IN MEMORIAM: SOE HOK-GIE

Ben Anderson

He was a young man, just 27, without position, and of Chinese descent. Yet, in all Indonesia, he was the first to write publicly about the thousands of political prisoners held without trial in prisons and internment camps, and about the despair of their wives and the destiny of their ostracized children. His elders had proclaimed often enough their commitment to universal humanist values--but none but he, and a few others of his generation, had the courage to defend these values at home.

He had contributed more than most to the student campaign which helped to overthrow the Sukarno regime. Yet the dispossessed supporters of that regime would read his articles in the Djakarta press and say, "Dia orang baik." He wrote his *skripsi* on the Madiun Affair in 1948, and trenchantly criticized the Communist leadership of that period. Yet, in the simple dedication opposite the title page, he wrote, "My sympathy is for all those who have sacrificed everything for the people of Indonesia, whether they stood on the left or on the right." Others attacked the corruption and hypocrisy rampant in Indonesia, but only he was willing to take the risks of naming names.

For me, and I think for many others, he was much more than a trusted and loyal friend, and a courageous and compassionate man. He was in a way a symbol of all our hopes. And those hopes were never stronger than when one was with him, listening to his rapid, staccato confidences, watching the wrinkles on his forehead which seemed so out of place under his crew-cut hair, and then following him with the eye as he would jump up to go, striding off with his unmistakable springy walk.

Although the news of his death on the top of the Semeru volcano, last December 14, seemed completely unacceptable, in a strange sense it was not out of keeping with his life. It was impossible to imagine him middle-aged, settled down, reporting to work in an office, holidaying with wife and children. Perhaps, in a way, he felt it himself. He wrote to me last summer: "Since graduating, I'm beginning to feel *gelisah*. I'm teaching at the Fakultas Sastra. Mainly routine, boring duties. I feel a growing gap between myself and my old world, a world I love very much--the student world. Emotionally, I'm still a student, though I have a teacher's status. I'm finding it difficult to adapt myself emotionally to my new condition. If I have no work to do, I find I can't stay at home. . . . I don't know whether this is just a stage, or whether it's a sign that I'll always be *gelisah*, and unable to live in peace."

Living in peace . . . I believe he thought of it as giving in, abandoning hope and accepting the exhausted routine and frightened corruption he saw around him. One could sense this in the words he used so often and loved so well--*berontak, nekad, berani, djudjur,* and *bersih.* It was because of this that he insisted on the moral role of students in Indonesian politics, and attached so much importance to the solidarity of the campus and the streets. It was because of this too that he was so bitingly scornful of those student leaders whom he felt had decided to "live in peace" by accepting positions in the appointed Parliament and the attendant perquisites.

He used to refer to himself, with a smile, as an "anarchist." Evidently, a number of groups with which he had been associated had accused him of "anarchism" because he refused to play the safe, and temporizing game of tactical advantage, both under Sukarno and Suharto. Actually, I think he felt complimented. It was perhaps as an "anarchist" that he wrote to me: "I write in part simply to relieve my sense of nausea at our condition. Sometimes, though, I feel as if it's all useless. I feel that all there is in my articles is a few firecrackers. And I'd like to fill them with bombs."

He was always uncomfortable when associated with authority, instinctively seeing power as the last enemy of morality. Some of his elders ascribed his attitude to adolescent rebelliousness. But I am sure that it was born from the experience of Indonesian life as he knew it. More than most of his generation, he was outraged by the ruthless exploitation of the poor and defenseless in his society: the arbitrary, illegal taxes, the land-grabbing, the extortionate usury, the casual armed brutality and the "insolence of office." He had seen enough of "authority" to be determined, if he could, to remain apart from it, whatever it was. It was typical, perhaps, he was fond of the now-banned, but legendary song *Darah Rakjat*, created by the leftist youth organization Pesindo, in the Revolution he had been to young to experience.

Darah rakjat masih djalan
Menderita sakit dan miskin
Pada datangnja pembalasan
Kita jang mendjadi hakim

Hajo, hajo bergerak sekarang
Kemerdekaan telah datang
Merahlah pandji-pandji kita
Merah warna darah rakjat

Kita bersumpah pada rakjat
Kemiskinan pasti hilang
Kaum kerdja akan memerintah
Dunia baru tentu datang

But he saw himself not only as an "anarchist" but as a "modernizer." I remember very well, when we first got to know

one another, that he was surprised, almost incredulous, that I was anxious to learn as much as I could about traditional Javanese values and civilization. I think he saw it as typical Western "exoticism"--butterfly-hunting in the human jungle. A true child of Djakarta, he had little but contempt for an old culture, painfully disintegrating under the colonial rulers and their successors. But if he urgently wanted "modernization," it was because for him it meant, above all, liberation: liberation from hypocritical conventions and the degradations of accepted servitude. Being modern meant being able to stand up to those in power and see them for what they really are.

On my side, I was rather surprised to discover that he was an enthusiastic mountain-climber. He had then already climbed many of the legendary mountains of Old Java: Pangrango, Gede, Slamet and Merapi. At first I put it down to a compulsion to "keep fit," perhaps in protest at the *kemalasan* he sometimes complained of among his fellow-students. Then one day I asked him directly. He said it was partly to *latih diri*, but also because it was only on the top of a mountain that he really felt *bersih*. Perhaps he was within the tradition after all, in his own way.