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Het grote bestuurshervormingswerk: de emancipatiestrijd van Indonesische werknemers in het westerse bedrijfsleven en de indianisatie van Nederlands-Indië in het interbellum

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Summary: The great work of governance reform

The emancipation struggle of Indonesian workers in European companies and the Indianization of the Dutch East Indies in the interwar period

The Indianization this book is about, lies at basis of the emergence of an Indonesian middle class. Armed with low levels of Western education, they managed to secure a place in the intermediate ranks of government and European companies and then wanted more for themselves and their country. The significance of Indianization lies not in the economic value of the development for institutions and companies in the Dutch East Indies, but in the sense of self-esteem and the political awareness that the Indonesians developed with it. The emancipation struggle of these Indonesians in the lower 'European' ranks of the government and Western companies in the interwar period laid the foundation for Indonesia's later economic independence.

The conditions for Indianization arose during the first decades of the twentieth century, the years of so-called Dutch 'ethical politics'. The accessibility of Western education for Indonesians had been gradually increased by Dutch colonial government. In departure from standing colonial practise, it had also decreed equal work in government service to be paid equally regardless of ethnical origin. The consequences of this governmental Indianization penetrated even the conservative private sector. In companies with many intermediate 'European' ranks employment of Indonesian employees with full or partial Western secondary school education became a viable option.

For a long time, both European and Indonesian interested elites underestimated the importance of this emancipation struggle because it took place at a level with relatively low economic value and in organizations whose status were not traditionally established. In addition European executives displayed an ambivalent attitude towards the newcomers in their organisation, clearly influenced by the racial criteria of the day. Merits of Indonesians in European ranks were being attributed to Western education and work experience, while at the same time racist prejudices about the immaturity of the Indonesian people as a whole continued to exist. Ideas about structural 'immaturity of the native' were reinforced by Dutch literature on colonial political affairs. Kielstra, Boeke and most of the writers in the influential contemporary magazine *Koloniale Studiën* are examples of what Van den Doel has called 'a curious coalition of ethical thinkers, paternalistic civil servants and conservative politicians', who tried to justify an almost indefinite duration of Dutch colonial domination.

In the course of the interwar period, the importance of what European management thought or did not think about racial criteria was overtaken by developments in the volatile Indian labour market. In times of economic growth, every qualified member of staff was in demand. In times of crisis, Indonesians in 'European' ranks fulfilled a bridging function with their language and cultural knowledge, which in turn reinforced the trend of Indianization. Moreover, Indonesian workers with Western qualifications came from a

much larger pool than their European or Indo-European competitors, pushing them out of lower 'European' jobs for which a form of European qualifications were a prerequisite.

This emancipation of Indonesian workers extended to the European trade unions, which in the early 1920s tried to find an answer to the Indies Government's Remuneration Decree (BBL). Under this salary scheme, all government functions were divided into different pay scales (A, B, C) with a large number of subdivisions. If a majority of Indonesians emerged in one of the lower B scales, it was henceforth downgraded to an A scale with corresponding 'inland wage level'. Traditionally, the majority of European trade unions' members consisted of Indo-Europeans with B-scale wages. Their interests now both coincided and collided with those of the Indonesians with Western qualifications. Soon European unions became dependent on these Indonesians, both for their representativeness and for future growth.

Meanwhile the introduction of the BBL had put pressure on solidarity within and between the unions. The European civil service unions together with the Federation of European private sector unions, attempted to set up a General Dutch-Indies Tradeunion to counter the structural undermining of wages in the lower European ranks. This joint venture failed because the Federation's 'settler-workers' saw themselves more as an indispensable part of the interested elite in the colony than as employees. Because of this 'colonial spirit', the idea of unity in the trade union movement collapsed and companies and the government were given a free hand in determining the wage level in the Indies.

Within some European unions such as the Postal Union, solidarity with the lowest Indianized ranks prevailed over the 'colonial spirit' of the higher European ranks and a split of the union was prevented. In the early 1920s, Indonesian members proudly wrote to the Paper of the Postal Union about the importance of the modern postal service for their country. Not long after they would write about their bitter disappointment with the cut-backs made by government after 1924. Writers with a communist messages all but disappeared from the union-paper after the strike year of 1923, but writers with cooperative, socialist and Islamic-nationalist views continued to write for 'a great East Indies in general and one strong-brotherly P.T.T.-personnel in particular'. When the letters section disappeared from the postal paper after 1926, Indonesians stayed on as members of both rank and file and local boards members of the postal union. They represented the growing political consciousness 'in the bosom of the indigenous workforce' and gave voice to an emerging Indonesian middle class.

In the Dutch-language newspapers of the 1920s, this Indonesian voice was long ignored, just like the Indianization from which it originated. In the 1920s, 'Indianization' was used in the press solely as a loanword for developments in British India. Apparently, a development that took place in low profile jobs escaped the attention of Dutch-speaking journalists. The situation was different in the European trade union world. From 1927 they coined the word Indianization for the Indies situation, perhaps because the structural character of the emancipation they were confronted with at work, reminded the of developments in India. Only when the government introduced Indianization as the basis for its wage policy in 1932, the press at large woke up to the fact that jobs for the lower middle classes were taken over by members of the indigenous population.

In the Volksraad, the discussion about Indianization went through a similar development. Until well into the 1920s, Indianization remained undiscussed in the council and

when the debate finally began, the development had been well on its way for almost two decades. The Volksraad was an advisory council that, during all eight sessions of its existence, lacked both grassroots support and democratic decision-making power. Indonesians had formed a majority on the council since 1931, but were either elected in stages or appointed by the government. The indigenous interested elite, the aristocratic civil service, was greatly over-represented. This explains why a 'natural and necessary development' in the lower European ranks of government and industry had hitherto eluded them.

In 1931, the Indies government made a 'July promise' to the Volksraad with its 'brief remark' about the role of indanisation in the Indies. They promised not to use Indianization only as a cost-cutting tool, but to stimulate this 'natural development' to the benefit of all involved. That same year, the introduction of the press ban ordinance had ensured that the governor-general could ban any newspaper that published unwelcome political information in the colony. However, the press was still allowed to quote statements made in the Volksraad, effectively making it the last forum in the Dutch East Indies in which some freedom of expression was still guaranteed. Thus debate about the government's ruling on Indianization in the council created room for thought, after which the subject of Indianization could not be ignored any longer.

The Eurasian Association reacted strongly to the Indianization policy of the Indian government, which they saw as a threat to the survival of its own group. For the Indonesian Nationalistic Group however, Indianization by definition did not go far enough. They looked for indonesianization or indonesianization in all areas of society. The fact that they thereby also threatened the position of the traditional aristocracy in colonial civil service, had not gone unnoticed by the various conservative Indonesian factions in the council. At the same time, the government's promise of further Indianization gave these conservative factions the prospect of much greater influence in the future, so they decided to give the Indian government the benefit of the doubt for the time being.

As one austerity measure followed another, the European Patriotic Club turned against the threat of 'dewhitening', to them implicit in this government policy. With openly racist arguments they argued the need for protection from further Indianization in the Indies. At the same time, the Indo-European Union advocated the use of 'indiesation' instead of Indianization to slow down the development and to suit the sensibilities of their own membership. With their stance both parties reinforced the polarization in the council. Conservative Indonesian factions now grew impatient with both the rudeness of the European parties and the slow results of the Indianization policy as a whole. To their anger, the Indian government stopped expanding the ranks eligible for Indianization once the worst of the crisis had passed in 1935. Instead, Buitenzorg took measures that mainly benefited the supporters of the European Patriotic Club. For most Indonesians in the Volksraad, the Indies government thus broke the July promise of 1931. This acted as a catalyst for nationalistic sentiment among all Indonesian Volksraad members.

A milestone in this development was the petition submitted by the PPBB, the party of the 'indigenous' civil servants, to grant the Dutch East Indies 'a state of independence within Article 1 of the constitution through gradual reform'. Dissatisfaction with the slow implementation of the Indianization policy had finally resulted in the various conservative Indonesian factions uniting against the Indian government. Dissatisfaction with the

Indianization policy was also the reason why the Eurasian Association joined them, so a majority of the Volksraad voted in favour of the petition. When the Soetardjo petition was rejected without a doubt two years later, this convinced Indonesians in the council and beyond that the Dutch East Indies government was now standing in the way of the country's 'natural and necessary development'. The authority of the late colonial state in the Indies was shattered because the government openly failed to keep its word.

The Indianization policy of the Indies government had made the position of the late colonial state of the Dutch East Indies an untenable one even before the Second World War. The limited authority of the Volksraad was also over. In May 1939, nationalists formed a federation of almost all major Indonesian political parties demanding a real parliament for Indonesia. The time was ripe for a great governance reform in Indonesian hands and without the Dutch in the East Indies.