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COLONIZATION OF JAVANESE IN THE OUTER PROVINCES OF THE NETHERLANDS EAST-INDIES

WIBO PEEKEMA

Meeting of the Society, 8 March 1943

I DO not know much about this subject from personal experience because my own work in the Netherlands East-Indies never brought me into close contact with Javanese colonization. But we are fortunate in having with us M. Muhlenfeld, whose personal contribution to that great work has been very important in the years during which he was Director of the Department of Internal Affairs at Batavia. As M. Muhlenfeld was prevented by other duties from preparing a lecture on this subject himself, he gave me both his blessing and the assistance of his experience.

To be able to understand the importance of colonization of Javanese in other parts of the Indonesian Archipelago, we should bear in mind that it means the creation of tens of thousands, eventually even hundreds of thousands, of prosperous peasants out of the poorest people in the most overcrowded districts of Java. I consider this to be one of the most beautiful achievements: to prepare the way for large numbers of people to liberate themselves from conditions of stark poverty to which they are born, and thereby to open up for them the prospect of attaining by their own energy a prosperous life for themselves and their families.

Java is in some parts hopelessly overcrowded. While in 1815 this central island of the Indonesian Archipelago had only about five million people, in later years, as a result of stable government and improved hygienic and economic conditions, this number began to increase rapidly. In 1890 there were over twenty-three million inhabitants, nearly five times as many as at the beginning of the same century. And in 1940 this number had increased to over forty-eight million, tenfold the number of 1815. This meant an average density of population of nine hundred per square mile; the yearly increase is as great as six hundred thousand.

Notwithstanding the fertility of Java's young volcanic soil and the excellent climate, abundant both in rainfall and sunshine, it is not difficult to perceive that such a rapidly increasing density of population in an island, where practi-

cally all available soil up to the very tops of the mountains had been brought under cultivation, must present grave economic problems. In fact, in some districts of Java, mainly in the central part of the island where the overcrowding of population was at its worst, these problems looked as if they were insoluble. The partition of cultivated land among the individual freeholders had gone so far that the size of the individual farms was hardly sufficient for the maintenance of one peasant family; and even then there were thousands of able-bodied peasants who had to go without their own land, and had to eke out a precarious livelihood as agricultural labourers. In some districts large plantations were operating, either on cultivated land rented from native freeholders or on uncultivated stretches of land rented from the Government on long-term leases. In such parts the total sum of money income which the local population could earn, partly as land rent and partly as wages for plantation work, was greater than the sum which could be derived from indigenous cultivation, and therefore this income was able to feed more people. But this could hardly keep an increasingly numerous class of plantation labourers and their dependants alive, for the demand for this labour did not increase at the same rate; in times of depression the demand sometimes rapidly dropped or even temporarily ceased to exist.

Industrialization of the country, as a means of providing a new earning capacity for large numbers of the population, was a method which could not work miracles. Java, like the Netherlands East-Indies in general, principally exports agricultural and mineral raw materials, and is to a great extent dependent on its customers, such as some European countries, America, Japan, or India, who are only willing to pay for their imports by profitable exports of industrial commodities. Therefore industrialization in Java has always had to be controlled carefully.

Neither industrialization nor plantation-economy were able to solve completely the problem of these thousands of Javanese country people, whose numbers were increasing every year, who had no land to call their own, who could not find sufficiently paid work at home, and who seemed therefore doomed to a life of poverty. This spectre had been staring us in the face for a good many years already, and ever since the beginning of this century the idea of organized mass emigration of these Javanese to suitable and thinly populated areas of the Outer Provinces of the Netherlands East-Indies Archipelago had been advocated. This idea had been put into practice too, but up to the year 1930 not with satisfactory results.

This first scheme of Javanese colonization was inaugurated by the Government in 1905 and operated mainly in the Lampong Residency of south Sumatra, where conditions were favourable. This country is close to Java; there is abundance of fertile virgin soil, and there existed little or no possibility of infringement on established land rights of the sparse local population. Under this Government scheme of emigration, the Javanese settlers were given free transport and financial support during the first years in their new surroundings, while experienced civil servants took care of the experiment. However, after some twenty-five years and the expenditure of many millions of guilders, this Javanese settlement in the Lampong Residency numbered but some thirty thousand persons, cultivating only some 25,000 acres.



1. Clearing the jungle, south Sumatra



2. Sastro's plot after two weeks



3. Sastro's plot after three months



4. Sastro's plot after nine months



5. Sastro's rice crop: after one year



6. Sastro's new house: after three years

This result was not at all encouraging, and, on this basis, it would have been far beyond the financial means of the country to carry on a Javanese emigration which could ever have reached the dimensions which we desired. This problem became suddenly acute in 1930, when the world-wide depression of those days hit the Netherlands-Indies, as a producer of raw materials for the world's markets, with its full force and caused widespread unemployment and the closing down of many plantations in Java.

It was at this moment that M. Muhlenfeld in his capacity of Director of the Department of Internal Affairs came into contact with these problems. It was clear that amongst other things something would have to be done about the emigration of Javanese to the Outer Provinces, as one of the means to alleviate the economic misery in large parts of Java, and that a new impetus was needed to the colonization abroad of Javanese peasants.

Now it was known that apart from the colonization organized by the Government, many thousands of other Javanese had settled in the Outer Provinces spontaneously. A good many of them were former plantation labourers who, at the expiration of their contracts, had taken up farming; others had gone abroad entirely on their own initiative and had created a living for themselves. Investigations revealed that these settlers carried on correspondence with their relatives in distant Javanese villages; in these letters questions were put, and answered, about the quality and quantity of available land in the new country abroad, and conditions of life generally. At harvest time there was a shortage of labour in these settlements and the colonists were greatly in need of help during this period. Tales about the new country told by colonists, who returned after many years to their native villages in Java, often made such an impression on their old friends and neighbours that many of these resolved to sell their moderate belongings, leave their homes, and start a new life abroad, at first working for the old-timers, who gave them shelter, food, and part of the harvest for wages, until they had cultivated land of their own.

These observations by M. Muhlenfeld's collaborators together with the experience of M. Rookmaaker, then Resident of the Lampongs, formed the basis of an entirely new system of colonization. In the Lampong Residency, where an important nucleus existed already, there was still room for several times as many colonists, without prejudice to the rights of the local population. An inquiry was therefore made into the number of colonists prepared to receive newcomers with their families, under the traditional conditions just described, thus enabling the newcomers to exist until the ripening of their own first harvest on the land which would be placed at their disposal shortly after their arrival. Several thousand colonists proved to be quite glad of the opportunity to obtain extra help at harvest time in this way.

To enlist new colonists, some of the most energetic of the old settlers were sent to Java to explain, simply and frankly, at popular meetings in the poorer and most densely populated districts, the possibilities that lay before them in southern Sumatra. The cost of the journey would be borne by the Government. Only peasants with good reputations as workers and still fairly young, healthy, married, and with children would be accepted.

The experiment soon proved a tremendous success; thousands asked to be

allowed to participate. Their own possessions were sold first, in order to have a little capital to begin with in the new country, and because the smallest and most indispensable belongings were all that they could take with them. In some cases, as when villages had to be evacuated because of volcanic eruptions in Java, whole communities, complete with their village administration (consisting of the village headman, his secretary, the native policeman, and so on), undertook the long journey to start a new life abroad. Their reception was very well organized, every new family being immediately billeted and fed, and indeed no real difficulties arose.

Soon after their arrival, the new families were allotted land which they could start clearing, after aiding the old colonists to bring in the harvest. The rice they earned as part of their hosts' harvest usually sufficed until the first harvest from their own ground, but for urgent expenses, as in connection with buying tools, and building their homes, easy credit, although within well-defined limits, was available.

The cost to the Government of this new type of colonization proved to amount to some £3 or £4 per family (merely the cost of transport by the State railways of Java and the fare, at a much reduced tariff for large numbers, for the crossing with the Royal Packet Navigation Company), in contrast with the expenditure of several times that amount in former years, on the old basically unsatisfactory system. Road building, new irrigation works, health, and educational measures, were of course financed by the Government, but for this outlay a reasonable return was assured from the rapidly growing area of cultivated ground on which taxes could eventually be levied.

Whereas the experiment from 1905 to 1930 had only resulted in the settlement of thirty thousand colonists in the Lampong Residency and seven thousand in other parts of Sumatra, in 1931-32 there were about ten thousand new colonists under the new system. This number increased rapidly to a yearly average of about thirty-five thousand in 1938, and more than fifty thousand in 1940, the majority still going to Sumatra, but a growing percentage to Borneo and Celebes.

Instead of the insignificant numbers of emigrants under the old and costly Government scheme, who were entirely dependent on Government organization and financial support, a steadily increasing flow of Javanese families of the best peasant stock in this way began to populate the empty spaces of the Outer Provinces. And once having gained this momentum, this average of fifty thousand and more yearly, Javanese colonization needed but little encouragement and financially only the smallest possible support from the Government Treasury to increase continually. In fact, thanks to the new methods in which human nature and individual enterprise had been better recognized than before, colonization had become a real factor in the process of relieving Java in order to develop the Outer Provinces. Indirectly, the new settlements also stimulated the home industries of Java.

But apart from this general economic point of view, there is the individual human side of the process—the change of life for these decent Javanese families, and the new perspective which was opened for them. This is something which cannot be expressed in figures and statistics, but we can try to get an adequate impression of its importance by studying the progress of one of



7. *Irrigation works at Trimurdjo*



8. *Tertiary irrigation canals*



9. *Small village road*



10. Village headman's house



11. Metro: house of chief of the district



12. Constructing roads

these many thousands of settlers on his way from poverty to prosperity. Sastro was a Javanese peasant who was registered as No. 1551 in the 1938 group of emigrants.

For the sake of contrast, let us try to imagine Sastro present among a number of poor people at a communal kitchen somewhere in an overcrowded centre of Java. There is little hope for him that he may ever be a landowner, for all the available soil in Java is already cultivated and divided. But he has heard of some mysterious opportunity offered by *Kangdjeng Gubernemen*, the Venerable Government, as it is commonly called, to travel by railway and by steamship to some far away place abroad, where there is plenty of fertile land available for Javanese people such as he, who are capable and willing to work. And therefore one day when the Dutch Controleur (a subaltern in the Civil Service) with his two Javanese assistants comes to his village to explain this proposition, Sastro, together with a good number of his neighbours, thinks he might just as well go up and listen to what this young Tuan and his companions have to tell them. After due consultation with his wife, Sastro decides that there might be something in this scheme, and anyway they cannot lose much by giving it a chance. And so one day he finds himself and his family, together with a lot of his friends from his village, at the quay somewhere in south Sumatra, where they set foot for the first time as immigrants from an old to a new world.

Meanwhile, a lot of preliminary work has been going on at the place of their destination in the interior (Plate 1). Squads of experienced old-timers have been busy on the spot to cut at least the heaviest trees and to clear some of the worst jungle and creepers away; but even then Sastro's allotment does not look much of a place (Plate 2). This is a difficult moment. But, on the other hand, the old-timers have been busy also on other parts of the grounds in erecting temporary houses, in which Sastro and his family are going to stay close to the old settlers.

The next morning after his arrival, the family's luggage is brought by motor bus. Sastro's wife has to take care of that, together with the youngsters, for Sastro himself has to report at the colonization centre, where he is duly registered as a citizen of the new Javanese village which is to grow in this place. After these formalities are over, he is provided with the necessary tools and some other things which he was not able to bring from Java; then he goes to his temporary home and starts work.

Let us now make a jump of some three months and see what Sastro's plot looks like after this period (Plate 3). He has sown his initial crop of cassave while the first of his banana trees is beginning to spread its big leaves. When his own house is about ready, Sastro gets busy sowing his second crop, this time of maize; his banana trees are prospering fairly well where only nine months before there was nothing but dense and steaming jungle (Plate 4).

However all this is only the beginning. For being a self-respecting Javanese of peasant stock, Sastro after all takes a poor view of these initial crops of cassave and maize; the only real thing is the cultivation of rice, the possession of a paddy-field, if possible eventually of irrigated rice terraces or *sawahs*. But this rice cultivation cannot be had without large-scale preparation and without an efficient irrigation system. Fortunately, the Venerable Government

realizes that it is not possible to invite Javanese families to emigrate to Sumatra if you cannot open up a prospect for them that one day they may reap their rice harvest from their own land. In other words, rice cultivation is, and must always be, the foundation of a successful Javanese colonization.

The Government has planned towards this, and built an irrigation scheme on the local river, the Wai Sekampong, with a principal centre at Trimurdjo (Plate 7). A dam or barrage has been built in this river, and originating from there is the principal irrigation canal, which forms the backbone of the whole colonization area under discussion. Near the dam is the centre of engineering works by which the water is distributed in all directions along a number of secondary irrigation canals. These canals eventually divide their water contents in their turn over a system of small tertiary irrigation canals, and these tertiary canals distribute the irrigation water over the paddy-fields of Sastro and his fellow settlers (Plate 8).

After a year Sastro is a rising young farmer with his first crop of rice already harvested (Plate 5). This, to a young Javanese of peasant stock, is life. His children, well fed, are looking on; Sastro himself can afford to wear a palm-beach jacket and a nice batik sarong. But no picture and no smile is able to represent what is going on in his heart, now that he is harvesting his own rice, an agricultural product which since the dim past of the Javanese people has been so closely knit together with their religious and cultural ideas.

It is altogether a completely different situation from that in which we first met Sastro, at the communal feeding centre in Java where he was huddled with so many of his fellow Javanese, poor, and without any prospects in life. Meanwhile, his wife has not been doing so badly either. In the beginning, there was only a temporary market place, to which she could go to sell some of their bananas or other products or to buy the necessary oils and spices for the kitchen. But now that things are beginning to develop this market is extended, and becomes more like the place she was used to at home in Java; she can now get all the simple things she wants for her household. The village in general is doing well; the paths are cleared, the hedges are well kept, and in the gardens various useful trees and shrubs are growing (Plate 9). Of course, the villagers according to Javanese custom have elected a headman (Plate 10).

Now that the whole district is coming under cultivation, and various villages are springing up, a larger territorial and administrative unit, which combines all these villages and their areas, has to be organized. So just as in Java we see the assistant *wedono* or chief of the district making his appearance. In Metro, the capital of the district, his house is built according to the typical Javanese style, with its large square veranda, where the regular conferences with the village headmen take place (Plate 11). There in the evenings the gamelan, the old-fashioned Javanese orchestra, plays; the traditional dances are performed; and the *wayang*, the age-old Javanese shadow-play, is shown. Shortly, with his unerring instinct for business, a Chinese merchant decides to set up a shop, where the well-to-do Javanese farmer can buy anything he wants, from cigarettes to a bicycle.

Roads are cut through the jungle which separates the different colonization centres from each other (Plate 12). Where there are roads there is motor traffic,

and there you will always find the inevitable Royal Dutch Shell, or the Standard Vacuum Company, represented by a gasoline pump and a little store where they sell the oil for the lamps of the settlement. Metro, which in these few years has sprung from the jungle, now even boasts a doctor of its own and a large clinic. There is also the Government bungalow for travelling civil servants of the various services, such as Public Works, Irrigation, Education, and, alas, also the Inspector of Income Tax; for Sastro and his companions, who a few years before were nothing but a mass of paupers, have in the meantime become prosperous owners of 4-5 acres of land, whose public duty it is to contribute their fair share to the public revenue, thereby enabling more of their fellow countrymen to follow in their trail to a better life.

Three years after his coming to south Sumatra Sastro might be found in his orchard before his larger new house, looking over part of his rice crop, which is now of course many times bigger than his first effort (Plate 6). The land, the house, the trees, are all his property. Moreover, he is now even able to employ two assistants for the harvest, newcomers like himself once, people who are eager to earn something while they are waiting for their own first crops to mature. This simple picture of Sastro shows the progress of one out of so many thousands of Javanese from poverty to prosperity.

DISCUSSION

Before the paper the PRESIDENT (The Rt. Hon. Sir GEORGE CLERK) said: In his lecture to the Society in February 1942 Dr. Hart referred briefly to the remarkable work that the Government of the Netherlands-Indies had done in colonizing Sumatra from the overcrowded population of Java. This afternoon Mijnheer Wibo Peekema of the Netherlands Colonial Administration has undertaken to give us an account of this excellent work, which is important as an example that may well be studied by the administrations of other tropical dependencies.

Mijnheer Wibo Peekema then read the paper printed above, and a discussion followed.

The PRESIDENT: I understand that Mijnheer Muhlenfeld is the man to whom the very remarkable progress of the Javanese emigration to Sumatra is due. His work and his initiative we have seen wonderfully illustrated. He is with us now. I wonder if he would say a word or two?

M. A. MUHLENFELD: Mr. Peekema has spoken about the part I took in the scheme of colonization, and gives me more praise than I really deserve, as a very important part of the work was done by my collaborators. In later years, when the work of colonization had outgrown the Department of Internal Affairs and had been taken over by the Department of Economic Affairs there was most important work done in surveying available land in other parts of the archipelago. Since 1935-36 the work has extended very much.

There is among the audience one of my colleagues, the Director of the Department of Economic Affairs, who arrived in England some few weeks ago. He is, I imagine, much more up to date as to the state of affairs. From 1929, when the new system of colonization started and during the five or six years since I left Java, an enormous amount of work has been done under the aegis of the Department of Economic Affairs.

Mr. Peekema told us that one of the essentials of the new scheme was that the new immigrants provided labour during harvest time when there was great need