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*Indonesians Go to the Polls: The Parties and
Their Stand on Constitutional Issues**

BEFORE THE GENERAL elections of 1955 the hopes of the Indonesians were high regarding the effectiveness of democratic devices in solving political and economic problems. It was thought that the election of a Constitutional Assembly would solve the problems of the future of constitutional government in that country which so recently acquired its independence from the Dutch. The problem was of enormous size. During its brief history,¹ Indonesia had lived under co-opted governments chosen in accordance with the provisions of a tentative constitution.² With these makeshift arrangements it had to contend with inflation, repair of war damage, replacement of trained Dutch personnel, elimination of graft and corruption, armed insurrection in a number of spots, a military establishment uncertain of itself and of its place in the body politic, regional uprisings and the fragmentation of central authority, foreign exchange crises, and a general lack of experience with government, public administration and democratic institutions.

The Constitutional Assembly convened November 10, 1956, at Bandung, about one year after the voters went to the polls to select the delegates.³ It met at an ominous time. President Sukarno scolded it for having so many factions and hinted at an appointed

*The author was in Indonesia during the 1955 elections. This article is primarily based on interviews with prominent Indonesians, official records, Indonesian newspapers and press services. The Ministry of Information was very helpful.

¹ President Sukarno likes to use 1945 as the year independence was won, although this independence was not recognized by the Dutch until 1949.

² Gazette of the Republic of Indonesia, *The Provisional Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia*, Act No. 7, 1950, Gazette 1950, No. 56.

³ The elections to the General Assembly were held during the period beginning September 29, 1955, and lasted several weeks due to delays in making the arrangements in certain localities; the elections to the Constituent Assembly were held on December 15, 1955. The results were not announced until half a year later.

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super council which might take over the affairs of government in the troubled land.⁴ A military and civilian revolt broke out soon after in Sumatra, the wealthiest of all the islands. Dissatisfied with their share of the total expenditures of the national government in view of their large contribution to national taxes, the Sumatrans demanded the resignation of the Ali Government and the return of Hatta as an emergency premier at the head of a government dedicated to more local autonomy and greater efficiency and honesty. Early in 1957 the islanders of East Indonesia followed the Sumatrans by declaring partial independence.

The Constitutional Assembly, a large and unwieldy body of 520 members (just twice the size of Parliament) listened to the President's words solemnly and pondered slowly and deliberately the gigantic tasks facing it. It had to decide whether to adopt a democratic or a dictatorial form of government, what the role of the President would be, what the place of its elder companion, Parliament, would be, what the powers of the states would be, whether the present centralization should be continued, if democratic forms were followed, whether the parliamentary or presidential system of government should be adopted, what would be the role of Islam, what would be the place of the minor religious bodies, what would be the relationship between civil and military authorities, and what kind of parliament should be established and how it would be elected.⁵

Constitutional issues were not prominently debated during or since the election campaign. It is doubtful whether the average Indonesian voter knows very much about the complicated legal and political power questions involved. At the polls he had merely punched a hole through the symbol of his favorite party using the

⁴ Ministry of Information of the Republic of Indonesia, "Draw Up a Constitution Which is Really Based on Res Republica," speech delivered by the President of the Republic of Indonesia at the Opening Ceremony of the Constituent Assembly on 10 November 1956.

⁵ Materials in English on Indonesian constitutional history are scanty. A. Arthur Schiller, *The Formation of Federal Indonesia 1945-1949* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1955) covers one phase very thoroughly. His notes and bibliography cite the Dutch sources. George M. Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952) gives a vivid account of constitutional changes during the Revolution.

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nail provided in the polling booth for that purpose.⁶ He probably does not know exactly what position his party takes on the constitutional issues that are being raised by the convention and by recent events.

Of the many parties that President Sukarno criticized, four divided roughly four-fifths of the seats. The remaining fifth went to some thirty odd parties. As to the total number of parties President Sukarno was right. The system of proportional representation did produce too many parties.⁷ The behavior of these parties and the possible grounds for a stable coalition were something else. Could the parties get together in time and establish stable constitutional government? As President Sukarno indicated, time was running out.

The chart indicates how different the results were in Java, the most populous island, and in the outlying islands which are now in a state of semi-revolt. The nationalist, secular, and left wing parties polled their strongest vote in Java (Election Districts 1-4, inclusive) and the parties with religious orientation and backing were generally ahead in the outlying islands.

Of the nationalist parties, the Indonesian Nationalist Party (Partai Nasional Indonesia—PNI), is by far the strongest. It origi-

⁶ For the symbols of the four leading parties, see Chart. The Chart also shows the election districts, the apportionment of seats for the National Assembly and Constituent Assembly, and the results by districts of the Constituent Assembly Elections of December 1955. The large numbers give the location of the election districts, the names of which are given in the table. Due to a faulty working of the system, some elections districts did not get the number of seats apportioned to them. Thus Election District 10, E. Kalimantan (Borneo), was apportioned 6 Constituent Assembly seats but only obtained 2. The vote was light in this district and apparently only 2 seats were assigned in the first distribution. When remainders were pooled nationally, the E. Kalimantan lists did not fare well.

⁷ In the Election Law of 1953, Indonesians copied the Dutch system of proportional representation which tended to fragment political opinions. The some 150 parties presented a confusing picture to the voters. On the relationship of the system of representation to the number of parties, see Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties* (New York: Wiley, 1954). On the results in Indonesia, see Justus M. van der Kroef, "Indonesia: Search for Stability," *Current History*, XXXI (July 1956), 25-31; Irene Tinker and M. Walker, "First General Elections in India and Indonesia," *Far Eastern Survey*, XXV (July 1956), 97-110; Soedjatmoko, "The Role of Political Parties in Indonesia," in Philip W. Thayer, ed., *Nationalism and Progress in Free Asia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1956).

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nated in 1927 when a young engineer, one year out of Bandung Technical School, helped to form a movement of that name.⁸ The Dutch were very suspicious of the movement and of the man, whose name was Sukarno. Except for two years, 1932 and 1933, Sukarno spent the years from 1929 to 1942 in prison or in exile. Freed by the Japanese in 1942, he became their main collaborator, but this did not lessen his zeal for Indonesian nationalism nor his reputation as one of the founders of the Indonesian Republic. Actually, PNI began its organization work after 1945. After the withdrawal of the Japanese Sukarno remained as the head of the revolutionary movement which sought to shake off Dutch rule and to establish an independent Indonesian republic. PNI was in a key position to build up an organization. After he became president of the republic in 1945, Sukarno was nominally aloof from politics but in practice he did many things to aid PNI. A major share of the key civil service positions went to PNI, including those in the important Ministry of Information, which had field representatives everywhere down to the smallest village. Some Ministry of Information officials were PNI candidates in the elections and are now serving in the National Assembly.

As PNI developed its program, it became clear that it was above all nationalist. As one commentator put it, the party is still fighting the Dutch for independence.⁹ Another tenet of the party is "proletarian nationalism" (marhaenism), an Indonesian brand of socialism which may be linked to Indonesian village customs of doing things together and to the lack of Indonesian capitalists. On constitutional issues, PNI favors the secular state with religious freedom for all and a highly centralized government with power concentrated in Djakarta. This last policy is a reaction against the Dutch attempt to use federalism as a device for dividing and ruling. PNI came out on top in the popular vote because of the glamorous reputation of President Sukarno, the general enthusiasm for nationalism, the efficient political work of the PNI patronage machine, and the ineffectiveness of the opposition in capitalizing on the mis-

⁸ *New Century Cyclopedia of Names* (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1954).

⁹ Quoted by R. C. Bone, "The Future of Indonesian Political Parties," *Far Eastern Survey*, XXIII, No. 2, February 1954.

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takes made by PNI. Its vote was particularly heavy in Central and East Java. This party is trying to persuade the Sumatrans to end their revolt against central authority. It is not united on President Sukarno's anti-parliamentary proposals for a guided democracy, but it generally supports his views. Partly because of this split the party lost votes in the regional and municipal elections of 1957.

The minor nationalist parties did not fare so well in the Constituent Assembly elections. PRN, a small group that split off from PNI over the question of the recognition of the Viet Minh, which it opposed, and federalism, which it favored, won 3 seats in the Constituent Assembly. The other nationalist parties made hardly any showing.¹⁰

In a state whose inhabitants are estimated to be 90 per cent Muslim, it can be expected that religion will play an important part in political affairs. While the provisional constitution of 1950 provided for a secular state, Indonesian governments have had a Ministry of Religious Affairs. The Muslim political parties are the Masjumi, NU, Partai Sarikat Islam Indonesia (PSII), and Persatuan Tarbijah Islam (Perti). The two Christian parties are Partai Katolik Republic Indonesia, and Partai Keristen Indonesia (Parkindo), of which the former is Catholic and the latter is Protestant.

The Masjumi is a federation of Muslim theological, charitable, women's, youth, peasants', and other organizations that were formed by the Japanese to unite into a single body in order to provide a convenient means of controlling the Islamic religious community.¹¹ It ties together the Muslim religious community, the major Muslim social organizations, and their village leaders in a political party. Its 1946 program included the following: "Realization of the Islamic ideology in matters concerning the state in order to be able to establish a state based upon popular sovereignty and justice in harmony with teachings of Islam."¹² Emphasis has been placed upon the position of the village in the national economy with co-operatives as means of avoiding high interest rates. As compared with other parties, the Masjumi is less rabidly nationalistic and

¹⁰ Two separate factions of Persatuan Indonesian Raja won 1 seat each in the National Assembly.

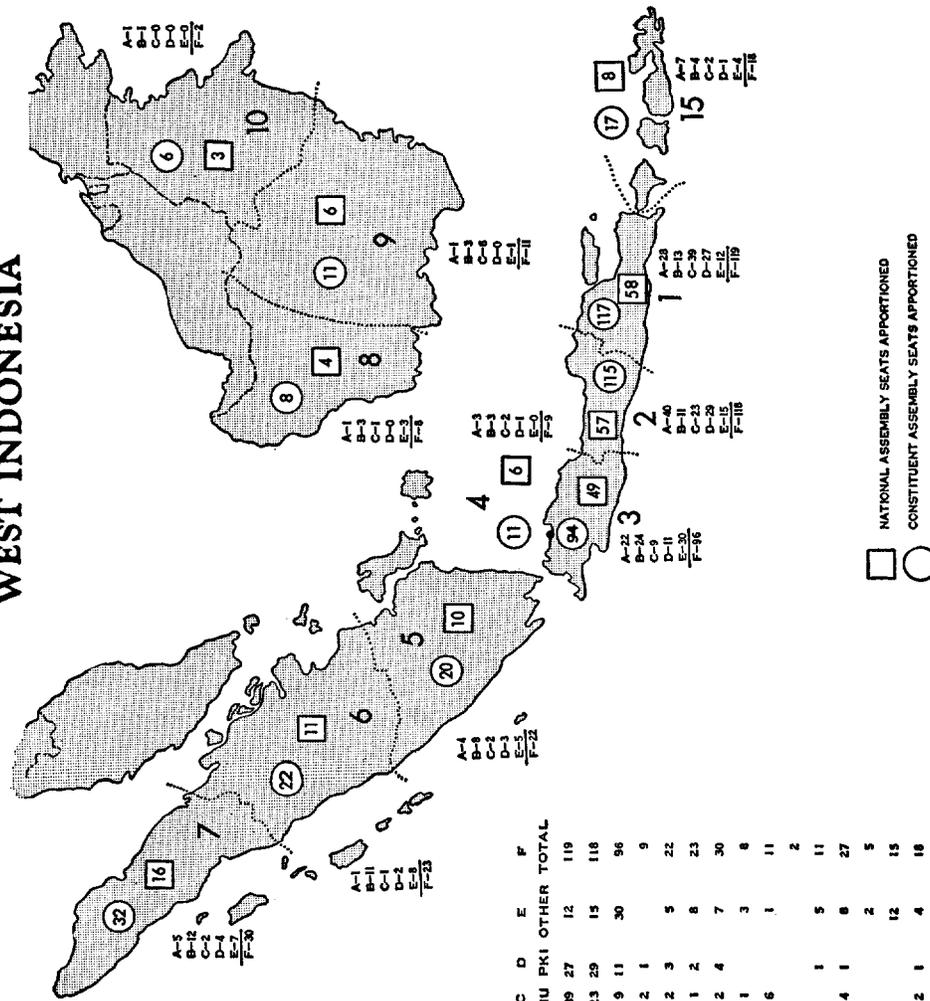
¹¹ Kahin, *op. cit.*, pp. 305-13.

¹² Emergency Program, 1946.

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INDONESIAN CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS OF DECEMBER 1955

WEST INDONESIA



DISTRICTS	A	B	C	D	E	F	OTHER	TOTAL
1. E. JAVA	28	13	39	27	12	119		119
2. C. JAVA	30	11	23	29	15	118		118
3. W. JAVA	22	24	9	11	30	96		96
4. G. DJAKARTA	3	3	2	1		9		9
5. SUMATRA	4	8	2	3	5	22		22
6. C. SUMATRA	1	11	1	2	8	23		23
7. N. SUMATRA	5	12	2	4	7	30		30
8. W. KALIMANTAN	1	3	1	3	8			15
9. S. KALIMANTAN	1	3	6		1	11		11
10. E. KALIMANTAN	1	1				2		2
11. N. & C. SULAWESI	2	3	1	5	11			22
12. S. & SE. SULAWESI	2	12	4	1	8	27		47
13. MOLUCCAS	1	2			2	5		5
14. E. I. SUNDA	1	2			12	15		15
15. W. I. SUNDA	7	4	2	1	4	18		18
16. W. IRIAN								
	119	112	91	60	112	514		898

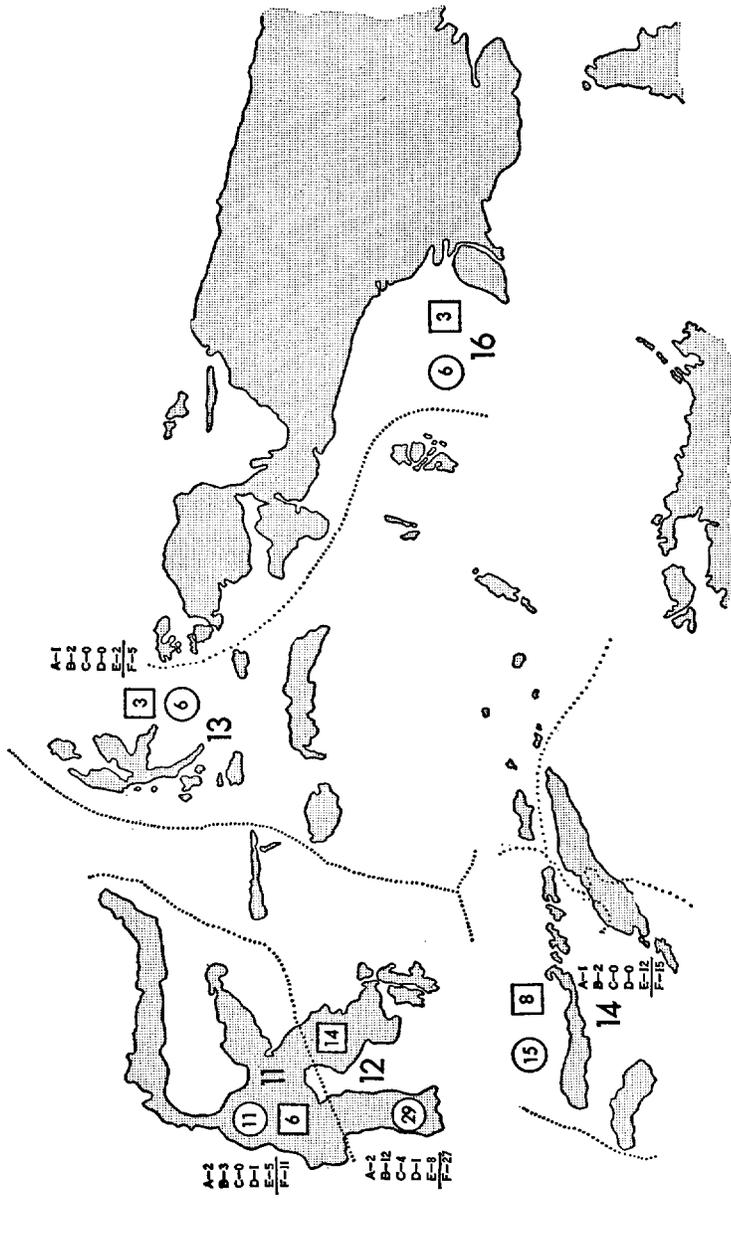
□ NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SEATS APPORTIONED
○ CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY SEATS APPORTIONED

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EAST INDONESIA



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more inclined to recognize the need for foreign capital in the development of Indonesian natural resources.¹³ In the early Indonesian governments it worked closely with PSI. On constitutional questions it favors responsible party government, recognition of Islam as a state religion, federalism and greater local autonomy. It has refused to accept President Sukarno's plan for a guided democracy and it has declared that the present cabinet is illegal because it is not responsible to Parliament.

How did it happen that the political experts overestimated the electoral strength of the Masjumi? ¹⁴ It was in Central and East Java that the Masjumi fell down.¹⁵ In the rest of the country, as the chart shows, it led the other parties as it was expected to do. During the campaign, the Masjumi was subject to strong attacks by PNI and PKI.¹⁶ The party was accused of being pro-American and of not being really orthodox in religious matters. Control over the local religious leaders and teachers was shared with NU and other Muslim parties. The leaders of the Masjumi failed to realize what had to be done in order to win a political campaign. The Harahap government failed to clean out the PNI partisans in the civil service and it failed to capitalize on the mistakes of its predecessors. The results of the 1957 regional and municipal elections show that the party has not remedied these defects as yet.

The NU, or Indonesian Scholars' Association (Nahdlatul-'Ulama), is a conservative splinter of the Masjumi, which is strong among Muslim teachers and mosque officials in East, Middle and West Java, Sulawesi, and Kalimantan. It was founded in East Java in 1926 as a nonpolitical religious organization to promote Islamic law. It split away from the Masjumi in 1952 because it did not receive the religious ministry in the Wilopo cabinet. It has women's, youth, students', farmers', and labor subsidiaries. In the Constituent Assembly it favors a preferential position in the con-

¹³ Financial and Economic Urgency Programme, December 1955.

¹⁴ David Landman, "Independence in its Infancy," *New Republic*, CXXXIII (October 3, 1955).

¹⁵ The election figures given by Tinker and Walker, *op. cit.*, are based on press service reports (Antara) which failed to catch an error of over 800,000 votes in the unofficial returns for the Masjumi Party in Central Java National Assembly elections of 1955.

¹⁶ *Suluh Indonesia* (PNI) and *Harian Rakyat* (PKI) for 27 September 1955.

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stitution for Islam, a bicameral legislature, greater local autonomy, a requirement that the president (and possibly the religious affairs and education ministers) be Muslim, and the abolition of special representation in parliament of Chinese, Eurasians, and Arabs. While it failed to take a positive position against Communism in the Ali Communist-supported cabinet during 1953-55, it participated in the formation of a government in 1956 which excluded PKI and it accepted positions in the nonpartisan emergency cabinet of Djuana.

The unexpectedly large vote received by NU may be traced to several causes. NU undoubtedly benefitted from the bitter attacks made on the Masjumi by PNI and PKI. Many Muslims, confused by the sweeping accusations made against the Masjumi, were not attracted by the Nationalist appeals but turned to NU. The long control which NU had of the Ministry of Religious Affairs enabled the party to build up a patronage machine. Without fanfare, NU campaigned in the *langgar-langgar*, the primitive kampong prayer houses in the rural areas. They conducted a simple campaign along religious lines with no general propaganda or modern techniques. At their meetings they explained the sectarian differences which they had with the Masjumi.¹⁷ These methods seemed to work with the Indonesian voters in the rural areas, especially in Central and East Java. The NU was fortunate in 1955, but the 1957 regional and municipal electoral losses have shown its lack of leadership.

PSII is a radical Islamic party claiming origin in 1911 as Sarikat Islam, Indonesia's first political party. It has cooperated with PNI rather than with the Masjumi and it was represented in the Ali cabinet of 1956. In the Constituent Assembly elections it won 16 seats.

Perti is a small Islamic party with its main support in Central Sumatra. It obtained 7 seats in the Constituent Assembly elections. The Minister of Public Affairs in the recent Ali Government was a member of this party.

The connections which the Muslim parties have had with the armed rebel Darul Islam (DI) gangs of West Java, North Sumatra, and Sulawesi have not been brought out in the open, but it seems

¹⁷ Interviews with NU leaders.

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likely that Masjumi and NU use their influence against a violent repression of the dissidents, hoping for a peaceful solution of the security problem.

The members of the Catholic party are concentrated largely in a few communities in Central and East Java and in the largely Catholic population of Flores. It won 10 seats in the Constituent Assembly. It will combine with PNI and PKI to oppose a constitution recognizing Islam as a state religion. It has been represented in many cabinets since it has many able administrators in its ranks.

Parkindo is made up of members of several Protestant sects found in Indonesia. On constitutional issues it stands with PNI and the Catholic Party for a secular state. Its votes come largely from North Central Sumatra, North Celebes, and Ambon. It won 16 seats in the Constituent Assembly. It owes its participation in Indonesian cabinets to the education and technical competence of its leaders.

While there are 8 Marxist parties, only half of them made any showing in the elections. These are: PKI, Partai Sosialis Indonesia (PSI), Partai Murba, and Partai Buruh.

The PKI was founded in 1920 and this makes it one of the oldest of the Indonesian political parties. It has had many ups and downs, including unsuccessful attempts at rebellion in 1926 and 1948. Since the establishment of the Indonesian Republic, it has expanded its membership and increased the power and influence of affiliated front groups, the most important of which is Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia (SOBSI), the largest trade union confederation in the country. Other front organizations include veterans', farmers', youth, women's, cultural, and peace groups.¹⁸

The PKI program, like other Communist party programs, emphasizes the elimination of colonialism, imperialism, and feudalism, looking forward to the formation of a "people's democracy." It declaims against foreign capital and advocates the nationalization of certain enterprises. PKI plays down as completely as possible

¹⁸ Ruth Thomas McVey, *The Development of the Indonesian Communist Party and Its Relations with the Soviet Union and the Chinese Peoples Republic* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Center for International Studies, 1954).

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the antireligious character of international Communism and avoids alarming the peasants with talk of collectivization. It welcomed President Sukarno's speech criticizing political parties. Naturally, it favors the secular state, centralization and President Sukarno's plan for a "guided democracy."

PKI is the best organized of the Indonesian parties for waging a political campaign. Its organization follows the familiar pattern for Communist parties, but this pattern with its highly developed hierarchy and carefully worked out membership rules and procedures is strange to most Indonesians.¹⁹ During the campaign the well disciplined cadres used effectively such campaign devices as parades, literature, posters, huge statues, mass meetings, small meetings, house-to-house canvassing in the cities and villages, and special events. It won outstanding victories in Central and East Java, polling an overwhelming vote in Semarang and Surabaya. The electoral showing makes the party one of the strongest Communist parties in Asia outside the Communist orbit. It increased its prestige by the spectacular gains made in the regional and municipal elections of 1957. Of all the parties it has given President Sukarno most enthusiastic support.

The small size of the PSI vote was a disappointment to its leaders and to some foreign observers.²⁰ Sjahrir was the first prime minister of the Republic and his reputation as a revolutionary leader who refused to collaborate with the Japanese gave him considerable influence over the younger intelligentsia.²¹ That was one of the troubles with the campaign put on by PSI, it was aimed at too high an intellectual level. Another difficulty which the party faced was the long period of time that Sjahrir had been out of power. After its poor showing in the elections, PSI may pay more attention to mass organization and mass appeals. Although the party won only 10 seats in the Constituent Assembly, it will still be influential because of the high calibre of its leaders. It has followed a strong anti-Communist policy and espouses a socialism which calls for the adaptation of Marxian ideas to Indonesian conditions.

Partai Murba was founded by Tan Malaka, a former leader of

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Landman, *op. cit.*

²¹ Soetan Sjahrir, *Out of Exile* (New York: John Day Co., 1949).

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PKI who was reportedly executed in 1948 along with some PKI leaders who participated in the rebellion. The party has been often referred to as Trotskyite but it is frequently closer to the Moscow line than PKI. Attempts to reunite Murba and PKI have failed for ideological reasons. Murba won 4 seats in the Constituent Assembly.

Partai Buruh, the labor party, represents a small part of the labor movement and it has a socialist rather than a communist orientation. Its principal strength is found in Central Java. In the Constituent Assembly elections, it won 5 seats.

There are some 23 other parties that won seats in the Constituent Assembly but only one of them, Ikatan Pendukung Kemerdekaan Indonesia (IPKI) with 8 seats, won more than 3 seats. Eleven of these parties won single seats only.

This brief description of the individual parties gives some idea of the problems facing the Constituent Assembly. The struggle over the selection of a chairman of the Assembly indicated the way the lines would be drawn. The parties which were pro-Western, liberal on economic questions, and moderately nationalistic lost by a narrow margin. Those parties which were anti-Western, ultra nationalistic, and against modernization elected their man. The work will be slow and arduous. It may be three years before the Constituent Assembly comes up with a draft constitution. Disturbed economic, political and military conditions may in the meantime decide some of the constitutional issues. If some form of federation is not adopted or if the central military authority cannot establish its supremacy over the regional military leaders, the Republic of Indonesia as based on the territories that once comprised the Dutch East Indies might disintegrate. If the moderate parties are not willing to fight for democratic institutions, then the extremists, the ultra fanatical nationalists and the Communists might take over. The general elections in which such high hopes were placed did not solve the political and economic problems of the Republic of Indonesia. President Sukarno's virtual repudiation of these elections by his National Advisory Council and Emergency Cabinet has so far deepened the crisis and the division of the country. In searching for a stable constitutional government, the Indonesians face trying days ahead.

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