

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN JAVA?

SUDDENLY everyone has learned the word "Indonesian." But probably most readers will be glad to have this article, written for "The Listener" by A.M.R., to help elucidate the strange situation that has arisen in Java.

TWELVE years ago I used to startle Australians by the news that nearer to them than New Zealand were 70 million Asiatics. To-day, even the computation that Java, size of our South Island, contains 100 times its population, all farmers, scarcely raises an eyebrow; or the calculation that the Indies, if stretched across the map of Europe, would run from Norway to Tunisia and from Ireland to Afghanistan. In short, the physical contiguity of Indonesia, its enormous extent and its teeming population we have got used to. But its nearness remains inaccessible, its peoples mysterious, and the current news of an "Indonesian" government which claims to be in control of the whole of Java being opposed by Japanese troops under British orders on Dutch behalf merely underlines our blank ignorance of conditions on our doorstep.

Comparison with India

Yet the political situation in Java—temporary Gilbertian features disregarded—is simple enough. The Indies (spelt "Indie," pronounced "India" by the Dutch) are only the Philippines or our India ("Hindustan," "Hither India," "British India") over again. In each case a European state took power, one to three centuries ago, almost purely to further trade; kept nibbling always deeper and more indigestibly into government, agriculture, education, and public health in order to secure and extend that trade, and now, attacked by moral qualms and native politicians, finds itself so entangled among vested interests, fears, and responsibilities that getting out looks to be as difficult as getting in.

But Indie, physically a very much larger edition of the 7081 Philippine Islands, has not had their three centuries of slow soaking in Spanish Catholicism,

brilliantly finished off with three decades of surface polishing in American schools. On the contrary, Christianity controls only a few small outlying regions such as the Minahassa tentacle of Celebes (which, however, supplies most of Java's white-collar workers). On Java itself as late as 1940 only two children out of five had had even a year's schooling. In the outer, and much larger, islands the day is not far off when it was an offence for a native to speak Dutch or ape European religion and culture.

Culture Colony of Hindustan

Historically Java is a culture colony of Hindustan and was thoroughly Hindu from 200 A.D. until four centuries ago when the Arabs offered Islam or the sword, and the Portuguese offered trade or the blunderbuss. Little Bali alongside is, indeed, the one place in to-day's world where classical Hinduism still exists unmodified by missions (Buddhist, Moslem or Christian) and by money and machinery. But British India, despite its sub-continental size, its racial variety, its castes and sub-castes, and its Moslem-Hindu cleavage (which, fortunately, has never been organised in mainly-Moslem Indonesia) has been welded by past history, present education, and the English language into some sort of unity. The Indies remain a congeries of archipelagoes. And the high native culture level of thickly-populated Java contrasts like a metropolis in a desert with the head-hunting savagery of the vastly greater islands round about, islands almost empty of population and jungled to the water's edge.

This comparative primitiveness and diversity of Indonesia enables it to surmount continental India's economic problems simply by spilling over Java's surplus population into Celebes and Sumatra. The Javanese appear to have increased from 3,600,000 a hundred and fifty years ago to somewhere between 50,000,000 and 60,000,000 to-day, but even at this pace they will need a century or more to fill the archipelago. Finally, to differentiate Indie from India, a third race, neither rulers nor ruled, grows steadily in the islands, not merely in numbers and in wealth, but in esteem and, indeed, in indispensability. The Chinese, first traders to these isles, look like surviving all competition.

No Dutch Kipling

The Dutch, rulers of this luxuriant plenty, appear at first sight even more out of place than the British in their India. But that is only because they have fewer *pukka sahib* poses and no Kipling. Actually, since they gave up trying to live on *rijstafel* and in broadcloth and Old Batavia—"the unhealthiest town in the world" in a century of municipal mortality—they have become much the better naturalised of the two. Instead of half-killing themselves keeping up the



With banners and a Nationalist flag, Indonesians demonstrate in Batavia

strenuous games of the cold Homeland, they take sensibly little and sensibly practical exercise; work reasonable tropical hours; educate their children locally, only sending them to Holland for the dangerous two or three years at puberty; and live a real home life, as the club-haunting Britons, with their eyes for ever fixed on furlough and final retirement "at Home," seldom do. In fact they often settle on Java for life: so that, while every Briton in India is lonely among ten thousand "natives," the Dutch proportion in Indonesia is one in two thousand.

Colour by Culture

Then their national rating of wealth above status has enabled them to compromise with the facts by re-drawing the "colour line" as very much a "culture line." Everyone with the tiniest tinge of the magic blood, who "lives European," is received, for nearly all purposes and in nearly all cases, as a European. Japanese and Philipinos count as Europeans. And it is even possible for pure-blooded Indonesians of high standing to become raised to Caucasian status by legal process. In the Army all the privates of whatever race barrack together ("But, Gad Sir, Prestige!") and most officers are only technically "white." In fact the colour line, though strictly maintained in theory, has become so blurred in practice that in Holland itself one person in every hundred has some Indonesian ancestry.

On the other hand, the Hollander has been by far the more efficient exploiter. His forced labour system, once practically universal, was completely abolished only in 1915. And right up to the war Java imported low-grade rice to feed its native producers of high-grade export rice. (Java coffee, incidentally, no more comes from Java than Eskimo pies from Greenland.) Dutch vengeance after revolts, too, has made our brief bloodlust after the Mutiny look watery: Pieter Elberfeld's skull is still on execrated display, although his rebellion was nipped before budding and that 200 years ago. The "Communists" of 1926 and 1933,

who would hardly be left-wing Congress talkers in India, were sent physically to rot in the New Guinea swamps.

Great credit, however, is due to the Dutch for their unique system of "parallel administration" by native civil servants alongside local headmen under aristocratic "Regents." (There are "Native Princes" in Indie as in India.) Nevertheless, although the Netherlands Empire has titularly become a Commonwealth, by the Indies being designated "an integral self-governing section of The Kingdom of the Netherlands," a "Minister for the (abolished) Colonies" in fact continued to control them almost until the homeland itself was overrun. A Volksraad or People's Council has, indeed, existed since 1918, with powers over finance (so long the bone of Indian contention) though not over Ministers. But of its 60 members only half represent the 70,000,000 "inlanders," five being allotted to the million and a-half Chinese and Arabs, and the remaining 25 to the quarter-million Dutch. Furthermore, only two-thirds are elected, and the franchise is so restricted that Her Majesty's Opposition of ten Indonesians were all from the appointed third.

Sitting on a Wall

Yet in present circumstances it could scarcely be otherwise. For two of democracy's essential prerequisites are lacking—a broadly-educated mass and a well-educated core of leadership. In 1939 only 777 pupils graduated from secondary schools in the whole Indies; and only 204 of them were Indonesians; only 81 gained University degrees, and of these only 44 were Indonesians.

Humpty-dumpty Soekarno must therefore fail. For his Movement's base is, in fact, a mere knife-edge of intellectuals, however many red and white flags the masses may wave. But all the Queen's horses and all the KPM's millions will not unscramble to-day's situation—if indeed they try. They may master it, but some day a solution will be necessary, and for that Imperialism has no key.



DR. SOEKARNO
Indonesian Humpty-Dumpty