Revolutionary fervour reached an unprecedented intensity in the Netherlands Indies in 1918. In Holland in retrospect the Ministry of the Colonies spoke in its annual report for 1918 about ‘a certain restlessness’ in the colony as a result of the activities of Sneevliet and others. This was an understatement. Unrest had been widespread.\(^1\) Again taking a backward glance the editor of *De Indische Gids*, E.A.A. van Heekeren, noted ‘serious happenings’. One was ‘a progressive spirit of resistance in native society, which manifested itself in a mounting insecurity of persons and goods, in attempts made on Europeans’. The other was that the army was ‘affected by a spirit of disobedience’ (Van Heekeren 1919b:13). In the Netherlands Indies the question of whether or not the indigenous population, and the other population groups perhaps as well, had lost faith in the government had emerged as an earnest subject of debate. In the People’s Council various members – J.J.E. Teeuwen, Achmad Djajadiningrat, Sastrowidjono, and Abdoel Rivai – repeatedly pointed out that large segments of the population from the highest level to the lowest echelon distrusted the government. A ‘spirit of discontent’ reigned. They argued that the anti-Dutch mood had been exacerbated by the poor economic conditions and by the high-handed and conservative way in which Dutch people, civil servants, and staff of the estate in the vanguard, continued to treat Indonesians.\(^2\) Spokesmen for the colonial government denied that this was indeed the case.

The mood thus discerned coupled with doubts about the capability or even willingness of the colonial army to suppress large-scale popular unrest engendered renewed reservations about the creation of a native militia among Europeans. Arming natives under such circumstances might be dangerous (Van Heekeren 1919b:142). Cogently, many of the nationalist leaders continued to oppose a militia. Attacking Indië Weerbaar had become one of the ways for the ISDV activists to wrest control of the Sarekat Islam from Tjokroaminoto, Abdoel Moeis and other moderate leaders. To achieve their

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purpose they hammered away at the argument that a militia was only of benefit to no one but the capitalists, and that the Javanese population did not have much to fear if the Netherlands Indies were conquered by a foreign nation. Only the Dutch would lose their jobs, one of the ISDV members, B. Coster, a schoolteacher in Malang, for instance, stated at an ISDV meeting in Semarang in early September.3

Indië Weerbaar assumed the shape of the catalyst for a confrontation between the left and the right, which also set people in the European community at odds. Indië Weerbaar was intensely promoted by the colonial government and part of the white establishment. They did so with a certain urgency, afraid that it might not be long before war would be declared on the Netherlands because of the complications about the Dutch position which had arisen in Europe. A new Indië Weerbaar Association had been formed on 31 August 1917. It united local Indië Weerbaar branches which were still extant or had been newly formed. A telegram was sent to Queen Wilhelmina to congratulate her on her birthday and to inform her about the founding of the new association. The chairman was K.A.R. Bosscha. Among the other members of the board were G.J.C.A. Pop, one of the driving forces behind the new association, Koning of the KPM, and Muurling.4 A number of Indonesians also joined the board: R.A.A. Achmad Djadiningrat, J.A. Soselisa, Pangeran Raden Soerio Atmodjo, Raden Temenggoeng Sosrowerdojo, and Raden A.A. Tirtokoesoeomo. Lieutenant General H.N.A. Swart, adjutant to the Queen and Civil and Military Governor of Aceh, became honorary chairman. An Orgaan der Vereeniging ‘Indië Weerbaar’ (Organ of the Association The Resistant Indies) began to be published in February 1918. Initially Malay and Javanese translations of some of the articles were included. Later it would become a fully bilingual Malay-Dutch journal. A few months later a march, the Indië Weerbaar Marsch was composed by F.H. Belloni. A postage stamp was designed as well.

Initially the aim of the founders had been ‘military defence’. When this caused opposition – a few people wanted to do away with the term completely – the goal was changed to ‘economic and military defence’. Branches took the non-military part of the drive seriously, linking it with the development of the indigenous population. One example was the Banyuwangi branch. It funded a ‘domestic science school for native girls’ and a seedling farm for rice and ‘native crops’. The human body was not forgotten. As Bosscha said: ‘the labourer and the soldier should be physically strong and possessed of the

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3 IPO 1917 no. 36, citing Kaem Moeda, 6-9-1917.  
4 When a general meeting was held in August 1918, the KPM promised a reduction in the fare for people who wanted to attend.