were rife during this period (see picture 3.5., 3.6.,

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Some of the surviving ones that I was able to find are undated and without obvious context—they were often collected into the archival offices without accompanying correspondence—but it is very likely that some of them were produced during the Dutch military offensive, given the fact that they refer to things such as ‘occupied areas’ or ‘retaking our areas’. This implies that they are related to Indonesian efforts to strike back at the Dutch. Some pamphlet-makers were well known (the Kempen, for example), but more often they remain obscure. There are certain practical reason which could account for this. Many pamphlets contained extraordinarily strong words calling for violence against the Dutch. Publishing the names of those who had produced these would have enabled Dutch retaliation. As explained before, it was not uncommon for Dutch troops to conduct raids and capture those regarded as anti-Dutch provocateurs.

The Kempen residency of Kediri in East Java distributed a pamphlet entitled ‘DO NOT WAIT!’. It stated, ‘if you want to join the guerillas, you should not wait until everybody else has done so’. The pamphlet depicted what the government saw as the ideal individual, and what it saw as the most unwanted figure in the time of crisis. It divided people into several categories with regard to their role in the struggle, namely ‘the soul who fears’ (‘the soul who wants to join the guerillas in the middle or at the rear’), ‘the great soul’ (‘standing at the forefront’), ‘the brave soul’ (‘the pioneer’), ‘the tiny soul’ (‘who hides’) and ‘the greedy soul’ (‘who seeks personal gain’).

Meanwhile, a small and relatively unknown pro-Republic militia, Pertahanan Rakjat Indonesia (the Indonesian People’s Defense Force), stressed in one of its pamphlets two specific things that Indonesians should employ against the Dutch: ‘guerilla action’ and ‘sabotage’. The pamphlet read: ‘Attack and destroy Dutch buildings! The time has come to release your hammer!’ In another contemporaneous pamphlet, it called on ‘Indonesian people’, including ‘traders, peasants, laborers, [and] the general populace’ to boycott the Dutch ‘by whatever means possible, using any method! Anytime and anywhere!’ The closing statement in this pamphlet was, ‘REMAIN REBELLIOUS!!’ Another of Pertahanan Rakjat Indonesia’s pamphlets even used a quote

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from the Prophet Muhammad to call for the people’s participation, obviously to appeal to the masses by indicating that the struggle was not only for the sake of a new, secular entity known as the state, but additionally to further the higher values implicit in justice and religion: ‘Those who are dead, who (in life) never took part in the war (never defended justice) and even in their hearts had no desire to take part, they are dead as hypocrites.’\textsuperscript{75}

Another militia, Patriot Indonesia, crafted a pamphlet addressed to people in the Dutch-occupied areas, attempting to prevent them from cooperating with the Dutch and urging them to instead support the Republic. It called on Indonesians there to ‘take action now! Do not hesitate! Indonesian people: engage in guerilla warfare and enact sabotage against the enemy everywhere’. It strove to convince the people that the Dutch-occupied areas would soon be re-seized by the Republic: ‘We are retaking the big cities! Come on, other cities should not be left behind! The Indonesian bull shall rage and bring ruin to the Dutch, the obstacle to the independence!’ It closed its call by quoting a slogan which was obviously an adapted version of the existing one: ‘Once merdeka, always merdeka’: ‘Once attacked, always resist!’\textsuperscript{76}

The Dutch advanced into many main cities of Java and Madura, considerably reducing the amount of Republic-held territory. To address this, Republican propaganda underlined two primary ideas: that the Dutch propaganda, claiming that they had won and had occupied Indonesia’s main cities, consisted of lies, and that Indonesia still occupied the cities around the Dutch-occupied areas. In short, the Dutch claim of victory was disputable. The latter was used as grounds


to contend that Indonesia still existed and would soon triumph. An undated pamphlet entitled ‘Be Sure! We will certainly win!’ stated ‘the Dutch claim they won. They assert that they have occupied Yogyakarta. It is a lie! A lie! We still hold the areas surrounding the Dutch-occupied places, and we continue to launch fierce resistance!’.

The pamphlet continued:

For your information! We are still holding Java and Sumatra Island. We have taken over some places which were occupied by the Dutch. Yogyakarta, Solo, Magelang, Madiun, Kediri, etc., are still safe and peaceful.

Friends!

Do not trust the Dutch! Their sweet mouths contain poison. The Dutch slogan is: ‘Once colonizing, always colonizing!’

Our slogan is: ‘ONCE FREE, ALWAYS FREE! ONCE REPUBLICAN, ALWAYS REPUBLICAN!’

![Picture 3.6.](image)

A pamphlet calling on people to conduct guerilla warfare and acts of sabotage

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78 Pamphlet entitled ‘Gerilja! Sabotage!’, ‘Verzameling Republikeinse
A pamphlet calling upon all pemuda and people to defend the state and nation by destroying the Dutch.\textsuperscript{79}

Four days after the Dutch began their offensive, the Indonesian military realized how far into Republican areas the Dutch had advanced. Whereas the Dutch implicitly equated their advance to victory, one Indonesian response was to emphasize that victory was not necessarily determined by enemy advances but rather by how determined the Indonesians remained to defend their country.\textsuperscript{80} This approach marginalized the Dutch progress and focused on consolidating and strengthening support for the Republic. Indonesian propaganda acknowledged that the Dutch had taken over Indonesian cities, but this was not seen as a defeat. Rather, this was a test for the Indonesians of their dedication to independence.


Indonesians could only pass the test by increasing their efforts to defend this independence.

Indonesian propaganda made much of the perception that before 21 July, Indonesia had shown its willingness and readiness to maintain peace and order, and that it was the Dutch who had violated the Linggardjati Agreement. One undated pamphlet stated:

A War for Independence, a Holy War, a Total War has erupted in our Homeland of Indonesia because of Dutch coercion! Even though we, before 21 July, 1947, sufficiently displayed our desire to establish peace in Indonesia, the Dutch remained stubborn. The Dutch tore the Linggardjati Agreement up, ripped the cease fire agreement to pieces [...] and the Dutch used violent weapons. The proof is the morning of 21 July, 1947, when the Dutch officially cut off peaceful relations with us, officially waged war against us, officially launched attacks on our Homeland from air, land and sea.

As of 21 July, 1947, the Dutch have declared Colonial War, a war with the purpose of recolonizing and resuppressing our nation at a moment when they have already acknowledged us as an Independent nation.81

Similar messages were disseminated via flyers pasted up in public spaces. The Dutch authorities, particularly the RVD and its branches in Java’s main cities, found these inflammatory, inciting public anger toward the Dutch, and confiscated quite a large number of them, along with other Republican printed material. These materials were later used to develop counterpropaganda and as proof of Republican agitation when the Dutch brought their military action to the international world.82

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82 NL-HaNA, 2.10.14, inv. Nmr. 5465. The Dutch underlined that the confiscation of such propaganda materials was part of their effort to restore law and security in Java and Sumatra. The Republic’s anti-Dutch propaganda must be stopped because it could ‘provoke and disturb troops and civilians’. The Dutch
wanted to prove that it was the Republic’s propaganda which incited the masses to fight the Dutch even after the cease fire had been stipulated. See ‘Cease-fire and political discussions, documents submitted to the Committee of Good Offices by the Netherlands Delegation’ betreffende de periode 1947 nov-1948 jan, 1948: NL-HaNA, 2.10.14, inv. Nmr. 5443.

83 Pamphlet entitled ‘SETAPAK PANTANG MUNDURI’, ‘Verzameling
Individuals and Violence

Propaganda was a tool used to link the struggle at the national level with the ordinary people, especially by using local languages and rhetoric easily understood by ordinary people (see picture 3.8., 3.9., 3.10 and 3.11.). A pamphlet drawn up by an artist named B. Tjipto St., issued in August, 1947, was a typical example of how Republican propaganda attempted to approach the population. No reference was made to either Republican institutions or militias, thus it was very likely that this one was made independently by a pro-Republic artist. It used a number of stratagems to approach the lowest levels of society, such as depicting a becak (trishaw) driver, an andong (horse cart) driver, an ordinary man, even housewives and children. Depicted in the pamphlet, an artist wrote on a building wall ‘We do not want to be colonized again’ (Tidak mau didjadjah lagi). He was seen by a becak passenger who then shouted ‘I agree, Brother’ (Akoor Boeng), giving a right-handed thumb’s up to show his approval. The becak driver also responded positively: ‘Independent for sure’ (tetap merdeka!). Beside the becak, a child was shown enthusiastically reaching for a pamphlet dropped by an airplane with the Indonesian flag on it, containing the message ‘Unite’ (Bersatue).

Below this illustration, another picture entitled ‘Ready to attack the enemy...’ (Siap menggempoer moesoeh...) showed how commoners should fight the Dutch, even if only in their imagination. The first scene depicted a man sharpening his machete. He asked it, ‘Hi machete, how many Dutch heads do you want?’ The machete answered, ‘At least ten’. In another scene, a young man held a sharpened bamboo spear (a lance, or a granggang in Javanese). He asked, ‘Hi lance, what if I am killed?’ The lance answered, ‘I myself would rage’. The third scene showed a husband who asked his wife, working in their kitchen, ‘What are you doing, my wife?’ The wife answered, ‘Boiling water

to flush the Dutch if they come here’. The last scene showed many people with their own weapons, ‘siap’ (ready) to fight the Dutch. The conclusion to be reached was that Indonesian people from every level of society were ready to ‘annihilate the Dutch’ (mem|binasakan Belanda) by all possible means, ‘not solely with cannon and mortar, not only with rifle and grenade’, but also with ‘sharpened bamboo spears, pestles, hoes, chilis, hot water, stones or sand, with everything we shall destroy the wicked Dutch’. A Javanese translation of this passage, entitled ‘Let’s annihilate the Dutch!’ (Hajo, kita tumpes Walondo), was printed alongside the Indonesian version.

A poster calling on the common people to unite and be ready to destroy the Dutch

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In its effort to mobilize people to fight the Dutch, the Republic employed local languages, enabling wider distribution of their messages in both Republic-held and Dutch-occupied territories. The former was to prevent local people, especially villagers, from coming under Dutch influence and the latter to prevent local support of the Dutch and to call upon those already affected to return to the Republic. Those commoners who, either because of gender (female) or age (children and the elderly), were not eligible for military service, or who had no interest in taking part in the conflict, were given the opportunity to get involved in another way, by endorsing the Republic’s assertion that violence was necessary to expel the Dutch. As non-combatants, ordinary Indonesians were requested to perpetrate violence with any tools they had.

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85 NL-HaNA, 2.10.14, inv. nmr. 5465.
A call to the people not to accept or use Dutch money

A pamphlet instructing people not to be deceived by the Dutch

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86 NL-HaNA_2.10.14 inv. nmr. 5465.

Dealing with Defeat

The Indonesian authorities felt that to a large extent they had lost possession of Indonesia’s key cities, particularly major cities in Java and Sumatra, due to Dutch military action in July 1947. Nevertheless, Indonesian propaganda addressed the situation by emphasizing that this did not mean that the Dutch had won the war because it would not be long before Indonesia emerged victorious. This view was very apparent in a radio speech by the head of the Indonesian army, General Soedirman, on 2 August, 1947. He couched his description of the situation in his optimism, seeing victory in the near future. He stated that the enemy was ‘truly vicious’ and that they could derive some advantage from their attack, particularly in West Java. Despite this acknowledgement of the Dutch advance, however, Soedirman assured his listeners that it was just a matter of time. He called on Indonesians to continue fighting, to ‘take the initiative and crush’ the enemy, saying that they ‘should not be indecisive’ and that they ‘should believe in God’s justice and our power’.

Soedirman emphasized that any advantage the enemy derived would not last long. He reminded his listeners of the story of Dutch cowardice, when their troops had, several years before, only lasted a week against arriving Japanese troops in the Indies. Soedirman underscored that the collapse of the Dutch defense at the time (marked by the signing of a Dutch unconditional surrender to the Japanese by the Commander of the Dutch Indies Army, Lieutenant General Hein ter Poorten, in Kalijati on 9 March, 1942) took place in West Java. By way of this story, Soedirman assured his army and the rakjat that the Dutch would once again be defeated in West Java, this time by the Indonesian army and the rakjat. 88

In a pamphlet about the first week of the Dutch military offensive, developed by an army spokesperson and printed and distributed by

the Kempen, the army once again carefully couched the description of the Dutch advance in tones favoring Indonesia. It first accused the Dutch troops of violating the truce by initiating the attack which caused the deaths of Indonesian military personnel and, more importantly, Indonesian civilians. Furthermore, the army acknowledged that the Dutch had made advances, taking several cities in Java, but the tone was cynical. The Dutch were portrayed as having ‘very great power’ and yet they could only take over a few cities, signifying the extent to which Indonesia’s resistance had hampered Dutch movements. Another passage stated, ‘the enemy has advanced in several places, but, conversely, they also suffered a massive strike from our side’. The army concluded that the Dutch had failed in their bid to control all of Java and Sumatra, and that Indonesia had effected a successful counterstrike. The Dutch were depicted as having committed a large number of army and military personnel and devices to control the two islands, but had in the end lost hundreds of soldiers and a number of strike planes and armored cars.\(^\text{89}\)

Several weeks after the military offensive, the retrospective view of the Indonesian authorities was still that the Dutch had not in fact won the war and that it was Indonesia which could claim the victory, especially given the numerous statements of support that Indonesia had received from the international community. This foreign sympathy was seen by the authorities as proof of Indonesia’s triumph over the Dutch, in particular with regard to the competition for international support. This perception of victory boosted Indonesia’s confidence, especially obvious when the Indonesian authorities commemorated the day of independence on 17 August, 1947, about one month after the Dutch launched their attack. The commemoration was viewed as the perfect time to evaluate the fight for independence and strengthen existing patriotic feelings, as well

as to disseminate new interpretations of the struggle. The East Java branch of the Kempen, for example, issued pamphlets wherein they depicted various difficulties which Indonesian independence had faced. The Kempen also raised national morale by asserting that Indonesia could overcome any problem, now or in the future. A simpler version of this pamphlet’s message was distributed in the form of a postcard, apparently an attempt to spread optimism throughout Indonesia.\(^{90}\)

In Malang, another pamphlet by someone working under the name ‘Pakmu NARKO’ (meaning ‘your father Narko’, here referring to Sunarko, the regent of Malang) implied that Indonesia had won the war. It read: ‘For your information: in this colonial war, the Dutch have been isolated. In contrast: THE ENTIRE WORLD SUPPORTS OUR STRUGGLE AGAINST DUTCH AGGRESSION’. Narko assured his readers that Indonesia would finally gain independence. He continued, ‘Because of that, be sure: WE WILL CERTAINLY WIN. Do not be afraid of fighting the Dutch. Conduct continuous resistance. Do not give up.’\(^{91}\)

Postcards allowed the Republic’s messages to travel across the country and even to other parts of the world. A special card was issued and sold by the Kempen of East Java in mid-August, 1947, commemorating the proclamation of independence and celebrating the coming Eid al-Fitr (the holiday marking the end of the Islamic fasting month) of that year. The postcard congratulated the Muslims on their Eid al-Fitr, but was more focused on the ability of the Republic to maintain independence over the two years since the proclamation. A flower necklace was drawn ornamenting the anniversary number (two) and the national flag and two soldiers signifying that the

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Republican army would continue to fight to defend the independence (see picture 3.12.).

![Picture 3.12.](image)

A post card commemorating both Eid al-Fitr and 2nd the anniversary of the proclamation of independence.92

**Justifying Internal Indonesian Violence**

Violence during the revolution was not limited to clashes between foreign powers and Indonesian revolutionaries; it also occurred among Indonesians, against, among others, those considered a danger to the independence. A primary example was the communist uprising in Madiun (East Java) in 1948, and the Republican government’s harsh response to it. During the second half of 1948 the communist group there became increasingly radical, partly because of Muso’s return in August, 1948. Muso was an Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) leader active during the Indonesian nationalist movement of the 1920’s, who fled to Moscow in 1926. His return, and his propaganda

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campaign to bring Indonesia closer to the Soviet Union, were followed by numerous incidents of violence in East Java.\(^\text{93}\)

While the propaganda calling on people to go to war against the Dutch was supported by widespread already-extant negative sentiments towards the Dutch, mobilizing people to fight fellow Indonesians at a time when national unity was truly essential was extremely difficult. Moreover, many communist leaders and party members, such as the former Minister of Information Amir Sjarifoeddin, had actually supported the Republic at one time. Amir and other communists, comprising three leftist parties (the PKI, the Socialist Party and the Labour Party), joined a leftist political organization, the People’s Democratic Front (FDR).

The dispute between the Indonesian government and the communists was basically an internal political conflict in which a competing entity operating outside the Republican state proffered a new concept of nation-statehood to the population, in particular

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\(^{93}\) An agreement, known as Renville Agreement, was signed on January 1948, in which a cease fire was stipulated, Indonesian troops were withdrawn from Dutch-held territories and a referendum was agreed upon to be held in order to determine popular support. The acceptance of the Republic to this agreement as well as Dutch acts infringing upon the contents of the agreement generated increasing pressure from opposition groups on the Republican government. The new Republican government that was established at the end of January, 1948, for the first time excluded the left wing groups. From January, 1948, onwards, it was the Islamic and nationalist parties of Masyumi and PNI which occupied most of the ministerial seats. The left wing parties turned to the opposition and became harsher toward the Republic. The disappointment among the communists, including about the government’s act of disbanding the communists’ mass organizations, led to armed confrontation against the Republican government. The uprising was finally put down by the Republican army in October, 1948. Two leaders of the uprising, Muso and Amir Sjarifoeddin, were killed and 300 soldiers sympathetic to the communists were captured. Around 8,000 were estimated to have died. According to Ann Swift, the failure of PKI rebellion in East Java was determined largely by two factors, the lack of assistance from the army and the absence of popular support. See Ann Swift, *The Road to Madiun: the Indonesian Communist Uprising of 1948* (New York: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1989) and M.C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), p. 281.
in East Java. In the first half of 1948, the FDR and its leaders worked tirelessly to influence the population, relaying the message that the Republican government had deviated from the true aim of independence and that the FDR would correct such deviation. Upon his arrival in Jakarta, Muso was warmly received by Soekarno, who admired Muso as his political teacher and an experienced nationalist fighter.\(^{94}\) Muso was also glad to be there, and repeatedly boasted to his comrades that his presence strengthened ‘our Republic’.\(^{95}\) Soekarno and Muso’s communications in August, 1948, still reflected the belief that Muso’s presence would greatly improve the Republic’s ability to fight the Dutch. Not long after, however, Muso began to counsel the population that there was a serious problem with the current Indonesian government and that he had the solution for it. In his first public speech in front of, according to a report, 50,000 in Yogyakarta, he demanded a change in the Republic’s political system. The communist leader insisted on a change in the Republic’s political system from a presidential cabinet to what he called a ‘front national cabinet’. In the cabinet, the FDR would play a significant role. Muso called for the Republic to intensify relations with the Soviet Union instead of what he called the capitalist USA, because he believed that only the Soviets could help Indonesia break the Dutch blockade. The USA, he said, would ‘collapse by itself because its economic situation nowadays is flawed and damaged’.\(^{96}\)

At another public meeting in Yogyakarta, on 22 August, 1948, Muso even demanded the cessation of all talks with the Dutch.

\(^{94}\) *Revolutioner*, 19 August 1948, quoted in Pramoedya Ananta Toer, et. al. (eds.), *Kronik Revolusi Indonesia, Jilid IV (1948)* (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2003), p. 504

\(^{95}\) ‘Kepada Kawan2 Komunis Indonesia’, *Bintang Merah*, 19 August 1948, quoted in Pramoedya Ananta Toer, et. al. (eds.), *Kronik Revolusi Indonesia, Jilid IV (1948)*, p. 525

\(^{96}\) Pramoedya Ananta Toer, et. al. (eds.), *Kronik Revolusi Indonesia, Jilid IV (1948)*, p. 537.
and advocated a need to exchange envoys with the Soviets.\textsuperscript{97} The communist leader went further, telling the press that ‘the revolution was going the wrong way’ and that the PKI must get half of all government seats.\textsuperscript{98} He continuously underlined what he saw as elementary mistakes in ideology, politics, and organization within the Indonesian revolution, and promoted his own solutions, which he called ‘the new road for the Republic of Indonesia’.\textsuperscript{99} One of FDR’s members, SOBSI, the main communist affiliated federation of trade unions, in a meeting in the last week of August, 1948, demanded that the government withdraw from two previous agreements entered into by the Republic, the Linggardjati and the Renville agreements.\textsuperscript{100}

Muso’s ideas concentrated on how and in which direction the state-and-nation-building-process in Indonesia should proceed so as to preserve the independence. This idea was backed by considerable political support not just from the leftists and socialists but also from a number of the Republic’s army members who were dissatisfied with Republican leaders. Such notions obviously posed a serious threat to the government, which had neither the intention to fundamentally reorganize its political system nor felt it necessary to associate with either the USA or the Soviet Union. Muso had questioned the hegemony of the Republican government and introduced an alternative based on a communist, as opposed to a capitalist, rhetoric. Muso’s designation of his concepts as a ‘new road’ suggested that the PKI must lead the Indonesian revolution and that Indonesia should seek ideological

\textsuperscript{97} Pramoedya Ananta Toer, et. al. (eds.), \textit{Kronik Revolusi Indonesia, Jilid IV (1948)}, pp. 544-545.

\textsuperscript{98} Pramoedya Ananta Toer, et. al. (eds.), \textit{Kronik Revolusi Indonesia, Jilid IV (1948)}, p. 551.

\textsuperscript{99} Pramoedya Ananta Toer, et. al. (eds.), \textit{Kronik Revolusi Indonesia, Jilid IV (1948)}, p. 555.

\textsuperscript{100} Pramoedya Ananta Toer, et. al. (eds.), \textit{Kronik Revolusi Indonesia, Jilid IV (1948)}, p. 550.
conformity with the Soviets. He was confident that the Soekarno-led Republic was outdated and must be completely abandoned. Muso’s project of alternative nation-state building was warmly welcomed by a large number of communists in Central and East Java. Partially fueled by propaganda from both parties, bloody conflicts soon erupted at the lower levels of society, particularly kidnapping and homicide. The PKI seized pro-Republic supporters, and vice versa.  

 Indonesian government propaganda in response to this can arguably be said to differ significantly from previous propaganda targeting foreigners. The communists were profiled as having performed reprehensible acts against the people (see picture 3.13. and 3.14.). The government championed its policies and condemned the ‘new road’ concept of nation-state building introduced by the FDR. The government circulated three primary concepts to frame the misdeeds of the communists in a light showing them as deserving a firm reaction, with violence if necessary. The government first proclaimed that it guaranteed democracy and the freedom to establish new organizations, but that it strongly rejected any movement which could weaken the government. Secondly, it said, the communists engaged in despicable acts which could cause the destruction of the Indonesian state and nation, such as undermining the solidarity of the Indonesian people, ruining the Republican government, establishing a foreign-sponsored state, and instigating strife within the armed forces. Thirdly, the rakjat only had two choices: to side with Muso or support of the Republican government.

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101 At the beginning of September 1948, several PKI officials in Solo disappeared. The PKI blamed a team of kidnappers who had connections with Vice President Hatta. In the middle of the same month, Republican government organs in Madiun were attacked. The attackers, according to the Republican authorities, were those under the auspices and leadership of the FDR and PKI leaders. Given the latter, the government announced that all means would be taken to restore the legal authority and administration and hoped that the entire population would help herein. See Ann Swift, *The Road to Madiun*, p. 67-73.
A pamphlet depicting the main PKI and FDR leaders as ‘foreign agents’ and ‘sellers of the nation’.

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A pamphlet ordering Indonesian soldiers who sided with the communists to ‘return to the correct path’, the Republic.103

In his radio address of 19 September, 1948, from RRI Yogyakarta, President Soekarno cited the willingness of his government to allow

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freedom in Indonesian society, referring to ‘healthy political struggle’ which, he said, was inseparable from democracy. Therefore, the government would not oppress any ideology or organization. There was, however, an exception. The government would eradicate ‘anarchy from the leaders along with the troublemakers, who threatened the state and used conspiracy groups’ and constituted a movement which ‘endangered public safety’.

Whereas the abovementioned theme was focused on raising public awareness about the perceived communist danger to the legitimate government, another propaganda campaign aimed at heightening the people’s concerns about their own safety. Soekarno’s 19 September radio speech cited a variety of acts committed by the PKI and its associates which he saw as dangerous to the rakjat, including ‘causing anxiety in society’, ‘inciting people’, ‘inflaming people’s hearts’ and engaging in ‘intimidation and threats’ against the employees of Indonesia’s vital offices, including the PTT, the trains, and gas and electricity facilities. The president added that tools of the government’s power and the Republican army had also been the targets of communist provocation and influence. Soekarno continued:

In their plan, which they have been developing since last February, it is obvious that paragraph II calls for the instigation of chaos from the inside and for both legal and illegal actions; it calls for:

a. Generating chaos everywhere so long as the Masyumi cabinet still controls the government, by mobilizing villainous organizations to commit acts of robbery, both by day and by night. The police have no power against such a situation. Note: should these actions be performed carefully and efficiently, all of our people would be frightened, and the government would lose their trust.

b. Hard measures, such as kidnapping if necessary, must be used against those who oppose the FDR’s plan.\textsuperscript{105}

These two claims were intended to convince the Indonesians that the rebellious communists in Madiun had committed and would commit crimes which constituted a threat to the government and to the people. Ultimately, the Indonesian government called upon the rakjat to decide quickly which side they would take. In fighting the PKI uprising in Madiun, Soekarno stressed that there were only two options available for Indonesians, that the Indonesians must choose one, and that that choice will be to stand behind him:

My beloved people, [...] you must choose one of two options.

You can follow Muso and the PKI, which would bring the goal of an independent Indonesia to an end, or you can follow Soekarno-Hatta which, with God’s permission, with the help of God, would establish our Republic as an independent Indonesia which could not again be colonized by any country.

I believe that the Indonesian people, who have already fought for independence for a long time, would not hesitate to stand behind us. The government approves of a stance free from doubt. Please help your government and its tools with all your might to eradicate clashes and return the legitimate government to sovereignty. All areas of Madiun and environs must soon be in our hands.

[...] my nation, stand up. Our government is going to be destroyed by the troublemakers, who are unwilling to wait for the people’s choice in the [upcoming] general election. Our state is going to be kidnapped. Let us together eradicate the troublemakers. Let us maintain security under the government. Do not be hesitant. With God’s permission we will definitely win.\textsuperscript{106}


\textsuperscript{106} See Pamphlet entitled ‘Pidato P.J.M. Presiden Republiek Indonesia pada djam 20.00’.

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President Soekarno supplemented this call with a new regulation on 1 October, 1948, delineating punishments for those who openly supported the communist rebellion. Government Regulation Nr. 39, Year 1948, was disseminated in the form of a pamphlet which stated that ‘Those who in [this] dangerous situation use words, writing or attitude to state their approval of the actions of the rebels, who are with force trying to usurp the government’s power, are to be punished with the longest sentence of ten years’. The act of supporting the rebels was labeled a ‘crime’ (kedjahan).

Republican leaders used radio to attack the communist leaders and approach their followers who had escaped from TNI searches by hiding in the mountainous areas of East Java, but who could receive radio signals. The communist leaders, especially Muso, used radio as well. The Republic then published multitudinous pamphlets which were distributed in the communist stronghold of East Java and surrounding areas. The pamphlets were pasted up in public spaces because the Republic, unlike the British and the Dutch, could not drop them by air. The key points of emphasis in the pamphlets were the Republic’s dislike of the communists’ intrusive acts, an appeal to return to supporting the Republic, the mistakes of the communists and the danger they posed to independence, and the severe punishment the communists faced if they remained stubborn. Republican authorities expressed fear that the communists would crush independence from within just as the Dutch would crush it from outside, and they acted upon that understanding.

Pro-government View in the Press

Newspapers backed the government’s position regarding the communist rebellion. Pro-Republic newspapers reported the

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news about TNI-communist clashes in a strong pro-Republic light, especially by quoting one-sidedly, limiting citations to the statements of Republican authorities. This was helped by the TNI’s tolerance of journalists, some of whom were permitted to embed themselves with the TNI, which necessarily slanted their reports in a pro-TNI direction and incited disappointment and anger on the communist side.  

The reports in *Merdeka* newspaper reflect how Indonesian violence against fellow Indonesians was generally portrayed in the press. Largely drawing on Antara as its source the paper constructed an image of the Republican government as responding steadily more harshly toward the rapid movement of communist groups, which at the time strongly opposed the government. At the beginning of September, 1948, it was said that the government ‘intended to undertake hard measures’ against the communists. Vice President Mohammad Hatta announced on 3 September the government’s disappointment that its patience in responding to the situation ‘was often considered by the people as a weakness’ and that now the government would ‘no longer hesitate to take action to eradicate parties which cause intimidation and chaos’. That the government meant business was proven later. The newspaper endorsed the government’s view that what the communist group had embarked upon in Central and East Java was a ‘pemberontakan’ (rebellion).

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108 One of the embedded reporters was a female journalist named Gadis Rasid. During the Japanese occupation, she worked for a Japanese-published newspaper based in Semarang, *Sinar Baroe*. In 1948, she was a journalist at *Pedoman*, a newspaper established by Rosihan Anwar, a close associate of Sjahrir, the Republic’s first premier. Gadis expressed her interest to TNI officers in reporting the TNI’s moves in Madiun by attaching to the TNI troops; it was permitted. She published her reports about the TNI’s attacks in the printed press, possibly in *Pedoman*. See S.K. Trimurti, et al., *Wartawan Wanita Berkisah* (Jakarta: Indonesia Raya, no year), p. 55; Ajip Rosidi, *Mengenang Hidup Orang Lain: Sejumlah Obituari* (Jakarta: KPG, 2010), pp. 199-201.


and that such action ‘was destroying security’. This was portrayed as contrapunctual to the Republican police and army, trying to put down the rebellion and widely regarded as ‘tihak jang berwadjib’ (the authorities)—and thus legitimized in using violence. When the Indonesian authorities eventually attacked communist positions in Madiun (East Java), where it was reported that a ‘Soviet Republic’ had just been established by Muso, Merdeka newspaper reported this attack as a legitimate government action against a threat not only to the government of the Republic of Indonesia, but, more crucially, to Indonesian independence itself.

The newspaper described the communist act as ‘grabbing legitimate power’ (merampas kekuasaan jang sjah), thereby designating it as a coup d’état. It was also reported that in their effort to hinder the Republican army’s progress, communist troops destroyed public facilities such as bridges. In Sarangan (a border area between Central and East Java), the communist group was even portrayed as having engaged in far greater misconduct: ‘In facing the attack of the TNI, the rebels used civilians and children as a shield. [However] Because of the TNI’s strategy, none of them fell’.

The government’s vigorous effort to overcome the communist rebellion was reported by Merdeka. Most of its reports touted progress and victory. On 25 September it was reported that while

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113 ‘Sarangan dan Walikukun direbut kembali’, Merdeka, 25 September, 1948. In the first week of October, 1948, it was reported that despite the fact that many cities had finally been taken over by the government, the battle against the rebels during the previous week had caused 159 TNI deaths and ‘many people’ who ‘fought with sharpened bamboo spears’ fell. This report indicated that the rebels were fighting the TNI and the common people alike. This information was apparently intended to bolster popular backing for the government’s fight against the rebels. See ‘159 orang TNI tewas’, Merdeka, 4 October, 1948.
the battle was still going on in Madiun and Ponorogo, in and around another city in East Java, Blitar, ‘the Republican police managed to defeat the rebellion’. In two other cities, Jombang and Malang, ‘communist troops surrendered without resistance’. The TNI was only beaten once, when Ngawi city was finally taken by the communists. In Surakarta (Central Java), meanwhile, ‘the rebels [...] have been repelled’.

One notable sentiment disseminated by the press was the idea of remorse. The portrayal of communist violence was on the whole much more moderate than the depictions of Dutch or British violence. The conflict was reported in a different tone from the clashes with the external enemies, the Dutch and the British. A sense of remorse appeared here, considering the fact that this fight was internal, among Indonesians. The press wanted to indicate that the road for Muso’s followers back to loyal participation in the national struggle remained open. The communists, in the eyes of Merdeka journalists, were in the wrong and hence reproachable for their use of violence, but at least they were fellow Indonesians. They should be convinced, if need be by force, of the legitimacy of the Republican authority, but they were not the kind of ruthless criminals that the Dutch and their henchmen were. The newspaper claimed there were a lot of reasons behind the unrest, ‘but if such reasons generated a civil war, in the moment when our nation was still struggling to face other dangers ahead of us, this would be regretted by every Indonesian who uses his common sense’.

A caricature was added to reinforce the statement (see picture 3.15.). It showed three animals, representing the three contending parties at the time: a bear (symbolizing the Soviet Union’s influence, with a label reading ‘Muso’ on it), a bull (symbolizing Indonesia, with a label reading ‘The Republic of Indonesia’ on its body and

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‘Madiun’ on its tail), and a lion (symbolizing the Dutch). The bear was portrayed biting the tail of the bull, which initially faced the lion. The lion was depicted with an open mouth, suggesting that the Dutch were preparing to attack Indonesia at exactly the time when Indonesia was preoccupied with internal enemies.

Picture 3.15.
The fight between the bear, the bull and the lion.\textsuperscript{115}

Conclusion

Since the beginning of the revolution, the central Indonesian government, via Republican officials in Jakarta, had continuously stressed their peaceful standpoint regarding solving the problem related to the disarmament of Japanese soldiers and the coming of the Allies. This pro-peace position was deemed necessary to appeal in particular to the arriving British troops and the international world,

\textsuperscript{115} Merdeka, 25 September 1948.
which were in favor of postwar peace. This pro-peace position was dominant among the local Republican leaders, due also in part to the lack of weaponry on the Indonesian side. Nevertheless, this pro-peace campaign proved short-lived. Disputes about how authority should function arose between the Republic, the Allies, and, subsequently, the Dutch in many places in Indonesia (including one of the worst cases in Surabaya), hindering further pro-peace campaigning.

When Indonesians began to fall victim to British violence, and the Republic failed to convince the Allies that it was the sole authority in Indonesia, pro-war propaganda started. The Republic justified its involvement in violence by noting that it was because all armed incidents were initiated by the Allies, and later the Dutch. According to them, the Republic was simply defending its existence against foreign aggressors. References to the colonial past, like the notorious British violence toward native British Indians voicing their political aspirations, were used to convince the world that the British still acted as an imperialistic country, treating natives badly.

Violence from the Dutch side was said to be aimed primarily at (innocent) Indonesian civilians. Pro-Republic elements claimed that the violence they enacted was purely in self-defense, and, therefore, an unavoidable path to peace—peace which, according to the Republic, had been brutally shattered by the Dutch. The Dutch brutality -- the shooting, torture, killing, and, more significantly, the absence of courtroom trials (for instance in Westerling’s operation in South Sulawesi) were repeatedly emphasized as a tool to sway the world about the devilish nature of Dutch operations. A similar rhetoric was employed when Republican authorities formulated propaganda justifying violence against fellow Indonesians (the rebelling communists), though in a more conciliatory form, because this was violence against compatriots.

The rhetorical stances above were vitally important to the Republic in motivating its army and populace to hate the Dutch, and therefore
to participate in the fight against them by whatever means possible and with any weapons available. Indonesian propaganda ensured that the war was fought by all Indonesians, not just by the Republican army. This was consequently also the period in which Indonesian propaganda portrayed the victims and losses on the Indonesian side as more than a series of family or community tragedies, but rather as a national tragedy which contributed immensely to the establishment and preservation of Indonesian independence.

This was also grounds for the Republic to gain public sympathy within Indonesia and abroad, in particular for the Indonesian civilians suffering these many acts of Dutch violence. Heavy emphasis was put on civilian victims to prove to the world that the Republic and its citizenry deserved support and protection from the Dutch ferocity.

From a military point of view, the British and Dutch troops were better-trained and better-equipped than the Indonesian army and paramilitary. The attacks they launched on Indonesian positions often led to massive destruction and major setbacks for the Indonesians. The propaganda campaigns discussed above were imperative to the Republic as the British, and later the Dutch, used armed attacks to gain control over territories. Propaganda which framed Indonesia and the Indonesians as the victims enabled the Republic to justify their own military operations against the Dutch. Continually propagating this victim-based discourse allowed the Republic to counterattack and at the same time call upon the international community to prevent other acts of violence.