H. de Graaf

The Indonesian declaration of independence. 17th August 1945

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THE INDONESIAN DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

17th OF AUGUST 1945 ¹

Although the proclamation of Indonesian Independence is a fact which is still fresh in many a mind, the particulars reported about it are neither numerous nor absolutely certain. On the contrary, legend has already penetrated into the history of this event, a fact to which the retired vice-president of the Republic of Indonesia drew the attention only the other day; he even warned against this legend coming into existence. Therefore it seems to me that it would be a good thing, for Indonesia as well as for the rest of the world, to try and draw away the curtain of myth and come as near to the truth as possible. In doing this we can now make use of richer source material than was the case some years ago. For this purpose we may refer to the list of sources at the end of this paper.

In one of the writings composed after Japan's surrender by Japanese officers for the use of the Allied authorities, in order to inform them on the management of the Netherlands Indies by the Japanese, it is openly declared that it was never the deliberate intention of Japan to grant independence to the Indonesians. All the measures conducive to the participation of the Indonesians in the government of their country, were only intended to obtain the cooperation of the population for the Japanese war aims. As the military and economic circumstances of the Japanese became more unfavourable, however, the price to be paid for this cooperation increased. Finally, at the end of July 1945, the supreme leaders found themselves compelled to promise complete independence to the Indonesians at short notice, after having done so before, in September 1944, with realization "di kemudian hari" (in the future).

Now about this time the territory of the Netherlands Indies, as far as it was not yet occupied by the Allied Powers, was subordinate to

¹ After a lecture held in the monthly meeting of the Oostersch. Genootschap in Holland on the 3rd of April 1957 in the Snouck Hurgronje House at Leiden.

three bodies, viz. Java under the command of the 16th army, Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula under that of the 25th, the rest being so-called Navy territory. Therefore measures regarding the whole former Netherlands Indies could only be taken by an authority ranking above these lower organs, in this case by general Itagaki, head of the 7th territorial army, of Singapore. So, by the end of July 1945, it was there that a meeting of staff-officers from Sumatra, Java and the Malay Peninsula took place, where the Navy was also represented.

It was no longer necessary to advise or decide about the granting of the independence, as Tokyo had already taken a decision about it. Only the measures to be taken in connection with the forthcoming independence had to be considered. Two committees were appointed, a Japanese and an Indonesian one. The first would have to do the hardest job, namely that of preparing the gradual transfer of activities from the Japanese to the Indonesians. Not General Itagaki who was not allowed to leave his post at Singapore, would be the chairman of the committee that was to work in Java, but General Nagano, the head of the 16th army in Java. Nishimura, the head of the Department of General Affairs in Java, drew up the agenda, which ran to no less than 20 pages. This committee first met on 7th August, but, although composed of capable officers, technical experts and experienced officials, it was of opinion that it would not have finished before the end of the year, although it ought to be ready at the beginning of September.

In the long run a more important part was allotted to the Indonesian council for the preparation of the independence. Its members were appointed by the Japanese Military Government of Java; there would be 15 members from Java, 3 from Sumatra and the same number from Celebes. The chairman would be a Javanese. The council was allowed to lay down a constitution and to choose a chairman. It would be solemnly inaugurated at Buitenzorg on the 18th of August and the next day it would be allowed to start its activities, that is to say, in order to promote quiet working, not in noisy Jakarta, but in the mountain hotel Sela-Bintana.

Finally, according to an order from Tokyo received by Marshal Terauchi on the 5th of August, it was decided that Sukarna, Hatta and Radjiman would fly to Saigon, in order to accept the solemn assurance of Tokyo's plans about Indonesia from the said marshal, who stood immediately under the chief command. In point of fact they should have proceeded to Tokyo, in order to receive the independence of Indonesia from the Japanese government itself, but the problems of

the voyage as well as the depressing view which the destroyed city offered in these days, made this less desirable. So the said trio, of which Sukarna and Hatta formed the more progressive, and Radjiman the more conservative element, travelled to Saigon, supposedly to tender their thanks for the independence now promised at short notice.

Not before the 11th of August were they received with some splendour at Dalat, a small place in the mountains, at a distance of about 300 kilometres from Saigon, where Terauchi was staying at the time. The reception hall, where the aged, suffering marshal spoke to them, was a stately, white-panelled room. Sukarna and Hatta were in evening-dress with kupiah and wore the decorations conferred on them by Tojo in November 1943, whilst Radjiman paid his respects clad in national costume. Photographs were taken, which appeared in the press, and a sound film was made, which failed.

It seems that in his official speech Terauchi informed them of three things:

1. that the independence would extend over the *whole territory* of the former Netherlands Indies;
2. that, at the discretion of the imperial government, the independence would only begin, when the *preparatory work* would have been finished; that is to say *gradually*, so Java first, after that the Outer Provinces, in proportion as the preparatory committees to be established in Sumatra and Borneo would finish their work.
3. finally the independence would have to be in accordance with the *demands of the war*. The Indonesians should continue to support the Japanese in their struggle against the Allied Powers.

Sukarna replied by expressing his gratitude to the high wisdom of H.M. the Emperor and promised to do his duty with all his heart.

After that a less official conversation took place till about 1 p.m.. Perhaps it was then that Sukarna pressed the point of allotting the Malay Peninsula and North Borneo to Indonesia, but Hatta did not much care for it. According to the latter Terauchi is alleged to have also stated: "It is up to you to define when Indonesia will be independent", but these words can be considered as being a free interpretation of Terauchi's second promise.

In the evening the three Indonesians were the guests of the Japanese general.

On the 14th of August, at 5 p.m., they alighted from their plane again at Batavia airfield, where they were received by Japanese and

Indonesian authorities. Sukarna delivered a short speech there, in which he gave expression to his conviction that Indonesian independence was very near: "Formerly he might have said that independence would come within the *ripening* of the djagung (maize), but now he was sure that it would come even before the maize would *blossom*." Thereupon he exclaimed: "Dai Nippon Banzai!" and the head of the Japanese Military Government present, General Yamamoto, replied to this with a "Indonesia Banzai!" All this according to the newspaper-report.

Next day, the 15th, in the morning, Sukarna and Hatta paid a visit to General Nagano, the commander of the 16th army, in order to report to him about their journey to the head-quarters at Saigon-Dalat, on which occasion Sukarna paid his thanks to the general for all the facilities granted.

On the 15th of August 1945 at noon, Japanese time, the speech of the Japanese emperor, Tenno Heika, was broadcasted and also heard in Indonesia, in which speech the suspension of hostilities was announced, by which Japan actually admitted its defeat.

The contents of this speech, broadcast in Japanese, naturally reached the Japanese in the first place, but did not remain a secret for the Indonesians very long. The altered behaviour of the Japanese after the reception of the speech was sufficient to draw their attention. Therefore it need not create surprise that at about 3 p.m. Sukarna, Hatta and Subardja came to the office of the Japanese Rear-Admiral Maeda. Sukarna stated that he had already applied to some Japanese authorities, but nobody had been able to receive him. He asked Maeda whether it was true that the situation had undergone an important change. According to this statement Maeda answered: "Although it is fairly certain that an important change has taken place, no official telegram has yet been received about it and therefore it is not possible to answer you (officially)". According to the Rear-Admiral the conversation was of a painful and tense nature. The Japanese interpreter Nishijima further stated that Subardja declared at the end: "that it made no difference whether Japan surrendered or not; we still have to continue fighting for independence".

The uncommunicative attitude of Maeda must have struck the Indonesians as peculiar because this naval officer had always tried to keep in touch with the Indonesian people. As a naval officer, who had seen more of the world than the average army officer, he had a more exact view of the situation than the slightly narrow-minded military men. He spoke several languages, and was in charge of the Bukanfu

at Batavia, the naval purchasing-office, which had to effect the liaison between the army and the navy in Indonesia. He did not exclusively confine himself, however, to his military task, but in order to make himself acquainted with the circumstances in Java, he founded an information office of his own there, of which Subardja was the head. Through this office, which cost him a good deal of money, he obtained a better insight into Javanese matters than was afforded by the official army-bulletins. Moreover he took the liberty to establish an *ashrama* (boarding-school) of his own for young Indonesian nationalists, to which prominent leaders were attached as teachers and where rather radical doctrines were propagated.

Less unheading than the military men, he thus won the hearts of many nationalists who were sure of always finding a ready ear with Maeda for complaints and objections. So the reserved attitude of Maeda — to be explained in consequence of the shock he had received when obtaining the news about Japan's surrender — must have impressed his Indonesian visitors deeply.

It seemed as if they had now lost their last support, as they had nothing to expect from the Allied Powers. Time after time the Netherlands Indies radio from Australia had assured them that for those who had made common cause with the Japanese, there would be no mercy. Their own adherents, overcome by the Japanese defeats and increasing indigence, were clearly decreasing in number. It was to be expected that, after Japan's fall, especially the moderate-minded groups would try to make a compromise with the Allied Powers, in this case the Dutch. However, Sukarna, the inventor of the slogan: "Amerika distrika, Inggris dilinggis" (America will be ironed flat, England will be clubbed to death) could have little hope on mercy from the side of Japan's enemies. Even after the proclamation of independence on the 17th of August he was firmly convinced of his forthcoming arrest, and he telephoned daily to the Japanese to find out whether the warrant of arrest had already been received, whilst Hatta, in preparedness for a compulsory removal, had already packed his trunks.

As now even Maeda seemed to let him down, Sukarna must have had as only support the extremist nationalists, who were mainly found in great numbers among the young people.

What groups were these, which afterwards, under the name of *pemudas* (the younger ones) played such an important part?

Shortly after the occupation of the Indies by Japan several "younger people" had already combined to form organisations, which must be

considered partly as spontaneous manifestations of youth, partly as extensions of the political groupings of adults. Some of them were rather disposed to strive after the Greater-East Asiatic ideal together with the Japanese; others felt more attracted to a free Indonesia. Especially the latter group considered Sukarna to be its leader elect. Its leader was Sukarni Kartadiwirja ².

The Japanese tried to make use of these turbulent youths for their war plans. In the first place, on the 29th of April 1943, they founded the Seinendan, the official Japanese youth organisation, which tried to make the young people familiar with Japanese political and military ideals.

When it had been at work for somewhat less than half a year, and the Japanese supposed that they had at their disposal a fair number of boys well-trained in the Japanese fashion, the Volunteer Army of the Peta was founded (3rd October 1943), consisting of selected young men, to whom a complete military training was given. Even the door to an officer's training was opened.

Besides, in the middle of 1944, the impulse was given to the Benteng Perdjuangan Djawa Movement (Fighting Stronghold of Java), which in principle aimed at activating the masses in various social fields, but finally resulted in a general, primitive arming of the people, a defective militia equipped with bamboo spears, bamboo helmets and such like. Here especially the younger people (up to 35 years) were not slow to respond. Strange organisations were formed, such as *women's corps* and *suicide troops* (in imitation of the Japanese). These are the groupings, usually called *pemuda* (with its feminine counterpart *pemudi*) which often were in strong support of a radical policy.

Later on the Japanese reported that since April 1945 this youth movement was out of their control. They began to act for themselves. New groupings arose under the names of Angkatan Muda (Youth Corps) and Angkatan Baru (New Corps). But, as the Japanese stated, although they were active, there was not much question of an actual organisation. It is not possible to trace whether by these names separate bodies were really meant or only certain modalities within the movement as a whole. At all events the latter group beat the former one. The Japanese, who had so far followed these movements patiently but attentively — information about them was allowed to appear in the press — now took action and forbade the Angkatan Baru, on account

² Usually he is mentioned only by his first name.

of its radical and extremist purposes, as a consequence of which this movement was disbanded. Even in July 1945 many younger people were arrested. It goes without saying that this movement had not thereby ceased to exist. There are many hidden ways of continuing an illegal action.

It was also in this period that Chairul Saleh and Sukarni, whom so far the Japanese had managed to keep in the Sendenbu or Intelligence Service, were dismissed from it, because they had refused to be appointed as members of the Committee of Investigation into the Preparation of Indonesian Independence, — a body preceding the Preparatory Council already mentioned. With these appointments the Japanese had aimed at the representation of the younger element in the Committee of Investigation. Since then there was no further contact between these men and the Japanese Military Government, and they escaped the attention of the Japanese for some time, until the abduction of Sukarna and Hatta brought them to the fore again.³

The news of Japan's surrender had also spread among these younger men and they now deemed it time to act. One of them, Adam Malik, who devoted a malicious booklet to it, "Riwayat Proklamasi 17 Agustus 1945", stated that on the 15th of August, at 8 p.m. a number of them met in a room behind the Bacteriological Laboratory in Pegangsaan Timur, Batavia, under the leadership of Chairul Saleh. There they discussed what attitude would have to be taken in the present situation, how the Indonesian people would proclaim its independence, apart from the "Kemerdekaan Hadiah" (Granted Independence) as offered to them by the Japanese, and what the attitude would be towards Sukarna and Hatta.

They decided to proclaim the Independence *themselves*, free from foreign interference from whatever side. As regards Bung-Karno and Hatta ⁴ it was decided to have a discussion with them for the last time

³ It is these radical younger people, with whom Sukarna had always found a ready ear, who, on the 4th of August 1945, were summoned by Sukarna and Hatta to be in Batavia towards the middle of August — without doubt with full knowledge and perhaps even at the initiative of the Japanese Government. The object of this meeting was kept very vague, but perhaps it was a last effort of the Japanese Government to get these youth groups in hand again through the intermediary of Sukarna.

Of course, this meeting with its vague aims never came off. It may be that it gave rise to a certain concentration of *pemudas* in Batavia. At all events the *pemudas* in Java became a power which the Japanese as well as the nationalist leaders had to take into account.

⁴ Bung, "older brother", is the familiar word used for addressing political leaders.

that they might sever all ties with the Japanese, *Putus dari Djepang!* (Independent of Japan!) In order to communicate this to them Wikana and Darwis were delegated. They would meet again at 71 Tjikini, in order to hear the report of the delegates.

At 10 p.m. Wikana and Darwis put in their appearances with Sukarna in his house at 56 Pegangsaan Timur. According to Malik (p. 36—37) the interview took the following course: they asked him what his attitude as leader of the people would be towards the Indonesian question.

Sukarna answered that he would not believe in the Japanese surrender before an official statement was issued. As regards Indonesian independence, they would certainly be free, as this question only bided its time, because all preparations had nearly been finished now.

The delegates inquired after Sukarna's opinion: "Must we wait until Independence is given us as a "present", although Japan itself has surrendered and is defeated in its Holy War?"

Sukarna's answer was that they would wait first, as the question of the independence had been settled.

The delegates asked in their turn: "Why does not the people itself proclaim its independence? Why do not *we* declare ourselves independent as a nation?"

Sukarna stated that he was not able to decide on that before he had consulted his other friends; he also first wanted to hear official declarations of Japan's surrender and how matters would develop in connection with the independence which now was in the making.

Shortly afterwards Hatta, Subardja, dr Buntaran and other prominent men made their appearance in the room. Various views were again expounded. Sukarna inquired after Hatta's opinion.

Hatta, who had already been sounded by Sjahrir, stated that, as long as the news of Japan's surrender had not yet been confirmed officially and they did not know the opinion of the Gunseikan (Head of the Japanese Military Government) and the Sumubutyō (Head of General Affairs), he and Sukarna were not allowed to proclaim independence.

He further said that he and Sukarna would not allow themselves to be chivvied or bullied. For the rest, "If you are ready and willing to proclaim, *tjobalah!* (go ahead!) I would like to see your *sanggupan* (strength)".

The delegates answered: "If this is your opinion, be it so! We younger ones do not feel justified in delaying the proclamation beyond

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Een 16de eeuwse Maleise vertaling van
de Burda van Al-Būṣīrī
Verhandelingen deel XVIII - 1955 f 8,50

W. KERN

Commentaar op de Salasilah van Koetai
Verhandeling deel XIX - 1956 f 16,—

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Waropense Teksten (Geelvinkbaai, Noord-
Nieuw-Guinea)
Verhandelingen deel XX - 1956 f 18,—

H. R. VAN HEEKEREN

The Stone Age of Indonesia
Verhandelingen deel XXI - 1957 f 15,—
in linnen band f 18,—

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The Bronze-Iron Age of Indonesia
Verhandelingen deel XXII - 1958 f 15,—
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De Regering van Sultan Agung, vorst van
Mataram 1613-1645 en die van zijn voorganger
Panembahan Séda-Ing-Krapjak 1601-1613
Verhandelingen deel XXIII - 1958 f 22,—

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Adat Atjèh, Reproduced in facsimile from
a manuscript in the India Office Library
Verhandelingen deel XXIV - 1958 f 10,—

A. TEEUW

Lombok, een dialect-geografische studie
Verhandelingen deel XXV - 1958 f 22,—

TEUKU ISKANDAR

De Hikajat Atjèh
Verhandelingen deel XXVI - 1958 f 10,—

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The first contest for Singapore 1819-1824
Verhandelingen deel XXVII - 1959 f 18,—

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daytime to-morrow. We, younger ones, will take measures and show the strength which you desire".

At about 11.30 a.m. the two delegates left the premises of 56 Pegangsaan Timur with very mixed feelings.

From the last remarks of Hatta and the two visitors it may be concluded that at the end the conversation was of a rather heated nature. And we learn from the very concise report, drawn up by Hatta, that Sukarna kept his end up. In his "Legend and reality about the proclamation of the 17th of August", Moh. Hatta, in a note on p. 338, informs us that he was just busy drawing up the text of the proclamation of independence, which would be discussed in the Preparatory Council next day, when Subardja asked him to come with him to Sukarna, as the latter was surrounded by some *pemudas* under the leadership of Wikana and Chairul Saleh. By these *pemudas* evidently the two delegates Wikana and Darwis are meant. The former urged Sukarna to announce on the radio that very evening that Indonesia had freed itself from the Japanese grip. As Sukarna refused (it was indeed quite impossible) Wikana threatened him with the words: "If Bung Karno will not make this announcement this same evening, there will be blood and murder to-morrow on a large scale".

On hearing these words, it is said, the blood rushed to Sukarna's head and he went up to Wikana exclaiming: "Here is my neck; drag me into that corner and take my life this very evening! You need not wait until to-morrow".

Wikana then is said to have drawn in his horns a little and declared that he did not mean Sukarna, but the Ambonese, being the tools of the Dutch.

If we somewhat tone up Malik's report and tone down that of Hatta, the reports do not differ so very much, especially if we take into consideration that both are incomplete.

At midnight a presumably still larger meeting consisting of representatives of various youth groups took place at 71 Tjiki, in the large back verandah.

Just after midnight Chairul Saleh opened the meeting and shortly after that the two delegates Wikana and Darwis, who had visited Sukarna, delivered their report. Thereupon a discussion was held. It was brought to the fore that, if Bung Karno and Hatta did not want to pronounce the proclamation, the people itself should do so in a big public meeting. Others proposed that they should again take counsel

with Bung Karno and Hatta in a place where the people itself could exert pressure.

Before the meeting adopted a resolution, Sukarni and J. Kunto suddenly joined in the discussion. Thereupon a common resolution was adopted, namely that independence should be announced immediately by the people itself, and that they should not await the independence-as-a-present. As regards Bung Karno and Hatta it was decided that they should be brought outside the town into a territory where the population and the volunteers' army (Peta) were quite prepared for every contingency which would arise when the proclamation had been read (A. Malik p. 38).

After that the meeting was adjourned for some time, during which Chairul Saleh, Sukarni, Singgih (of the Peta), J. Kunto and dr Muwardi deliberated how they would get Sukarna and Hatta outside the town. Singgih, in the name of the Peta, promised to co-operate.⁵

At about 4 o'clock Javanese time (i.e. 5.30 Japanese time) a car left 71 Tjikini, in which Chairul Saleh, Sukarni, J. Kunto and dr Muwardi were seated. First they went to D. Asmara's house at Pekalongan Road in order to borrow his car. After that dr Muwardi was taken to 56 Pegangsaan Timur, in order to awaken Bung Karno, Sukarni and J. Kunto continuing their way to Bung Hatta. After arriving there Sukarni sent a guard to awaken Hatta. The latter took fright, appeared at the door and asked Sukarni: "What is the idea?" He answered: "Bung, get ready at once as the situation is very critical; the people's patience is at an end. The Dutch and Japanese will stick at nothing. In view of what is going to happen the younger ones and the people do not want to bear any further responsibility if you still remain in town".

It was only when Hatta heard of all these things that he got ready, although he was angry at being turned out of bed.

Dr Muwardi, who had to awaken Sukarna did not dare do so because he was sleeping so soundly. Therefore he waited until Chairul Saleh arrived together with D. Asmara. Only then he was pressed to awaken Bung Karno. The latter put the same question as his friend Hatta and obtained more or less the same answer. For the stated reason he was bidden to leave town at a quarter past four. Partly under compulsion, Sukarna said that he would soon be ready to go with them. Shortly after, Sukarni and J. Kunto appeared with Bung Hatta, but at this

⁵ It is curious that this very evening of the 15th of August it was rumoured in Batavia that Sukarna and Hatta were carried off by *pemudas* (Report of Celebes Representative).

moment Hatta discovered that he had forgotten his coat and he had to be taken back in order to fetch it.

It was not before 4.30 a.m. on the 16th of August 1945 that Sukarna left, accompanied by his wife and his son Guntur in one car, with J. Kunto, whilst Sukarni and Hatta were in the second car.

Chairul Saleh went back to 71 Tjikini, where the other *pemudas* had awaited the result of this precarious hour. Then only they went home.

The journey of the two cars was not delayed, not even by the Japanese watch-posts. When Sukarna perceived that he was outside the town, he asked where they were taking him, but Sukarni did not give any information. Sukarna now became suspicious, but Sukarni set his mind at ease and is said even to have informed him that he was taking him to the first *independent territory* of the future Republic. Sukarna, however, insisted on being taken back to Batavia. Only in the town could the wishes of the people and the youth groups be fulfilled and could the Japanese be consulted. Sukarni, however, was adamant.

On their way gun-shots were heard. At last Sukarni was forced to bring his car to a standstill and to transfer Bung Karno to a convoy of cars of the Peta, which overtook them. Bung Karno got a Peta-uniform and he was requested to change his clothes, as his destination might have become known to the Japanese. Sukarna took the hint and with Sukarni changed to another car, whilst his wife and son followed in their own car.

It was only when they had passed the post near Tjakung that they reached their destination, that is to say the Rengas Dengklok barracks. In that place a group of volunteers was still doing some police work, and they had provided accomodation for a group of *pemudas*, adherents of Sukarni. According to Malik's report the Peta officers there were already informed about the plans, and had taken measures for isolating themselves from the surrounding territory, in order to form the first basis for the territory of the Republic. All this seems somewhat fantastic. It seems more likely, that everybody was completely unprepared for what was going happen, although Malik tries to give the impression that everything happened systematically (p. 41). They seem to have arrested some people here and there, e.g. the resident of Batavia, Sutardja, who was on a tour of duty, a *wedana* (head of a district), and two Japanese charged with rice-growing affairs. In the evening these people were released again.

Now Sukarna and Hatta were brought to separate rooms (p. 42), where they had to wait for some hours. According to his writings this

annoyed Hatta very much. "There we were doomed to inactivity for one day, whilst we had to witness from afar the failing of an idea which was not based on reality" (p. 335).

Hatta's assertion, however, that no discussions were held, must be doubted, as Adam Malik is very positive here. After having taken a rest for some hours Sukarna and Hatta were taken to a room of the barracks where Sukarni, dr Sutjipta, Umar Bachsan, the commander, and other members of the staff were awaiting them (p. 42).

Sukarni started the discussions: the only intention of the abduction had been to beg the two leaders to announce Independence as soon as possible in the name of the whole population, as circumstances made this imperative. Otherwise a violent insurrection of those who were against independence was to be feared. Therefore it was necessary to carry the proclamation into effect in the name of the entire population, labourers, farmers and army. If not, the population would no longer answer for the consequence, especially for those concerning the well-being of the two brethren.

It is said that Bung Karno and Hatta kept silent, timid and confused, being torn between the Japanese and their people. They only repeatedly asked: "Is it true that Japan has surrendered?" Sukarni replied: "Brethren, judge for yourselves!" pointing somewhat melodramatically to the robust Peta fighters and adding: "There is no doubt any more about the surrender of Japan". Thus Bung Karno could not give a further answer and persisted in his undecided and confused attitude. Thereupon Sukarni decided to send J. Kunto to Jakarta (Batavia) in order to deliver his report and to take counsel with the groups at Jakarta.

Whilst Sukarna and Hatta filled at least part of the day with discussions at Rengas Dengklok, a secret conversation took place from 10 to 11.30 a.m. on the 16th of August in the billiard-room of the Zoological Gardens. Chairul Saleh *cum suis* took part in it, and the Peta was represented by Captain (?) Abdul-Latif and his colleague Singa-Dimedja (43).

It is said that a plan of campaign of 7 articles seizing power in the town of Jakarta was drawn up. The Peta and the Heiho (auxiliary troops) were to strike the first blow at the Japanese. They would supply the "students", who, as has been mentioned above, had received a military training, with the arms they captured. They would take the students in trucks as a reserve to the outskirts of the town. An investigation into the barracks and watch-posts of the Japanese, which

had already begun some hours ago, would be carried on by the People's and Students' *pemudas*. The leadership of the military activities would be in the hands of the leaders of Peta and Heiho. The armed surprise attack would take place at 1 a.m., August 17th. After that, communications, code words and passwords were agreed on.

In the light of subsequent affairs the radical younger men may be glad that this reckless scheme was not even set in motion, as the Japanese could not have been taken by surprise as had been the case in the military revolt at Blitar of February 1945; they had quickly recovered from the shock of the 15th of August and were completely on their guard. At least the radio station at the Koningsplein was already well guarded.

Let us now shift our attention to the Japanese, especially to Rear-Admiral Maeda.

At midnight on the night of the 15th/16th of August *Maeda* received the official news of the hostilities having ceased. He had intended informing the Indonesian leaders, who had visited him the day before, on next morning, but when he invited them, it appeared that Sukarna and Hatta had disappeared that night without leaving a trace. He then went to the Military Government, as he suspected the military authorities of having a hand in this disappearance, of which he heard with anger and indignation (*Nishijima*). There he met major-general *Nishimura*, who declared he knew nothing, notwithstanding the inquiries that were being made everywhere. In the meantime there was considerable tumult in the town, and the most unfounded rumours about an approaching insurrection went round.

Maeda was of the opinion that such a revolt should not be suppressed by the ordinary police, but by Japanese soldiers. Without doubt they would succeed, but as a consequence an incurable breach might arise between the Japanese and the freedom-loving Indonesians. And it was this that Maeda wanted to prevent at all costs in the interest of future relations, commercial and otherwise, between Japan and the new Indonesian state to be expected.

The Japanese interpreter *Nishijima*, who worked at the *Bukanfu*, thereupon approached a certain Javanese *Sunata*, who also worked there and who was a figure in the youth movement. For this purpose *Nishijima* called upon him in his house at no. 50, *Defensielijn van den Bosch*.

At first this *Sunata* was non-committal, but afterwards he vaguely mentioned a conspiracy, a coup d'état, which a certain group would

undertake. However, he promised to ring Nishijima as soon as he knew anything definite. He rang at 1 o'clock and stated that they were not willing to negotiate with Japanese, as they always lied. But he was willing to let Sukarna and Hatta return, if their safety was guaranteed by Maeda.

Maeda promised them a safe-conduct, provided that they really came. In the meantime he warned the Japanese authorities who, among other things, ordered the radiostation to be occupied by 300 to 500 men.

Nishijima then went to inform Sunata personally of Maeda's cooperation, but the latter kept still silent about the abode of the disappeared leaders. The only thing he said was that it would take 4 to 5 hours before Sukarna and Hatta could be with Maeda.

In the meantime, during the afternoon, J. Kunto arrived from Rengas Dengklok (Malik p. 46) and had a discussion with Subardja and Sudira at the Kaigun (office of the Volunteers' Corps). Now we know that Subardja worked for the Bukanfu and was on very good terms with Maeda. In view of the results Subardja must have played an intermediary part between the extremists and the moderates. It was agreed upon that the proclamation would be postponed until 11 p.m., because before that Subardja and Sudira, accompanied by J. Kunto, wanted to travel to Rengas Dengklok in order to have an interview with Sukarna and Hatta. It is certain that Maeda knew about this mission and he probably had a hand in it. At about four o'clock the party left Batavia.

At first Sukarni refused to admit Subardja and Sudira (Malik 47; otherwise Hatta: Sukarni did not object) as Subardja stated that he came on behalf of the Kaigun. This called forth reactions as it suggested interference by the Japanese officers of this corps. A vehement dispute followed. The visitors were nearly arrested. But after that Subardja stated that his coming was supported by Wikana and his group, and that the preparations for proclaiming independence in Batavia were postponed until 11 p.m. Consequently he was not sent by the *Japanese* commanders, but by the Kaigun-group (that is to say the *Indonesians*) in order to inform Sukarna and Hatta of the official announcement of Japan's surrender.

If he did say this, he must have lied, for Hatta assures us that Subardja came as a delegate of the Gunseikanbu (Japanese Army Administration), which is not quite true either because Maeda did not belong this organisation but was the head of the Bukanfu (Navy Purchasing Office), whilst Maeda himself says that Subardja went to

Rengas Dengklok at the request of Sunata (who was in Maeda's service).

Nishijima also declares that Subardja was not received very cordially by the pemuda at Rengas Dengklok. They were very much excited, threatened him with a gun, because they took him for a Japanese spy. He had to talk for some hours before the young men were convinced that it was best if Sukarna and Hatta went with him.

After that, Malik tells us, within a few minutes Sukarna and Hatta on the one hand and the younger ones on the other hand arrived at an agreement. The former declared now to be convinced of Japan's surrender and they trusted that the whole population was ready for the declaration of independence. They proved themselves ready to sign it, on the one condition that it would happen at Jakarta.

At first Sukarni and his men still had some objections on account of the fact that once they were in Jakarta, this agreement might not be carried into effect, but Subardja guaranteed that the proclamation would certainly be signed that very night. The place where it would happen was quiet and free from all kind of "Provokasi", it being the house of "admiral" Maeda at the Nassau Boulevard (Myakoodoori).

Did Subardja made it appear as if Maeda was only somebody who put his house at their disposal? At all events he will have tried to minimise Maeda's concern in the matter as much as possible.

At about 10 o'clock in the evening the party accompanied and guarded by the Peta started for Jakarta.⁶

How they arrived there is not known from our Indonesian informants but from our Japanese authorities.

It was a peculiar company that entered Maeda's spacious residence at 11 o'clock p.m. Some young people armed with pistols in plain clothes alighted from two cars, keeping their hands on their right pockets as a token that they were prepared for everything. After them came Sukarni in Peta uniform with a Japanese officer's sword and also a gun. Finally Sukarna, Hatta and Subardja alighted. Our informant and interpreter Nishijima accompanied them to the front room next to the outer verandah. Sukarna and Hatta sat down, the young people posting themselves behind their chairs, as protectors or as guards?

After that Maeda came downstairs. When he entered Sukarna and

⁶ According to the journalist Miyoshi, Sukarna and Hatta were first taken back to their homes (in order to change their clothes?) but at 11 o'clock p.m. they came to Maeda's in his official residence at the Nassau Boulevard, the former British Consulate.

Hatta bowed in Japanese fashion. Nishijima, who in the meantime had asked Subardja, who was outside, after his experiences in Rengas Dengklok, went in and communicated them concisely to Maeda. The Rear-Admiral looked grave but calm and thereupon spoke in Japanese, translated by Nishijima: "It was fortunate that Sukarna and Hatta had returned. That Sukarna and Hatta had been away without giving notice of it beforehand to the Japanese authorities, as good Japanese custom demanded, was serious. If they had not returned it would have had serious consequences. The nationalist leaders should be careful about such things, as peace and order might be endangered in this way."

And to the young men he said: "I can appreciate the struggle for liberty but I did not think that the pressure of the Indonesians would be so great, and I can definitely not agree with such revolutionary methods." And he quoted several sad examples from history.

These lessons in history did not impress the young men very deeply. They assumed an unbending attitude, thrusting their chests out in order to show that they did not believe a word of it.

Maeda continued by guaranteeing the safety of Sukarna and Hatta, but, as he was not the highest authority in Java, he could not give any information about the independence. Exactly at this moment, when Maeda had come to the main point, Sukarna asked Sukarni whether it was not already too late. The latter gave a start, looked at the clock in the room and said to himself: "*O, saja loepa, saja moesti pergi*" (O, I forgot, I must go).

Nishijima did not understand this, asked for particulars and obtained the answer that the young men outside did not trust matters, and would start a revolt if Sukarna, Hatta and Sukarni did not return before 12 o'clock. It was already past 11,30 then; Sukarna and Hatta no longer felt easy, and Sukarni wanted to go outside in order to avert the insurrection. Sukarna, Hatta and Subardja, however, stayed with Maeda, whilst the others with Nishijima went on a reckless drive through the town. And indeed, our interpreter saw several groups of young men prowling in the dark. They made a halt near a physician's at the corner of Tjikini, near a visitors' building for students at the Pasar Senen, and finally they went to the heavily guarded radio station on the Koningsplein. Everywhere young men, more or less armed, and some of them in uniform were warned, with the words: "*Ini hari tidak djadi, bung*" (Today nothing will happen, comrade) or such like. And indeed, the revolt was only postponed for 12 hours (Maeda).

When they returned to Nassau Boulevard no. 1 towards one o'clock or half past one the scene had slightly changed. Sukarna, Hatta and Subardja had left. The host, Maeda, was not there either. On the other hand some prominent Indonesians were present. What can have happened during Nishijima's absence?

Sukarna and Hatta will probably have explained to Maeda the dangerous tension among the youth groups and have pointed to the necessity of letting the meeting of the Preparatory Council take place, which should probably have been held that morning in the People's Council (Volksraad) building, but which had fallen through on account of the principal leaders being absent. At that meeting a proclamation of independence could be brought about.

In principle Maeda will have agreed to this, but at the same time will have made the remark that at least the consent of the military authorities would be necessary. He therefore proposed to call that very night upon the head of the Department of General Affairs, Lieutenant Major-General Nishimura, who lived not far from there at the Oranje Boulevard. In the meantime his subordinates or the *pemudas* could use his telephone in order to summon all appropriate members quickly to the official residence at the Nassau Boulevard, so that there, after their return from Nishimura, the meeting could be held.

When consequently Nishijima and his party returned from their nocturnal expedition they saw the committee members enter, whilst Sukarna, Hatta and Maeda were still with Nishimura. What was discussed there?

Presumable Maeda did not take much part in the conversation between the Indonesians and Nishimura. He confined himself, in the presence of the major-general, before and after the conversation, to paternal warnings of being careful and of showing comprehension for the Japanese view, probably in order to deceive Nishimura. The discussion, continuing for hours and only ending 3 a.m., went as follows, according to the reports of the Japanese Yoshio Nakatani (interpreter) and Captain Hiroshi Nakamura.

After having dwelled on his "abduction", Sukarna asked permission for the meeting of the Preparatory Council to be held immediately and independence to be proclaimed. Nishimura refused and preferred the hierarchical way via Singapore, Saigon, Tokyo v.v. Then Sukarna proposed to reverse matters, the declaration of independence first and a discussion with the members of the Council afterwards. Nishimura firmly declined this.

Thereupon Sukarna began to speak about useless formalities, and to make covert threats of revolt if he should prove no longer able to keep the masses under control. Nishimura then pointed to his duty as a leader. Otherwise (military) measures would possibly be taken. Why did not Sukarna steer a straight course?

Sukarna now apparently had come to the end of this tether so that Hatta took over. They should look at the matter from a more psychological angle. By taking forceful measures Japan would loose the "youth groups".

Nishimura did not enter into the matter further, as Sukarna now tried to fix the meeting of the Preparatory Council at least at a slightly earlier date, but Nishimura could not be prevailed upon to deviate even to the smallest degree from the prescribed way. He could not consent to an earlier date. Sukarna then changed his tune. He only asked permission "to have a meeting with the members of the "Council". Nishimura then said that, if this meeting meant "*Council*" he could not help him. But a "private tea-party" was Sukarna's own affair. Sukarna again assured him that it would not be a council meeting, but that it was his intention to inform the members of this conversation. He concluded by asking pardon for the *pemudas*.

At about 3 o'clock Maeda, Sukarna and Hatta returned to no. 1 Nassau Boulevard. There about thirty members of the Council and younger men were waiting for them.

Nishijima started by reporting on the prevention of the revolt. Maeda was very glad of it, which is quite understandable. Now the Japanese military men need not shed republican blood. After that he told that the visit to Major-general Nishimura had not come off as smoothly as they had thought. Some results, however, had been achieved, namely that the date of the opening of the Preparatory Council had been advanced by one day, and would take place on the 18th instead of on the 19th of August, as Sukarna and Hatta had insisted on it.

As appears clearly from the account of the discussion at Nishimura's there had been no mention at all about this. Maeda obviously said this in order to encourage the members of the council a little. He further informed them that, in view of the urgency of the matter, Sukarna had begged him to be allowed to use his house for a short discussion with the Indonesian leaders "how they would tide over this dangerous period". As he was not the competent authority for this he thought he might withdraw. He only left the journalist-interpreter, Miyoshi, as it was a matter of the military government after all. He then went upstairs and to bed.

At that moment there were on the ground-floor of Maeda's residence a number of Indonesians, and not only members of the council, with the leaders Sukarna and Hatta, together with Miyoshi in order to discuss some affairs. Would Maeda really have thought that at this "tea-party" at dead of night only *information* was given? His last words before retiring for the night may be explained as containing much more. On that account there must be some basis for the rumour "that Maeda together with the Indonesian leaders had prepared the proclamation (of independence)". When subsequently Nishijima asked Maeda about it, the latter answered with a smile: "Ask Sukarna and Hatta themselves, and the truth will come out".

Before the meeting began, Sukarna and Hatta had to go and eat something. Was this only to fortify the inner man or also to map out the future course of action?

We are not so well informed about the next meeting as we are about the discussion with Nishimura, although we are in the possession of reports from different quarters. We have a report by the Japanese journalist Miyoshi, who, however, seems not to have attended the whole meeting. Further one by the moderate dr Amir and one by the radical Adam Malik.

The one by dr Amir is rather detailed. After the nocturnal meal Sukarna is said to have declared to those present that they would proclaim the independence next morning, as otherwise a general revolt would break out in Java. "We have no choice", he said. Those present, amongst whom we shall have to include above all the more prudent members of the Preparatory Council, were surprised (or perhaps even dumbfounded?), but only Amir and Ratulangi "ventured" a remark. Ratulangi thought it rather illegal, now that Japan had lost the war, and Amir asked whether the Japanese army command had been consulted on the proclamation beforehand. For it may be presumed that Sukarna, during the preceding meal, had already drafted a short declaration of independence, which was now signed. If, however, we read Adam Malik on these events, we get quite another picture. He hardly mentions the presence of the members of the Preparatory Council. A large number of younger men receive his main attention.

In the first place Sukarna and Hatta are alleged to have proposed to sign and announce the proclamation on the 17th of August within the Preparatory Council. Sukarni and Chairul Saleh are said to have objected strongly.

Sukarna and Hatta are also said to have proposed to exchange views

again with a very high Japanese authority before the proclamation was announced. This too was opposed by Sukarni and Chairul Saleh.

Thereupon Sukarni read out a text of the proclamation of independence drafted by him as follows: "That herewith the people of Indonesia declared its independence. All existing governmental bodies must be conquered by the people from the foreigners who still controlled them".

This text was not to the liking of Sukarna and Hatta. An endless discussion ensued. Finally a middle course was adopted. Sajuti Melik typed this text: "We, the people of Indonesia, herewith proclaim the independence of Indonesia. Matters concerning the transfer of power etc. will be regulated accurately within the shortest time possible". The point of time was about half past 3 (Japanese time) 17th of August 1945, Sukarna and Hatta signed on behalf of the nation.

The journalist Miyoshi, who is very concise in his report, was still present when this declaration of independence was accepted. Presumably Sukarna's last words to him were: "This declaration won't be published, but it is necessary to calm down the sentiments of the Youth".

With that Miyoshi, whose presence for special reasons was no longer desirable, left the gathering.

Did the moderate delegates, for instance the members of the Preparatory Council, also leave at that moment so that only the radicals remained?

It looks as if it was then decided that the proclamation of independence would take place on the Koningsplein, in the presence of a large crowd hastily to be summoned. If necessary, an occupation of the radio station by *pemudas* could take place at the same time. As we saw, the latter action was originally planned for midnight, but afterwards postponed until the next afternoon. In that case the proclamation would assume a violent character after all.

The reading of the declaration of independence, however, did not take place on the Koningsplein before or in the radio station but at the house of Bung Karno himself, in the now historic house 56 Pegangsaan Timur. So at the eleventh hour this dangerous plan did not come off.

Probably towards 10 o'clock Rear-Admiral Maeda woke up and learnt in some way or other what had been contrived beneath his room during the early morning hours. He then again approached Subardja to prevent this highly dangerous experiment. "This Subardja is the man", he wrote afterwards, "who, on this occasion, set himself up to help and control matters with the utmost exertion". "In this way it was possible to allay immediately the biggest chance of a revolt at the very

last minute". Indeed, Maeda knew too well of the Japanese machine guns and tanks which lay near the radio station and the near-by Kenpeitai (military police) on the Koningsplein not to realise what the result would be of an infuriated crowd being collected there.

That this tragedy was really prevented at the last minute also appears from other facts. When the interpreter Nishijima also awoke between 10 and 11 o'clock, he heard the sound of marching people outside in the street. When he went out and had a look he saw "thousands of all ages and classes, who marched in rows of four like regular troops in the direction of the Koningsplein. They were provided with spears of bamboo and red-and-white flags. Indonesian songs were heard. And, of course, there was much shouting".

Nishijima immediately rang the Bukanfu office and one of his Indonesian employees told him that a mass meeting would be held on the Koningsplein. When after that he went to the office he heard that Indonesia would be declared free that day and that Sukarna would make a speech on the Koningsplein.

Sukarna, however, was in his house at Pegangsaan Timur. He had evidently been warned in time through Maeda and Subardja.

And indeed, it was evidently decided only at the very last moment to have the proclamation of independence take place not on the Koningsplein, but on the open space before Sukarna's residence. This plan was made so late that Hatta had already gone to the Koningsplein in his ivory-tinted Oldsmobile, so that they were anxiously waiting for him at Pegangsaan. For it seemed undesirable to postpone the declaration of independence any longer in view of the intervention of the allied powers being expected at any moment.

This meeting before the house of Sukarna was as much improvised as the nocturnal meeting at Maeda's. There were only a few people present (Kahin).

For the rest information about it is either strikingly concise or suspiciously circumstantial, from which it might be surmised that this historic event was somewhat lacking in external splendour. The press does not say anything about it. And no wonder! The newspapers inspired by the Japanese continued to print tidings of victory for some days after Japan's surrender. Amir mentions that the proclamation was read in front of Sukarna's house and that a flag was hoisted. There were no Japanese there. The members of the Committee had been invited rather late. One Japanese even thought that there were only "young men and other people" holding a meeting.

On the other hand the reporter Sumadi, in his detailed "Setahoen jang laloe" (One year ago) mentions that there were students and *pelopor* troops present. But he also mentions the presence of many others: the whole Preparatory Council, thousands of interested people. According to him, not only Sukarna, understandably pale with fatigue, but also Bung Hatta and Mas Suwirja, the Major of Jakarta, held a speech. It is said that amidst the hoisting of the bicoloured flag on the bamboo pole the *Indonesia Raja* sounded out, followed by a thunderous "Merdeka"! Many, deeply affected, could not withhold their tears, etc. Presumably here already the formation of legend had started.

In the evening of the 17th Rear-Admiral Maeda gave a banquet in honour of the members of the Preparatory Council in the same house, perhaps even in the same hall, where the declaration of independence had been adopted. Maramis and Subardja were also present. In an after-dinner speech Maeda stated that independence was an international right of every nation. "Indonesian people, continue fighting".

It seems to me that this banquet and these words may be considered to be the continuation and sealing of Maeda's concern with the preparation of the independence. And as such it will have been looked upon by the insiders.

When reviewing the above one cannot help observing the shortcomings of the actors in the drama of the declaration of the Indonesian independence. The one group, although of bright intellect, is lacking in initiative, the other, although attractive on account of their enthusiasm, misses understanding and insight. The only figure to act courageously as well as quietly, on the verge of ruin, is Maeda, who, by founding the Indonesian Republic, tried at the eleventh hour to render a service to his fallen native country. Among the few attractive Japanese from the period of occupation he is one of the most appealing.

If it is asked whether the 17th of August 1945 remains a remarkable date, the answer is that the formation of myth, and partly even historiography, likes to choose an exact date for fixing a complete turning of the scale. The same happened with 476 and 1453 for the beginning and the end of the Middle Ages, the 14th of July 1789 for the French revolution, the 1st of April 1572 for the Dutch revolt against Spain. At that given moment the events themselves are not always equally great or important, but the beginning of a new era is simply fixed on a certain date. It is the caprice of the party-man which brings this about, as well as that of the historiographer.

H. J. DE GRAAF.

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