Haji Omar Said Tjokroaminoto: Islam and Socialism (Indonesia, 1924/1963)

Introduction

Haji Omar Said (HOS) Tjokroaminoto (1882–1934), the author of Islam and Socialism, was a prominent Indonesian figure who played a leading role in the Indonesian nationalist movement of the early twentieth century. He was a leader of (the) Sarekat Islam/Islamic Association (SI)1—an organisation which served as a medium for those who held that Islamic religious sentiment and nationalist consciousness could be combined to voice their disappointment with the Dutch colonial rule in the archipelago. The SI attracted a significant number of followers, who envisaged the independence of the nation. This organisation was a transformation of (the) Sarekat Dagang Islam/Islamic Trade Association (SDI) founded by Samanhudi (1868–1956)2 in 1911 in Solo,


Central Java. The SDI was aimed at increasing the self-esteem of the 'common' Indonesians in confronting at least two challenges—the harsh competition in the batik industry particularly with Chinese traders and the Javanese noble class who merely supported the interests of the Dutch colonial regime.\(^3\) The SDI focused on its role in economy. However, thanks to Tjokroaminoto’s leadership of the organisation,\(^4\) its vision and scope of activities were broadened. Economy was not the only domain to which attention should be paid. In Tjokroaminoto’s hands, the SI was transformed into a mass organisation with social and religious dimensions, and political ambition. Thus, the figure of Tjokroaminoto cannot be detached from the history of the SI and vice versa.

Whereas the SI can be regarded as the first mass movement which planted the seeds of nationalism in the hearts of common Indonesians, Tjokroaminoto, as its leader, merits credit for playing a vital role in this process by using Islamic religious sentiment in attracting the followers. It is true that the Budi Utomo/Prime Philosophy (BU), founded by Dr. Sutomo in 1908, cultivated the sense of nationalism among Indonesians earlier than the SI did.\(^5\) However, the scope of membership and activities of the BU was limited to the elite circle of aristocratic educated Javanese people and local bureaucrats.\(^6\) Low-class people, whose number was large compared with the few educated people, were beyond the BU’s reach. After all, the BU was not initially aimed at becoming a nationalist mass movement or a political organisation at all. Rather, the BU’s activities focused on education and culture. It is therefore unsurprising that in the early years of its development the Dutch colonial government allowed room to this 'elite' forum to exercise its cultural programs. All in all, the BU deserves credit for inspiring other Indonesian leaders to found organisations

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