

# Persbreidel in the 1930s Netherlands Indies: Its Targets and Practice<sup>1)</sup>

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## Contents

Persbreidel  
Trends of Persbreidel Cases  
Soekarno, Soetomo, and Permi  
Towards More Repressive Measures

The new decade — the 1930s — began with anxiety for the Netherlands Indies state; anxiety that political activism might grow in uncontrollable ways and that the wave of the Great Depression would have unpredictable effects on colonial management. In terms of censorship, the new decade opened with an administrative measure — *persbreidel* (press curbing ordinance) — against journalists and especially the publishing business. Its main justification was to maintain public law and order. This emphasis on public law and order more than ever posed particular challenges for print culture in the 1930s.

Scholarship remembers the 1930s Indies as the period when political activities by Indonesian nationalists were suppressed by the state and controlled by the secret police as well. By 1934 Soekarno, Mohammad Hatta, Sutan Sjahrir and many other prominent Indonesian nationalists had been exiled to remote islands, while their “non-cooperative” movement was crushed.<sup>2)</sup> Freedom of expression and freedom of association were severely restricted, and the Indies state finally became “a police state” in the 1930s.<sup>3)</sup> In the latter half of the 1930s the “whole country went into exile,” as Rudolf Mrázek puts it,<sup>4)</sup> and the people came to be-

lieve that the nationalist movement was a “*taboo*.”<sup>5)</sup> Thus at this point the Indies state faced diminishing challenges from political activists. The quelling of the nationalist movement intensified the image of the repressive, strong, and efficient colonial state, which corresponded with the appearance of political tranquility in the colony.<sup>6)</sup>

All of this became possible following a “political-administrative revolution”<sup>7)</sup> that had taken place in the Indies state since the nineteenth century. With the changes that this revolution brought about, the strength and autonomy of the state were guaranteed by a new infrastructural power that may be defined as the “institutional capacity of a central state [...] to penetrate its territories and logistically implement decisions.”<sup>8)</sup> From the perspective of infrastructural power<sup>9)</sup> the Indies state seemed to have achieved all three levels of power: It established an efficient and capable central state, secured its territory, and achieved a stable social order. Hence it became what scholars call a “*beambtenstaat*” (bureaucratic state), or a state with a thorough and efficient bureaucratic machine.<sup>10)</sup>

The image of this repressive period of the Indies state has been associated with the lack of “free speech and expression” under the colonial power. Describing the late colonial state after Indonesia gained its sovereignty, Yale University professor of anthropology and sociology, Raymond Kennedy,<sup>11)</sup> wrote in 1946, “The censorship laws of the Indies have been almost unbelievable in their repressiveness, and the restrictions on free assembly and free speech have been almost as bad.”<sup>12)</sup> As an expert of the Indies/Indonesia, Kennedy noted the stringent and comprehensive censorship laws installed by the Indies government to target the indigenous press. He lists seven forms of expression that were prohibited by the Indies government:

1. expressions of sentiments of hatred or contempt for the Government of either the Netherlands or the Netherlands East Indies, or for any groups of the population of either;
2. propagation of revolution by inciting disturbance of the peace or

- assailing a public authority;
3. circulation of articles or pictures which violate the censorship laws for the purpose of publicity;
  4. publication of false reports for the purpose of sowing dissension;
  5. publication of secret military or governmental information;
  6. insulting a member of the Royal Family, the Governor-General, the ruler of a friendly nation, or the representative of a friendly nation accredited to the Netherlands Government;
  7. insulting any public institution or private person in the Netherlands or the Netherlands East Indies.<sup>13)</sup>

As Kennedy observes, in their aggressive application by the Indies colonial state, these rules profoundly affected the Indies print culture. He went on to remark that “violation of any of these rules brought warnings, and then, if repeated, suspension of the offending publication. After two suspensions, additional offenses might be penalized at the discretion of the court, even to the extent of prohibiting the publishing concern and all individuals involved in it from ever again conducting journalistic activities in the Indies.”<sup>14)</sup> To a certain extent, Kennedy was right that the Indies state conducted repressive press policy in the 1930s. But he had confused *persbreidel* and *persdelict* (press offence articles of Penal Code), and overlooked the fact that *persbreidel* targeted not only the indigenous press but also the Dutch and especially (Indies) Chinese press. Kennedy’s misinterpretation and overemphasis on the suppressive aspect of Dutch colonial censorship has led to the general impression that Indies censorship was especially authoritarian. His focus on suppressive censorship obscured for his readers a clearer view and deeper understanding of how the Indies state actually applied *persbreidel*.

The conventional wisdom exemplified in Kennedy’s work treats *persbreidel* as another symbol of the suppression of free press. In turn, the most frequently cited work reflecting this view was J. M. Pluvier’s *Overzichten van de Ontwikkeling der Nationalistische Beweging in Indonesië*

**Table 1** Numbers of *Persbreidel*, 1932–1940

Year	1st phase <sup>17)</sup>	2nd phase
1932	1	0
1933	6	2
1934	16	1
1935	3	0
1936	8	3
1937	3	3
1938	13	6
1939	7	6
1940	2	5
Total	59	26

[My own counting from the Mailrapporten.]

(“Overviews of the Development of Nationalistic Movement in Indonesia”) published in 1953. This review notes that up until 1936 twenty-seven Indonesian nationalistic newspapers were temporarily shut down on account of *persbreidel*.<sup>15)</sup> Although Pluvier did not specify his source for this number, it was actually based on an account published in 1936 by a prominent Indonesian journalist, Saëroen.<sup>16)</sup> A closer look at the data reveals that even Saëroen did not know the exact number of cases.

My own examination of secret colonial documents of the time suggests that there were thirty-seven cases of *persbreidel* up until the last case that Saëroen tallied in his book. If counting includes the latter half of the 1930s, the number of newspaper closures in the Indies exceeded eighty. This jump in number may be attributed to the fact that other newspapers — including Chinese and Dutch press publications — in addition to Indonesian nationalistic ones became the victims of *persbreidel*. This fact suggests that the policy priority concerning *persbreidel* had changed in the course of the 1930s.

In order to understand the political implications of this development, *persbreidel* needs to be examined in the context of wider political trends in the 1930s Indies. Unlike *persdelict*, which targeted individual journalists and involved a trial process at the district level, *persbreidel*



relied on administrative coordination from the district level up to the Governor-General, and this administrative judgment dealt with newspaper agencies in place of court trials. Because *persbreidel* was an administrative measure, it was subject to the policy priorities of the colonial state, which changed over the time depending on political and social circumstances. Hence *persbreidel* worked in the manner of preventive surveillance (*preventief toezicht*)<sup>18)</sup> against newspapers and periodicals in the 1930s.

## Persbreidel

In September 1931, the Press Curbing Ordinance, known as *persbreidel*, was introduced.<sup>19)</sup> This ordinance, ushered in by Governor-General De Graeff on 7 September 1931, was put into effect by Governor-General Bonifacius Cornelis de Jonge, who succeeded De Graeff five days after its enactment. The core of this new press law rested on the power of the Governor-General to temporarily proscribe the publication of a newspaper or periodical on the grounds of maintaining public order. It was evidently meant to be an instrument of intimidation against the emerging nationalist press, allotting much arbitrary power in the hands of the Governor-General. Articles of the *persbreidel* ordinance read:

### Article 1

- (1) If in his opinion it is necessary for the sake of maintaining public security, after consultation with the Council of the Netherlands Indies, with one legal decision the Governor-General can forbid the issuance of a particular publication for a period of time.
- (2) This decision then by (or by the order of) the Prosecutor General shall be notified to the publisher and printer, and also to person(s) under the editorship of the suspended publication, as long as the name and place of residence of this person is known.
- (3) If this act of maintaining public security by the Governor-General

al is no longer necessary, this decision by him, regarding all or part of this particular publication, can be rescinded.

(4) Unless revoked earlier, the decision is valid for one year.

## Article 2

(1) If the above measure does not bring desired results, the Governor-General after consultation with the Council of the Netherlands Indies, can prohibit the printing, publishing, and distribution of the said publication, for a maximum of eight days for daily newspapers and for the duration of three issues in a row for magazines.

(2) The decision instructed by the Governor-General will be announced in the *Javasche Courant*. The decision is to take affect one day after the announcement is published in *Javasche Courant*.

(3) When the period of suspension expires and the publisher of the publication resumes, a new prohibition can be issued as written in Article 1. For daily newspaper, the second and subsequent suspension(s) shall be for a maximum of thirty days in a row.

## Article 3

(1) The prohibition mentioned in Article 2 shall be notified to the Assistant Resident in Java and Madoera and to the head of the local administrator in other places where the publication is printed.

(2) The Assistant Resident or head of the local administration shall immediately take steps so that during the period of suspension the proscribed publication not be printed, published, or distributed, for which case he has the power to confiscate the printing machine and other equipment, and shut the shops used for printing with a seal. He has the authority, if necessary with the help of the police, to enter properties that are closed, including houses.

(3) As much as possible he shall inform those who are implicated, as referred to in point No. 2 of Article 1.

#### Article 4

- (1) Whoever violates the proscription in Article 2 shall be penalized with prison sentence for a maximum of one year.
- (2) The same punishment shall apply to whoever knows of the proscription but cooperates or helps compose or manage the proscribed publication.
- (3) Such punishable cases by this article are regarded as crimes.

#### Article 5

This ordinance is to take affect on the day after it is announced in *Javasche Courant* (announced on 11 September 1932).<sup>20)</sup>

The major points of the ordinance may be summarized as follows:

Article 1 empowers the Governor-General to designate certain publications for temporary suspension. If, subsequently, the designated publication soft-pedaled its criticism, thereby reducing the threat to public order, the designation could be partly or totally revoked. Otherwise it would remain in force for one year.

Article 2 authorizes the Governor-General to prohibit the printing, publishing, and distribution of designated publications. In the case of a daily newspaper, the ban could remain in force for up to eight days, and for periodicals, for up to three times the period between consecutive issues. A previously banned publication could again be banned after re-suming publication. For further offenses, a newspaper could be banned for up to thirty consecutive days on each occasion.

According to Article 3, the decision to ban a publication would be transmitted to the head of the local government in the region, where it was printed. Since 1932 this official, had to hold the rank of Assistant Resident, at least on the islands of Java and Madoera. The same article allows this official to take immediate measures to prevent the printing, publishing and distribution of the publication concerned by confiscating the printing presses and other materials used in the production process, and closing its premises. Where necessary, the police were authorized

to gain entry into barred premises including private houses.

Article 4 specifies the penalties that would be meted out for violation of the ordinance. Deliberate offenses against Article 2 were punishable by a one-year maximum prison term. The same sentence would apply to a person who, aware of the ban on a publication, further collaborated in the editing or organization of its contents, or its printing. All these acts were categorized as crimes.

However, the exact way in which *persbreidel* would be issued remained obscure in the official text of the *persbreidel* ordinance. Many journalists and Indonesian politicians expressed their worries about *persbreidel*, wondering to what extent it would affect the press. Initial reactions after the introduction of *persbreidel* came, predictably, from the nationalist camp. In the 16 January 1932, edition of the nationalist-leaning *Pewartu Deli* of Medan, the special advisor for the Congress of Great Indonesia (*prae-adviseur Kongres Indonesia Raja*), R. Soekardjo Wirjopranoto,<sup>21)</sup> contributed an article entitled "Press and *Persbreidel*."<sup>22)</sup> Soekardjo was a prominent Javanese politician and lawyer. He acknowledged that he could not really explain how *persbreidel* was exercised, even though he was a member of Volksraad, where the proposal of *persbreidel* was consulted and discussed. He provided an exposition of this new ordinance and tried to explain how it was different from the existing one, which was the *persdelict*. In this article, Soekardjo also points out that, unlike in the Netherlands, Indonesians cannot express their mind freely because they are not in a free country. Even though to write and to express one's thoughts is part of one's basic rights (*hak kodrat*), Indonesians live in a cage where unjust regulations are installed unjustly. Since the press is an important medium for the expression of the people's will, spirit, and their (nationalist) movement, he urges everyone involved in the press to oppose the *Persbreidel* Ordinance, as the People's Council had tried to do. He calls on them to pay no heed to the law and to continue to stand behind the people's movement as they would otherwise do. In other words, Soekardjo was making a case that *persbreidel* posed a major threat to the press' ability to speak out against

the colonial authorities and to political activism in general.

From Soekardjo's article, we also learn that the government had introduced *persbreidel* because it was not satisfied with the existing law, handled by courts, which generally allowed journalists to go free after paying a fine. He noted that the Indies government had already had a suppressive penal code, represented by the infamous articles of 161 *bis* and 153 *bis* and *ter* concerning public order and security.<sup>23)</sup> In his view, *persbreidel* added new repressive means to the existing penal code and was made even more dangerous by the fact that the Governor-General held the power to decide its application. In other words, the *persbreidel* ordinance allowed government officials to circumvent the court. For Soekardjo, this sidestepping of the court made possible by *persbreidel* was the crux of the problem — since *persbreidel* operated “outside of the book of laws,” it was especially authoritarian. It is imperative, he contends, that the government allows judges to decide if a newspaper is truthful or not, as is the case in the system of *persdelict* where accusations are allowed to be debated in court. By contrast, he emphasizes, *persbreidel* provides extrajudicial power for the authorities to suppress the press. The decision to invoke this ordinance, he argues, would be largely subjective and shaped by whether or not the authorities feel secure (*aman*) and peace (*tenteram*). It is this point — how exactly *persbreidel* would be applied — that Soekardjo emphasizes he cannot explain, because it can be invoked in an arbitrary (*willekeur*) way. Soekardjo warns that for journalists, protecting themselves from the arbitrary application of *persbreidel* would be the biggest challenge. If politicians like Soekardjo were concerned about the controlling aspect of *persbreidel*, some journalists focused more on the economic effects. *Sin Tit Po*, a Surabaya-based Chinese-Malay newspaper and organ of the Chinese Indonesian Party (*Partai Tionghoa Indonesia*), gave a slightly different view. In an article entitled “What is the meaning of Press Curbing Ordinance to Journalism,”<sup>24)</sup> a writer pen-named “Sar.”<sup>25)</sup> contends that the main purpose of the ordinance is essentially to interrupt the newspaper's business and cause financial damage to the paper. If a paper is sus-

pended for a week or so, it would not only lose subscribers, it would also lose advertising sponsors, especially the European ones, who would not want to be associated with politically problematic newspapers. For “Sar.” this is how the government kills nonconformist newspapers.

From “Sar.” and Soekardjo, we get a sense of how journalists and nationalists perceived the newly installed *persbreidel*. On the one hand they were troubled by its extra-judicial nature, and on the other they also paid attention to its economic effects on individual newspaper business. With such double impact, *persbreidel* exerted great pressure on newspapers to perform a kind of self-censorship in order to avoid suspension.

Newspaper reports on *persbreidel* did not quite expose how the ordinance worked. When it was introduced, the standard process to apply *persbreidel* had already been fixed. According to the ordinance’s text — that is, on paper — it was up to the regional Resident to submit a document to the Prosecutor General, in which he provided the name of the periodical and the actual article that was perceived to be potentially threatening to public order and peace. Sometimes, the local secret police or the Bureau for East Asian Affairs (*Dienst der Oost-Aziatische Zaken*) prepared this document and reported to the regional Resident. At this stage, the Resident made a recommendation as to the phase of *persbreidel* that was to be invoked for a given periodical as penalty. After having received this suggestion, the Prosecutor General proposed the punishment to the Governor-General. With the proposal, the Governor-General then authorized the application of *persbreidel* against the periodical. The Resident or Assistant Resident of the related region was then informed of the decision. This whole process usually took four to five weeks. According to the way the ordinance was written, *persbreidel* was to involve a fairly careful process of investigation that would typically last four to five weeks; in reality, as we shall see, the manner in which the ordinance was actually executed in specific cases varied greatly, having more to do with the political interests of the state than any interest in proper and consistent application of an administrative measure.

Thus according to the official format to be followed for the execution of *persbreidel*, the regional administrative apparatus was to play a central role in identifying local newspapers that were threatening to cause instability in the public order through their news coverage or were publishing material that was offensive towards other members of the community. The Regional administrative apparatus was also to take an active role in stipulating the punishment to be meted out in *persbreidel* cases. But as I will describe later, this format was altered in the latter half of the 1930s, when *persbreidel* mainly focused on the Chinese press in the Indies.

The actual process of applying *persbreidel* was more complicated. The first case of *persbreidel* was applied just two months after it went into effect and was announced in *Javansche Courant*. This case involved *Warna Warta* (News Variety), a Chinese-Malay newspaper in Semarang, which formally drew *persbreidel* charges on 19 November 1932.<sup>26)</sup> The Resident of Semarang stated in a secret document addressed to the State Governor of Central Java (No. 530/G.P.Z.) dated 22 September 1932, that since 7 June of that year, *persdelict Warna Warta* had been publishing a series of articles that could be charged with. *Warna Warta* had a history of more than thirty years of publication in Semarang and had a great influence on the local Chinese community. The Resident's report insisted that *Warna Warta* had carried a series of articles on the ongoing conflicts between Japan and China, which he maintained could spur an anti-Japanese sentiment among the Chinese community. The State Governor of Central Java subsequently submitted a proposal to the Prosecutor General on this matter on 29 September (no. 1758/68 secret document). On 17 October, the Prosecutor General wrote a summary of legal action to the Governor-General (no. 4872/A.P. secret document), in which he maintained that since inter-racial relations were generally worsening in the Indies, it was advisable to take a punitive action against *Warna Warta* that would also prevent its reporting from further exacerbating the race-relations problem. The Prosecutor General then decided to apply the first instance of *persbreidel* to *Warna Warta*. On the

same day the Prosecutor General sent a letter to the State Governor of Central Java (no. 4871/A.P.), explaining that even if *persdelict* could be applied in the case of *Warna Warta*, taking into consideration the socio-political situation in the Indies, the troublesome articles could destabilize inter-racial harmony in the Indies and endanger the public order, therefore *persbreidel* was to be invoked. On 31 October, the Council of the Netherlands Indies (*Raad van Nederlandsch-Indië*) discussed the Prosecutor General's summary of legal action (Commisoriaal no. 4267 to the Council of the Netherlands Indies, secret document, dated October 17). Five days later the Council decided to act on the summary, and on 19 November the Governor-General approved the application of *persbreidel* (no. 286/A, secret document). It was the first implementation of *persbreidel* in the first phase, and *Warna Warta* had to temporarily shut down its operation. The whole process took approximately two months, which showed that in this initial case, the authorities took serious consideration in applying *persbreidel*.

The application of *persbreidel* proceeded from the bottom-up of the administrative structure. It was the residents or governors who had the authority to propose *persbreidel* charges and specify the period of suspension of the publisher's business. The other government administrators involved in the process had only to assess whether or not the proposal was adequate. With the exception of only one case, the length of punishment proposed by the resident to the Prosecutor General was never reduced.<sup>27)</sup> In other words, once the governor or resident decided to apply *persbreidel* to a certain newspaper and its publisher and printer, it was most likely to be approved by the higher administrators. While formally the government had specified a careful process of consideration that would take months to complete, in fact, *persbreidel* charges were often rammed through, reflecting their essentially political function. So the key to the question of whether or not *persbreidel* was applied depended on how the governor or resident thought about certain newspaper and its coverage.



## Trends of Persbreidel Cases

During the course of ten years from 1931 to 1940, based on my tally there were eighty-five cases of *persbreidel* reported in the secret colonial documents. It is difficult to confirm the final accuracy of this number because *persbreidel* cases were decided behind closed doors and documentation was kept secret, but the evidence shows that *persbreidel* clearly worked to stifle the press.

My examination of these cases reveals six key points about the way that *persbreidel* was applied in the Dutch Indies: First, *persbreidel* did not solely target Indonesian nationalistic newspapers. Out of eighty-five cases, it was invoked only twenty-seven times against twenty-two nationalistic-oriented newspapers. Newspapers representing three other “racial groups” found themselves subject to temporary closure due to *persbreidel*. Eleven of these cases were against eight Dutch newspapers, and six cases were brought against three Japanese-owned newspapers. Most importantly, eighteen Chinese newspapers were temporarily shut down a total of forty-one times. That is, nine Chinese newspapers were slapped with *persbreidel* more than twice.

A second important point to note about *persbreidel* is that some significant changes in the application of this ordinance took place between the first and latter half of the 1930s. In the first half of the 1930s *persbreidel* was applied largely to major radical newspapers in Java and Sumatra, whereas in the latter half of the 1930s Batavia and Soerabaja were particularly monitored by the colonial authorities. After 1936 cases of *persbreidel* doubled in number compared to the first four years. Up to 1935 there were only twenty-eight cases, while the other fifty-nine cases occurred between 1936 and 1940.

A third feature of *persbreidel* in the Indies colony was the grouping that may be discerned among the Indonesian nationalist and radical newspapers that were the main target of the ordinance until 1935.<sup>28)</sup> These newspapers fell into four major categories:

- (1) Nationalist newspapers: Included in this category were *Per-*

**Table 2 The List of Newspapers charged with *Persbreidel***

Date	1st phase	2nd phase	Newspaper	City
11/8/1932	X		<i>Warna Warta</i> (M)	Semarang
6/15/1933		X (3 wks)	<i>West-Java Courant</i> (D)	Batavia
8/21/1933	X		<i>Persatoean Indonesia</i> (PI)	Batavia
9/21/1933	X		<i>Fikiran Rajat</i> (PPPI)	Batavia
9/21/1933	X		<i>Berdjoang Oentoek Merdeka</i> (*PI)	Pekalongan
10/30/1933		X (30 days)	<i>Persatoean Indonesia</i> (PI)	Batavia
11/7/1933	X		<i>Soeara Oemoem</i> (PBI)	Soerabaja
11/21/1933	X		<i>Medan Ra'jat</i> (PMI)	Padang
12/2/1933	X		<i>Pahlawan Moeda</i> (HPII)	Fort de Kock
1/5/1934	X		<i>Pewarta</i>	Padang
1/6/1934	X		<i>Api</i>	Madioen
1/7/1934 (?)	X		<i>Proletar</i> (PBKI)	Soerabaja
1/10/1934	X		<i>Sikap</i>	Jogjakarta
1/13/1934	X		<i>Indonesia Raja</i> (PPPI)	Batavia
2/1934 (?)	X		<i>Pelita</i>	Padang
2/2/1934	X		<i>Soeloeh Rakjat</i> (PI)	Pangkalpinang
2/2/1934	X		<i>Garoea Merapi</i> (IM)	Jogjakarta
2/17/1934	X		<i>Indische Courant</i> (D)	Soerabaja
2/17/1934	X		<i>Algemeen Handelsblad voor Nederland-Indië</i> (D)	Semarang
2/17/1934	X		<i>Midden-Java</i> (D)	Jogjakarta
3/14/1934	X		<i>Sipatahoenan</i> (S, Pasoendan)	Bandoeng
7/20/1934	X		<i>Soeara Kalimantan</i>	Bandjarmasin
10/1934 (?)	X		<i>Nieuws van den Dag van Nederland-sch-Indië</i> (D)	Batavia
11/9/1934		X (6 days)	<i>Pewarta</i>	Padang
12/15/1934	X		<i>Indië-Hou-Zee</i> (D)	Batavia
12/18/1934	X (?)		<i>Pahlawan Moeda</i> (HPII)	Fort de Kock
6/13/1935	X		<i>Oetoesan Indonesia</i>	Jogjakarta
6/13/1935	X		<i>Adil</i>	Soerakarta
12/18/1935	X		<i>Pahlawan Moeda</i> (HPII)	Fort de Kock
1/8/1936	X		<i>Indonesia Berdjoang</i>	Soerabaja
2/4/1936	X		<i>Al-Islaah</i> (M)	Bangkalan
4/17/1936	X		<i>Radio</i> (M)	Padang
5/5/1936	X		<i>Sin Po</i> (M)	Batavia
6/23/1936	X		<i>Indonesia Moeda</i> (IM)	Batavia
7/8/1936		X (3 months)	<i>Al-Islaah</i> (M)	Bangkalan
8/27/1936 (?)	X		<i>Sumatra Bin Poh</i> (C)	Medan
9/1936 (?)	X		<i>Masjarakat</i>	Batavia
10/15/1936		X	<i>New China</i> (C)	Medan

10/25/1936 (?)	X		<i>Sin Po</i> (C)	Batavia
10/27/1936		X (8 days)	<i>Sin Po</i> (M)	Batavia
5/15/1937 (?)	X		<i>Thien Sung Yit Po</i> (C)	Batavia
5/19/1937	X		<i>Tay Kong Siang Po</i> (C)	Soerabaja
6/5/1937		X (14 days) (?)	<i>Sumatra Bin Poh</i> (C)	Medan
6/19/1937		X (8 days) (?)	<i>Thien Sung Yit Po</i> (C)	Batavia
7/1937		X (8 days) (?)	<i>Tay Kong Siang Po</i> (C)	Soerabaja
7/1937 (?)	X		<i>Soeara Mataram</i> (M)	Jogjakarta
3/19/1938 (?)	X		<i>Sinar Selatan</i> (M/J)	Semarang
4/5/1938	X		<i>Het Nationale Weekblad</i> (D)	Batavia
4/5/1938	X		<i>Sin Tit Po</i> (M)	Soerabaja
5/4/1938 (?)	X		<i>Soerabaja Post</i> (C)	Soerabaja
6/28/1938	X		<i>Thien Sung Yit Po</i> (C)	Batavia
7/9/1938	X		<i>Sin Po</i> (C)	Batavia
7/9/1938	X		<i>Chiao Sheng Weekly</i> (C)	Pontianak
7/9/1938		X (8 days)	<i>Sin Tit Po</i> (M)	Soerabaja
7/14/1938	X		<i>Tay Kong Siang Po</i> (C)	Soerabaja
7/28/1938	X		<i>Keng Po</i> (M)	Batavia
8/6/1938	X		<i>Ta Chung Shih Chieh Weekly</i> (C)	Batavia
8/30/1938		X (8 days)	<i>Tay Siang Po</i> (C)	Soerabaja
9/5/1938	X		<i>Shang Pao</i> (C)	Soerabaja
9/17/1938		X (8 days)	<i>Tay Kong Siang Po</i> (C)	Soerabaja
10/5/1938	X		<i>Hua Chiao Yit Pao</i> (C)	Makassar
10/9/1938		X (8 days)	<i>Sinar Selatan</i> (M)	Semarang
10/13/1938		X (3 wks)	<i>Ta Chung Shih Chieh Weekly</i> (C)	Batavia
10/28/1938	X		<i>Sinar Selatan</i> (M/J)	Semarang
11/18/1938		X (3 wks)	<i>Het Nationale Weekblad</i> (D)	Batavia
1/21/1939	X		<i>Foto Journal</i> (M)	Batavia
2/7/1939	X		<i>Tohindo Nippo</i> (J)	Batavia
2/24/1939		X (3 wks)	<i>Ta Chung Shih Chieh Weekly</i> (C)	Batavia
3/3/1939	X		<i>Hua Chiao Yit Pao</i> (C)	Makassar
3/25/1939	X		<i>Sin Po</i> (M)	Batavia
4/26/1939		X (8 days)	<i>Sin Po</i> (C)	Batavia
7/31/1939		X (3 wks)	<i>Ta Chung Shih Chieh Weekly</i> (C)	Batavia
9/5/1939		X (?)	<i>Tay Kong Siang Po</i> (C)	Soerabaja
9/11/1939	X		<i>Thien Sung Yit Po</i> (C)	Batavia
9/23/1939	X		<i>Sin Po</i> (C)	Batavia
9/30/1939	X		<i>Tohindo Nippo</i> (C)	Batavia
9/30/1939		X (14 days)	<i>Hua Chiao Yit Pao</i> (C)	Makassar
11/25/1939		X (14 days)	<i>Sin Po</i> (C)	Batavia
2/9/1940		X (6 wks)	<i>De Heraut</i> (D)	Bandoeng
3/15/1940		X (8 days)	<i>Sin Po</i> (M)	Batavia

3/15/1940		X (8 days)	<i>Sin Po</i> (C)	Batavia
3/20/1940		X (8 days)	<i>Thien Sung Yit Po</i> (C)	Batavia
3/21/1940		X (3 wks)	<i>Tohindo Nippo</i> (C)	Batavia
3/23/1940	X		<i>Pewarta Soerabaja</i> (M)	Soerabaja
4/22/1940	X		<i>Het Nationale Weekblad</i> (D)	Batavia

[Source: Mailrapporten and Verbalen (1932 - 40) held in the Algemeene Rijsarchief, Den Haag]  
 Dates indicate when Governor - General's decision (besluit van Governor - Generaal) was made.

Explanatory Remarks: (14 days) means that a certain correspondent periodical has been ordered to shut down for its printing, publication and selling for the period of fourteen days.

C: Chinese, J: Japanese, M: Malay or Chinese - Malay, D: Dutch, S: Sundanese languages.

W: Weder toeepassing 2de fase

< > has the name of political party.

*satoean Indonesia* (Indonesian Union, PI), known as the organ of the Indonesian Party (*Partai Indonesia*, PI) led by Soekarno, as well as *Berdjoang Oentoek Merdeka* ("Fighting for Independence," Pekalongan in East Java) and Soeloeh Rakjat ("People's Torch," Pangkalpinang in West Sumatra) which were both local organs of the same party. The Soerabaja-based Association of Indonesian Nation (*Persatoean Bangsa Indonesia*, PBI) led by Dr. Soetomo published the daily *Soeara Oemoem* ("Public's Voice"), while the Batavia-based Association of Indonesian Students (*Perhimpoean Peladjar-Peladjar Indonesia*, PPPI) issued the daily *Indonesia Raja* ("Great Indonesia"), and the organization known as Indonesian National Education (*Pendidikan Nasional Indonesia*, PNI) issued *Masjarakat* ("Community"). The category also includes *Garoeda Merapi* ("Merapi Eagle") by the Mataram chapter of Young Indonesia (*Indonesia Moeda*), Pasoendan's organ *Sipatahoenan*, and Soerabaja's *Indonesia Berdjoang* ("Indonesia Fights").

(2) Radical newspapers: Falling into this group were those newspapers that generally propagated revolutionary political discourse and made attempts to mobilize the mass. The category includes the Batavia-based youth organization Young Indonesia (*Indonesia Moeda*, IM), which published their main news organ under the same name, *Indonesia Moeda*, while local branches of the organization issued *Oetoesan Indonesia* ("Indonesian Envoy," Jogjakarta in Central Java), *Proletar* ("The Proletarian" in Soerabaja, East Java), *Fikiran Rakjat* ("People's

Thoughts” in Batavia), *Api* (“Fire” in Madioen, East Java), and *Pewarta* (“Messenger” in Padang, West Sumatra).

(3) Islamic-oriented newspapers: Moehammadijah’s branch in Soerakarta, Central Java had its organ *Adil* (“Impartial”), the Padang-based Indonesian Muslim Union (*Persatoean Moeslim Indonesia*) had *Medan Ra’jat* (“People’s Arena”), and the Association of Islamic Youth (*Himpunan Pemoeda Islam Indonesia*) in Padang and Fort de Kock, West Sumatra had *Pahlawan Moeda* (“Young Hero”). Madoera-based *Al-Islah* (The Reform) was somewhat later case of *persbreidel* for this category, forced to shut down for three months in 1936 because its editor, led by Moehamad Saleh Seaidhi, were repeatedly charged with *persdelict*.

(4) Offensive Presses: These are newspapers which were charged with offending the Indies government and were consequently shut down temporarily. This category includes *Sikap* (“Stance,” Jogjakarta), *Pelita* (“Lantern,” Padang), and *Soeara Kalimantan* (“Voice of Kalimantan,” Bandjarmasin in South Borneo).

A fourth important point to note about the history of *persbreidel* in the Indies is that Dutch newspapers were also subject to temporary suspension in the early and late 1930s.<sup>29)</sup> In the first half of the 1930s they included *West-Java Courant* (Batavia), *Indische Courant* (Soerabaja), *Mid-den-Java* (Jogjakarta), *Algemeen Handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië* (Semarang, Central Java), *Nieuws van den Dag van Nederlandsch-Indië* (Batavia), and *Indië-Hou-Zee* (Batavia); in the latter half of the 1930s *Het Nationale Weekblad* (Batavia) and *De Heraut* (Bandoeng, West Java) were likewise victims of *persbreidel*. The former cases involved the *Zeven Provinciën* uprising in February 1933, which was a munity due to the pay-cut that took place on a Dutch warship.<sup>30)</sup> As reporting on the uprising became ever more extensive and widely read, which could potentially stimulate labor unrest in the Indies, it was deemed threatening to public order in the Indies and Indies officials attempted to contain. By temporarily suspending the reporting papers, the authorities tried to contain the perceived threat. This particular incident even led to talks of intensifying *persbreidel* and introducing even more severe censorship

regulations in the Indies. According to this line of reasoning maintaining the public order and tranquility (*bescherming van den openbare orde*) during periods of tension in society (*tijden van spanning*) made thorough containment of anti-governmental campaigns (*anti-gezagscampagnes*) a major imperative for the state.<sup>31)</sup> This argument however failed to get enough support and did not, in the end, lead to a more suppressive *persbreidel*.

After 1938, the Indies state was mainly concerned with war-related articles in Europe. The Dutch press in the Netherlands paid special attention to the rise of Nazism in Germany from the beginning of the 1930s.<sup>32)</sup> Yet in the Indies, the colonial government tried to contain reports on contemporary affairs in Europe, especially those related to Nazism. *Het Nationale Weekblad*, which had changed its name from *Indië-Hou-Zee* in 1938, was suspended for carrying articles on the political situation in the Netherlands. In the case of *De Heraut* the incriminating articles that triggered *persbreidel* action dealt with on subjects of war and anti-Nazism in Europe.

A fifth point about *persbreidel* concerns the Chinese newspapers, which became the most frequent target of *persbreidel* action in the latter half of the 1930s. Here, victims included newspapers in both Chinese and Chinese-Malay languages. These newspapers drew *persbreidel* action for two major reasons: Articles deemed offensive to the colonial authorities, as was the case with *Warna Warta* in Semarang and *Soerabaja Post* in Soerabaja; and articles deemed to be anti-Japanese. In fact, after 1936, the latter became the only cause for temporary suspension of Chinese newspapers.

Colonial authorities issued two types of colonial secret documents in connection with *persbreidel* action against Chinese newspapers. The first type of document was the usual secret mail report, and the second, known as *verbal*, was comprised of secret mail reports organized under similar topics and affairs as similar press curbing cases occurred and were filed together. The first type in ordinary secret mail reports dealt with the individual cases of *Sumatra Bin Poh* (Medan), *New China*

(Medan), *Thien Sung Yit Po*, *Tay Kong Siang Po*, *Ta Chung Shih Chieh Weekly*, *Tay Siang Po* (Soerabaja), *Sin Po*, *Hua Chiao Yit Pao*, *Radio* (Padang), and *Soera Mataram* (Jogjakarta).<sup>33)</sup> The second document type for *persbreidel* against Chinese newspapers consisted of three *verbaalen* in 1938, one in 1939, and two in 1940. The *verbaal* of 24 May 1938<sup>34)</sup> involved the case of *Sin Tit Po* (Soerabaja), the news organ of the Indonesian Chinese Party (*Partai Tionghoa Indonesia*, PTI); the *verbaal* of 7 June 1938<sup>35)</sup> contained documentation on the cases of *Shang Pao* (Soerabaja) and *Tay Kong Sinag Po* (Soerabaja); and the *verbaal* of 11 August 1938<sup>36)</sup> included cases of *Thien Sung Yit Po* (Batavia), *Tay Kong Siang Po*, *Sin Po* (Batavia), *Sin Tit Po*, *Keng Po* (Batavia), and *Chiao Sheng Weekly* (Pontianak). The *verbaal* of 24 February 1939<sup>37)</sup> documented the case of *Foto Journal* (Batavia). The *verbaal* of 24 January 1940<sup>38)</sup> carried detail on the cases of *Sin Po*, *Thien Sung Yit Po*, *Tay Kong Siang Po*, *Ta Chung Shih Chieh Weekly* (Batavia), and *Hua Chiao Yit Pao* (Makassar). The *verbaal* of 5 April 1940<sup>39)</sup> is the last one in the colonial mail reports and dealt with cases of *Sin Po*, *Tohindo Nippo* (Batavia), *Thien Sung Yit Po*, and *Pewarta Soerabaja* (Soerabaja).

The sixth point to make about *persbreidel* actions in the Indies concerns the Japanese-owned newspapers, represented by *Sinar Selatan* ("Southern Gleam") in Semarang and *Tohindo Nippo* ("Indies Daily") in Batavia, which published Japanese as well as Chinese editions. *Sinar Selatan* was considered a semi-official Japanese periodical in that it promulgated pan-Asianism. It tried to stir sympathy among the indigenous population towards Japan with news coverage and editorializing that was anti-Chinese and anti-Western. The colonial authorities consequently regarded *Sinar Selatan* as a dangerous element of the Indies press that encouraged harmful sentiments among ethnic groups in the Indies.<sup>40)</sup> After having been suspended by *persbreidel* action issued on 28 October 1938, *Sinar Selatan* discontinued its publication by the end of 1938. *Tohindo Nippo* also promoted Japan's pan-Asianism with similar anti-Chinese and anti-Western tones. It was suspended several times as a result.<sup>41)</sup> The Chinese weekly of *Tohindo Nippo* was also charged under

the second phase of *persbreidel*, culminating in the weekly's suspension in April 1940.<sup>42)</sup>

There is an important chronological dimension to the six features of *persbreidel* that I have outlined above. Eighty-five cases of *persbreidel* in the Dutch Indies involved forty-nine newspapers, with a number of newspapers falling victim more than once. Execution of *persbreidel* as an administrative measure, *persbreidel* did not happen haphazardly coincidence. Rather, *persbreidel* action came about as the result of consistent surveillance by the authorities, while different newspapers were targeted for different reasons. A 1933 article in *Sin Tit Po* informs us that the government had prepared a watch-list of newspapers, and that individual papers would stay on the list for a year.<sup>43)</sup> Thus it appears that even before *persbreidel* was applied to individual cases, the authorities already knew which newspapers they had in their crosshairs and were waiting simply for a trigger that would set off administrative action. The question then becomes: What were the criteria used by the authorities to single out certain newspapers for *persbreidel* action? To answer this, it is necessary to consider the wider political context in which *persbreidel* was applied.

## Soekarno, Soetomo, and Permi

For the first half of the 1930s the Indies state focused its attention primarily on two areas — Batavia and West Sumatra — due to nationalistic and religious political activism in these regions. In Batavia the state targeted the secular nationalist parties — Sukarno's Indonesian Party, known in abbreviation as *Partindo*, and Hatta and Sjahrir's Indonesian National Education (*Pendidikan Nasional Indonesia*, PNI) or the New PNI (*PNI Baru*). In the case of West Sumatra, two religious-based parties, which were founded or revived after 1928, and their leaders posed the biggest threat — Union of Indonesian Muslims or Permi (*Persatuan Muslimin Indonesia*), and the Minangkabau branch of the Indonesian Islamic League Party or PSII (*Partai Sarikat Islam Indonesia*). The colonial



state also paid special attention to radical religious activities that could potentially turn into a subversive movement.

Placing the history of *persbreidel* action against this political context reveals the way in which colonial authorities used *persbreidel* to silence individuals or political and religious organizations that were deemed to be a major threat to the state. Residents in general kept surveillance over allegedly dangerous political figures and organizations, and waited for “the right time” to apply *persbreidel*. All of the *persbreidel* cases against the Indonesian press occurred after Soekarno was arrested for the second time in August 1933.

Soekarno was the most provocative nationalist leader at the time.<sup>44)</sup> Born on 6 June 1901 in Blitar, East Java, he was admitted into a Dutch school and then attended a HBS school in Soerabaja in 1916. In Soerabaja he received room and board in the house of boarded at Tjokroaminoto, the leader of SI of Soerabaja and a great preacher. From Tjokroaminoto Soekarno learned the spirit of nationalism and political activism. In 1921 he commenced his studies at the Technical Institute (*Technische Hogeschool*) in Bandoeng. In 1927 he founded the Indonesian National Party (*Partai Nasional Indonesia*, PNI), advocating national emancipation and opposition to imperialism and capitalism, which he saw as only undermining the wellbeing of the Indonesian people. Soekarno was arrested in December 1929 and sentenced to two years in prison. Put on trial for sedition in 1930, Soekarno gave his eloquent speech in his own defense on 2 December 1930, that was later published as a book entitled *Indonesia Menggoegat* (“Indonesia Accuses”).<sup>45)</sup> By the time he was released, he had become a popular hero and political legend. In 1932 he established the Indonesian Party, Partindo, because PNI had been dissolved in April 1931 while he was in prison. Partindo soon gained thousands of members and supporters, which intensified the call for independence. It was at this moment, in 1933, that Soekarno was detained for the second time. Yet the colonial authorities were unsuccessful at suppressing political activism with his arrest and found themselves with growing fear that the nationalist movement would es-

calate. This political atmosphere led to the aggressive application of *persbreidel* against radical vernacular press, resulting in six suspensions in 1933 and eleven in 1934. This political context explains how and why it came about that certain vernacular newspapers were penalized with *persbreidel*. In many of these cases, the administrative action taken did not follow standard procedure spelled out in the *persbreidel* ordinance. To colonial authorities invoked *persbreidel* based on very quick administrative decisions — rather than on the results of careful investigation — that were often not recorded in any accompanying official, albeit secret documentation. A *persbreidel* case against the Soerabaja-based *Soeara Oemoem* (“Public Voice”) is a notable example of such irregularity. The newspaper was suspended for eight days, from August 16 until 23 due to *persbreidel* action<sup>46)</sup> that was not reported in any colonial secret documents.

*Soeara Oemoem* was the news organ of the Union of Indonesian Nation or PBI, whose objective was to improve the social status of the Indonesian people. It was established in 1930 by Dr. Soetomo, one of the pioneers of the nationalist movement. Born on 30 July 1888, in Lotjeret, Nganjuk, East Java, Soetomo studied at STOVIA, the colonial medical college for natives, in Batavia from 1903 and 1911.<sup>47)</sup> As a student in 1908, he founded Boedi Oetomo, an association generally regarded as the earliest nationalist organization. After graduating from STOVIA in 1911, he worked as a government physician in Java and Sumatra for eight years. Then he went to the Netherlands to study medical science from 1919 until 1923, during which he became chairman of the Indies (Students) Association (*Indische Vereeniging*) for the period of 1921–1922. Upon his return to the Indies, he established the Indonesian Study Club in Soerabaja in 1924, which six years later was converted into a political party, the PBI. He was not a great orator like his contemporary nationalist Soekarno, but he contributed many articles to various publications in the vernacular press, and his wit and charm attracted many young Indonesians as well as Chinese and even Japanese followers. Participants of his private meetings enjoyed lively discussions with Dr. Soetomo and

other attendants.<sup>48)</sup> Because of his popularity and influence, the colonial authorities watched him and his activities closely.

Several aspects of *Soeara Oemoem's persbreidel* underscore the irregularity of the case. To begin, the basis of the charge was the commentary that the newspaper made in an article titled "*Tinggallah sabar dan tenang*" ("Stay patient and calm") that was published in its 2 August 1933 edition. The article was deemed dangerous (*berbahaja*) because it dealt with Soekarno's recent arrest.<sup>49)</sup> But another Soerabaja-based paper of the vernacular press, *Sin Tit Po*, was not charged with *persbreidel*, even though it too published articles on Soekarno's arrest, including one titled "*Ir. Soekarno Ditanggkep Lagi: Kenapa Diwaktue Malem!*" ("Soekarno Arrested Again: Why at Night!")<sup>50)</sup> on 3 August 1933 and another, titled "*Tentang Penangkapan Ir. Soekarno*" ("Regarding Soekarno's Arrest"),<sup>51)</sup> published on 4 August. Both articles reported that Soekarno was arrested because of his provocative speeches at political rallies, and that for the arrest, police applied article 153 *bis* and *ter* of the Penal Code concerning the violation of public order and peace. The second remarkable aspect of this case was the speed with which the decision to invoke *persbreidel* was made. The decision appeared to have been made in ten days, or only one-fourth of the time expected for standard *persbreidel* procedure. It was through *Javaasche Courant* that on 11 August *Sin Tit Po* first learned of the news of the temporary closure of *Soeara Oemoem*.<sup>52)</sup> Clearly, the authorities were worried about something beyond the immediate impact of *Soeara Oemoem's* article on Soekarno's arrest, since many other papers of the vernacular press covered Soekarno's arrest yet did not incur *persbreidel* action. The obvious reason for the charge against *Soeara Oemoem* was Dr. Soetomo himself. By taking *persbreidel* action against the newspaper, the Resident of Soerabaja was in effect acting against Soetomo, who was popular and influential among Soerabaja's activists. *Soeara Oemoem* had, after all, been on the government's watch-list of newspapers since late June 1933, and could have been charged with *persbreidel* at any time.<sup>53)</sup> This particular case was the first suspension for *Soeara Oemoem*. The second incident,

this time recorded in a colonial confidential report, came three months later on 7 November 1933. But, unlike many other nationalist newspapers, despite these suspensions, *Soeara Oemoem* did not fold. Two main factors supported the newspaper's survival. To begin, Soetomo's remained an active political leader until his death in 1938. In the late 1935 he established the Great Indonesia Party or *Parindra* (*Partai Indonesia Raya*) to seek a collaborative relationship with the Indies government. Its members included Soekardjo Wirjopranoto, Woeryaningrat, R. Pandji Soeroso, and Soesanto Tirtoprodjo. Secondly, *Soeara Oemoem* had solid financial support from the Indonesian National Bank (*Bank Nasional Indonesia*), which Soetomo had founded in 1930.

Another example of the colonial authorities' attempts to contain allegedly radical political activities using *persbreidel* can be found in the secret mail report of 1296x/1933. This report dealt with the *persbreidel* case of *Medan Ra'jat* in Padang, which was known as a center of Islamic religious and education-related activism, and an epicenter of the communist uprisings in West Sumatra in 1927. Since the uprising, the Indies state kept a close surveillance on movement activities there, which forced organizers to adjust their political strategy. Even so, their radical tendency continued.<sup>54)</sup>

The confidential mail report of No. 1296x of 1933 contained two confidential letters with an appendix as well as a copy of *Medan Ra'jat*, from which one can tell how the authorities censored the paper and what kind of expressions were picked up as problematic. *Medan Ra'jat* was the news organ of Union of Indonesian Muslims or *Permi*, published in Nias Padang. When the 1 October 1933 issue was published, its editor-in-chief, Iljas Yacoub, had been in jail since early September due to articles he had published on Permi activities.<sup>55)</sup>

By the time *Medan Ra'jat* was temporarily suspended in October 1933, Permi was considered to be a radical Muslim as well as nationalist organization by the authorities. It was a direct descendant of the student organizations of the Sumatra Thawalib School, many of whose members participated in the Communist-led activities of the early

1920s. With emphasis on both Islam and nationalism, Permi was particularly active in schools, educational associations, youth groups, and in publishing newspapers and pamphlets. It was also associated with trade unions, religious organizations, and merchants' associations. Suppression of the revolt shattered the radical student associations within the schools, but in the early 1930s Permi was able to expand its influence in West Sumatra because of its clear anti-Dutch and anti-colonial position. By December 1932, it had about 160 groups throughout West Sumatra, with about 4,700 male and 3,000 female members; at one point the total reportedly reached 10,000. Its activities spread to Bengkulu, South Sumatra, Aceh, East Sumatra, and Tapanoeli.<sup>56)</sup> Newspapers reported that anti-colonial political activism led by Permi in West Sumatra and Tapanoeli was growing as well, which threatened to induce another rebellion.<sup>57)</sup> With this perceived threat to the colonial state growing, the situation around Permi's activism was increasingly tense by the middle of 1933.

On 13 October 1933, the Resident of West Sumatra in Padang wrote a confidential letter addressed to the Governor-General with a copy to the Prosecutor General. Its title was "proposal to apply *persbreidel* to Permi's organ *Medan Ra'jat*."<sup>58)</sup> The Resident strongly recommended the application of *persbreidel*, especially Article 1, due to *Medan Ra'jat*'s revolutionary tendencies and language. The letter drew attention to a particularly incriminating article, "*Disamping djalan National Reconstruction*" ("By the Roadside of National Reconstruction") in the newspaper's 1 October 1933 issue. A part of the Resident's letter is as follows:

Brief summary of the article entitled "Disamping Djalan National Reconstruction" in the 10-page daily *Medan Ra'jat* of 1 October 1933 is included.

After a brief history of the "Indonesian" national movement over the past 25 years, *Medan Ra'jat* points out that when the people become conscious that if one has the right to self-determination one's goal can be achieved, then they will strive to unlock their "co-

lonial shackles”; the newspaper adds that when leftist-political organizations in a colonized country openly pursue this freedom, the people will accept them with open arms and extraordinary interest.

Is such a goal banned? Can't a people seek to obtain their rights? The laws of the Netherlands Indies government give no assurance. It is very bad that the movement, which is based on justice and fairness, is faced with obstacles on the road. The civilized world recognizes that any emancipatory movement, based on human wisdom, should be legally recognized, as the following words of the former president of America Dr. W. Wilson emphasize: “Every people has the right to determine its own destiny.”

In challenging the accusations launched against the leaders, the article points out that the (Indonesian) movement is not a product of the leaders; it is merely the manifestation of the feelings and spirit of the people. So it will not take a wrong or dangerous path. It may play cards, but is not a secret organization. At public as well as closed meetings, it deals with the same topics, so the Government can be pleased to note that the movement plays its cards openly, and can be easily monitored.

Because there is a real conflict between there (*sana*) and here (*sini*), it is no surprise that the white press incites the government and suggests that the movement's throats and hands and feet be chained, until it disappears. The article is not sure if the rigorous measures which the Government has taken against the popular movement — with the application of amended Articles a and b, in relation to the ban on gatherings, the reactivation of the travel-pass system, the house searches and the arrests of Ir. Soekarno and H. Moechter Loetfi — is known by the white press, as well the inaccuracy of the intelligence reports stating that the popular movement is planning another uprising. There is no evidence that the leaders are committed to any such action. The article assumes that their arrest was made under “suspicion” or the “presumption that the public peace and order will be disturbed.” It is very con-

cern about what kind of punishment they will receive. There are doubts about the accuracy of white press regarding the internment of more leaders.

After reporting the police's warning to the board of the PI's Bandoeng branch not to take any political actions. The paper goes on to say that extraordinary measures being taken are widening the political gulf between the Government and the people. Recalling a remark in *Pewarta* that the "*ninik and mamak*" [adat chiefs]<sup>59)</sup> in Padang Pandjang might cooperate to eradicate the popular movement, the newspaper replies: There is always something going on in a colonial society.

Then the paper points out that inflammatory reports of the Dutch extremist nationalists have further troubled atmosphere. It advises that every action against the popular movement be first maturely considered, because this movement is rooted in world history, because it is a movement to pursue social reform. No one should think that severe measures administered with an iron fist will be able to kill the emerging national spirit; on the contrary, the fortitude of the people will improve while their spirit will continue to spark. A hero of liberation in British India says: "Who is able to chain a people, if their minds do not desire to be chained?"

Keep in mind that:

1. The movement arises from the feelings of the masses, who make up the society, and not because of the leaders.
2. The blood of the movement flows in the body of the youth, who will one day become its soul.
3. Since world history shows that repression however powerful never weakens the popular movement, the paper is fully convinced that the popular movement will not die, instead it will persist and bloom, especially if it is based on conviction.

Who will heal the wound in the hearts of the people, resulting from the arbitrary actions taken against the movement and its leaders, whom they love so much. As long as the people have lead-

ers who understand how to guide the movement, it will not fade away. But who will be to blame, if the people deprived of the leaders snatched from their midst, then take a wrong path?

Finally, the newspaper says:

We, men of the movement, precisely at times like this, must strengthen our mind and conviction.

Fear, indolence, weakness, sorrow, sighing and moaning and rashness — we must cast aside, so far as we can, because they are all deadly poison to our movement.

Courage and vision we must not let go, because they are very sharp weapons in this battle.

People, you who strongly want freedom, your ideals will certainly be realized. Keep up your action!<sup>60)</sup>

The editorial of *Medan Ra'jat* describes the spirit of the movement arising from the people's aspiration to be independent from colonial rule. By citing Wilson's declaration, it argues for a nation's right for self-determination. It's important to note that the language used was not particularly extreme, especially compared with other the writing that appeared in the news organs of other parties. Voicing calls for independence was not unusual for a nationalist movement. The article's reference to the "white press" (i.e., the Dutch press) as spreading misinformation and provoking attacks on the indigenous people's movement and its leaders might be troubling. Yet such jabs were not uncommon in the general Indies press. On the whole the article itself did not pose a particularly remarkable or extraordinary threat to the colonial authorities. What appears to have carried more actual weight in bringing about *persbreidel* action against *Medan Ra'jat* is the political context in which this action was issued. It is reasonable to conclude that *Medan Ra'jat* was temporarily shut down because it was the organ of Permi. As described above, the Dutch authorities had long been concerned with the influence of Permi's activities in Sumatra. For more than a month before *persbreidel* action was taken up for consideration, the editor-in-chief of *Medan*



*Ra'jat*, Iljas Yacoub, had been imprisoned due to *persdelict*, suggesting that the authorities were already waiting for the “right” article at right moment to slap the newspaper with charges of endangering public law and order.

The official Dutch summary of *Medan Ra'jat* revealed the authorities' main concerns. After the communist-led uprising took the colonial government by surprise in 1926 and 1927, conducting close surveillance over “dangerous” nationalist and/or religious organizations became the first priority, with the aim of maintain law and order and neutralizing any potential cause for social unrest. PID and its field officers worked around the clock to monitor the activists and made reports whenever necessary.<sup>61)</sup> *Permi* was among those organizations whose activities and personnel were under constant surveillance by the secret police. Knowing that leaders such as Iljas Yacoub had been removed from effective leadership with their *persdelict* imprisonment in September 1933, it was obvious that the authorities were aiming a further blow to *Permi* and its organ, *Medan Ra'jat*. Executing *persbreidel* was the best possible strategy that authorities had to silence the voice of *Permi*'s membership, and so they took the action in October 1933.

Colonial authorities stopped at nothing to effectively crack down on *Medan Ra'jat*, including tailoring the report that accompanied the *persbreidel* action. The report's “appendix” was a translated and “summarized” Dutch version of the *Medan Ra'jat* article that in actuality reflected upon only parts of the original article. The censor (a member of the Resident's staff) read *Medan Ra'jat*, made marks on the parts which he deemed “dangerous,” wrote some notes in Dutch on the margin of the newspaper so that, one may assume, his assistant would understand why these parts needed special attention, and then prepared a “summarized translation” of problematic articles/passages. The report then intentionally copied and pasted parts of the original article to present a highly distorted version of the article's main argument. In one part, the report translated a whole paragraph of the original article in *Medan Ra'jat*, while in other sections supposedly translated paragraphs

were actually cobbled together from several sentences that were taken from different paragraphs in the original article. The awkward sounding summary quoted above was the ultimate result of this work.

The Dutch “translation” also intentionally changed the original content of the article in question. For instance, the activities of Permi had been a source of headache for the authorities, hence they suppressed its gatherings by applying Articles 153 *bis* and *ter* of the Penal Code. Whereas the article of *Medan Ra'jat* made fun of exactly these two articles by clearly mentioning the numbers, the translation in the official secret report replaced them with “amended Articles a and b.” Also the last sentence of the summarized translation does not correspond with the last sentence of the original article, which reads “People who believe shall triumph” (*Bangsa jang jakin mestilah menang*); rather, the summary closes with a combination of two sentences from the fourth paragraph from the last. The original two sentences read, “We are activists of the movement. In an atmosphere like now, we need to work to fortify our spirit and conviction” (*Kita, kaoem pergerakan. Dalam saat jang seperti sekarang oedaranja, kita perloe bekerdja membenteng semangat dan kejakinan*).

## Towards More Repressive Measures

A series of communications in 1933 and 1934 among the Governor-General, the Prosecutor General, and the Director of Justice reflected the government’s suppressive attitude towards the vernacular press.<sup>62)</sup> Emphasized in this correspondence was the key phrase: “times of stress” (“*tyden van spanning*”). As these three top officials of the Indies state all agreed, in the time of stress it was incumbent upon the authorities to consider seriously applying *persbreidel* to newspapers and periodicals. The law of *persdelict* applied towards confining “crimes against public order” (“*Misdrijven tegen de openbare orde*”) was not enough to maintain political stability. Instead, so the officials argued, under the prevailing circumstances in the Indies, censorship suitable for

“a state of war and siege” (*den staat van oorlog en beleg*) must be applied. Accordingly, a “system of public control over the printing press” (*Regeling van het Overheidstoezicht op de drukpers*) should be installed immediately. Arguing that protecting internal as well as external security of the Indies and protecting public order was essential, the officials argued state control over the press should be a role assigned to the Prosecutor General, not to the Governor-General or the Council of the Indies.<sup>63)</sup>

It could be said that the period between 1933 and 1934 was the high point of government suppression of indigenous political and religious organizations. It was the time when leading nationalists like Soekarno, Hatta, and Sjahrir were exiled, while political organizations were forced to minimize their activities. *Persbreidel* functioned as part of this mechanism of political suppression. Political leaders and their organizations provided the motivation for the emergence of *persbreidel* in the Indies and were the real target of its application. By issuing *persbreidel* against radical nationalist newspapers in conjunction with the aggressive seizure of political leaders and the harassment of organizations, the colonial authorities successfully contained radical political activism by 1935.

The age of confrontational organized politics was about to end, which appeared to mean the end of radical Indonesian newspapers. The number of Indonesian newspapers charged with *persbreidel* declined from sixteen in 1934 to three in 1935, one in 1936 and none after 1937. The question of what to do with elements of the press that did not emerge from a formal organizational base, however, remained for the Indies state. This question would challenge the Dutch authorities in the latter half of the 1930s.

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<sup>2)</sup> Harry J. Benda, *Continuity and Change in Southeast Asia: Collected Journal Articles of Harry J. Benda* (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asian

Studies, 1972), pp. 237–238.

- 3) Rudolf Mrázek, *Sjahrir: Politics and Exile in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1994), p. 155.
- 4) Mrázek, *Sjahrir*, p. 154.
- 5) J. M. Pluvier, *Overzichten van de Ontwikkeling der Nationalistische Beweging in Indonesië in de Jaren 1930 tot 1942* ('s-Gravenhage and Bandung: N. V. Uitgeverij W. van Hoeve, 1953), p. 42.
- 6) The Indies was not the only repressive and authoritarian state in the early twentieth century, but in fact most states were more or less repressive. For the case of the US, see Robert Justin Goldstein, *Political Repression in Modern America: From 1870 to 1976* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001).
- 7) Robert Cribb, "Introduction: The Late Colonial State in Indonesia," in Robert Cribb (ed.), *The Late Colonial State in Indonesia: Political and Economic Foundations of the Netherlands East Indies, 1880–1942* (Leiden: KITLV, 1994), p. 5.
- 8) Michael Mann, "The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results," in John A. Hall (ed.), *States in History* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 113.
- 9) Hillel Soifer, "State Infrastructural Power: Approaches to Conceptualization and Measurement," *Comparative International Development*, No. 43, (2008), pp. 231–251.
- 10) Harry J. Benda, "The Pattern of Reforms in the Closing Years of Dutch Rule in Indonesia," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (1966), pp. 589–605; Heather Sutherland, *The Making of a Bureaucratic Elite: The Colonial Transformation of the Javanese Priyayi* (Singapore: Heinemann Educational Books, 1979); Benedict R.O'G. Anderson, "Old State, New Society: Indonesia's New Order in Comparative Historical Perspective," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (1983), pp. 477–496.
- 11) Kennedy started to establish Southeast Asian Studies at Yale University. Since 1930 Kennedy conducted research on the people and society in the Indies and he served for the Department of State during the war period while kept stationing in the Indies and Southeast Asia. For Kennedy's career, see John F. Embree, "Raymond Kennedy, 1906–1950," *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1951), pp. 170–172.
- 12) Raymond Kennedy, "Dutch Plan for the Indies," *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol.

- 15, No. 7, Apr. 10, (1946), p. 101.
- 13) Raymond Kennedy, "Indonesian Politics and Parties," *Far Eastern Survey*, Vol. 14, No. 10 (May 23, 1945), p. 131.
- 14) Kennedy, "Indonesian Politics and Parties," p. 131.
- 15) Pluvier, *Overzichten van de Ontwikkeling der Nationalistische Beweging in Indonesië*, p. 165.
- 16) Saëroen, *Dibelakang Lajar Journalistiek Indonesia* (Batavia-Centrum: Drukkerij Olt & Co., 1936), pp. 93-94.
- 17) *Persbreidel* action was usually applied in two phases; the first phase could shut down the publisher up to eight days, while the second phase could suspend it up to one year.
- 18) Mr. 604x/34.
- 19) The official name of the ordinance was "Bescherming van de openbare order tegen ongewenschte periodiek verschijnende drukwerken, Ordonnantie van 7 September 1931, Staatsblad 1931, no. 394" (Ordinance of the Governor-General dated 7 September 1931, To protect public order against the publishing of undesirable periodicals, State Decree 1931, no. 394).
- 20) Translated from Saëroen, *Dibelakang Lajar Journalistiek Indonesia*, pp. 90-91. See also *Staatsblad van Nederlandsch-Indië* 1931/394.
- 21) Born on 5 July 1903, in Kesoegihan, Tjilatjap, Central Java, Soekardjo graduated from law school in 1923, worked at government courts, and then opened his own law office "Wisnu" in Malang, East Java. He was elected at the People's Council (Volksraad) in 1931, while established Persatoean Bangsa Indonesia (PBI) with Dr. Soetomo.
- 22) R. Soekardjo Wirjopranoto, "Pers dan Persbreidelordonnantie," *Pewarta Deli*, 16 January 1932.
- 23) "*bis*" is a Latin term for a first supplement, and "*ter*" for a second addition.
- 24) Sar., "Artinja persbreidel boeat Journalistiek," *Sin Tit Po*, 14 August 1933.
- 25) The author behind the initial "Sar." appears to be J. D. Syaranamual, who was an editor of *Sin Tit Po* (a colleague of Liem Koen Hian) at the time and later moved to *Soeara Oemoem*, the organ of the Soerabaja-based Party of the Indonesian Nation (Partai Bangsa Indonesia) led by Dr. Soetomo.
- 26) Mr. 1161x/32.
- 27) Mr. 1356x/1935. This was the case of *Pahlawan Moeda*, which was shut down temporarily on 18 December 1935. The original proposal insisted on

the application of the second phase of *persbreidel*, which stopped publication for a period of four months. But for unclear reasons the Governor-General decreased it to the first phase.

- 28) Here I will list the source of colonial documents are appeared. Mr. 977x/33, 992x/33, 1239x/33, 1246x/33, 174x/34; Mr. 1321x/33, 1350x/33; Mr. 876x/36; Mr. 66x/34; Mr. 173x/34; Mr. 363x/34; Mr. 1378x/35, 10x/36, 34x/36; Mr. 1179x/34, 654x/35, 840x/35, 1084x/35; Mr. 1131x/33, 1132x/33; Mr. 1287x/33, 32x/34; Mr. 29x/34, 1238x/34; Mr. 57x/34; Mr. 606x/36, 686x/36; Mr. 653x/35; Mr. 1296x/33; Mr. 1400x/33; Mr. 1452/33, 1356x/35; Mr. 110x/36, 613x/36, 661x/36; Mr. 29x/34, 50x/34, 154x/34; Mr. 206x/35; Mr. 853x/34.
- 29) Mr. 286x/33, 727x/33; Mr. 257x/34; Mr. 1393x/34; Mr. 1138x/34; Mr. 267x/38; Mr. 1057x/38, 1084x/38 in Vb. 1-12-38-D39, 35x/39 in Vb. 9-3-39-S8; Mr. 315x/39, 572x/40 in Vb. 27-4-39-J16; Mr. 109x/40 in Vb. 4-3-40-G14.
- 30) On 4 February 1933, a group of ten Indonesian sailors seized the firearms and ammunition on board and took over the ship. Almost all other Indonesian crew members aboard along with some Europeans joined the mutiny. On February 10, an aeroplane dropped a bomb on the ship and the mutiny came to an end. There existed the suggestion that a communist or Indonesian nationalist cell organized the mutiny, while a Dutch historian Blom rejected such view by relating it to the Dutch political debate in the parliament concerning how to handle the Indies unstable situation. J. C. H. Blom, *De muiterij op de Zeven Provinciën* (Bussum: Fiblula-Van Dishoeck, 1975).
- 31) Mr. 604x/34.
- 32) Frank van Vree, *De Nederlandse pers en Duitsland 1930-1939: Een studie over de vorming van de publieke opinie* (Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij Groningen, 1989).
- 33) As appeared in order. Mr. 798x/36, 458x/37, 480x/37, 620x/37; Mr. 1021x/36, 599x/37, 250x/38, 342x/38, 362x/38; Mr. 385x/37, 551x/37; Mr. 1053x/36, 431x/37, 600x/37, 853x/38; Mr. 890x/38; Mr. 898x/38, 944x/38; Mr. 797x/38; Mr. 341x/36, 423x/36, 1053x/36, 1056x/36, 1102x/36; Mr. 859x/38, 921x/38; Mr. 110x/36, 342x/36.
- 34) Mr. 577x/38; Mr. 255x/38, 269x/38, 297x/38 in Vb. 24-5-38-F17.
- 35) Mr. 400x/38 in Vb. 7-6-38-R18.
- 36) Mr. 566x/38, 578x/38, 624x/38, 623x/38, 635x/38, 654x/38, 691x/38, 738x/38

in Vb. 11-8-38-C26.

- 37) Mr. 87x/39 in Vb. 24-2-39-B7.
- 38) Mr. 721x/38, 231x/39, 237x/39, 332x/39, 446x/39, 740x/39, 803x/39, 951x/39, 1007x/39, 1113x/39, 1088x/39, 1371x/39 in Vb. 25-1-40-K5.
- 39) Mr. 274x/40, 360x/40, 361x/40, 383x/40, 384x/40, 398x/40, 401x/40 in Vb. 5-4-40-M21.
- 40) Mr. 185x/37, 222x/38, 225x/38, 247x/38; 687x/38 in Vb. 11-8-38-C26, 893x/38; 957x/38, 976x/38, 1018x/38 in Vb. 25-1-40-L5, 796x/39, 893x/38.
- 41) Mr. 89x/39, 149x/39, 690x/39, 1137x/39, 1321x/39, 1401x/39, 1137x/39, 1321x/39, 1401x/39 all in Vb. 25-1-40-L5; Mr. 605x/39, 620x/39, 638x/39.
- 42) Mr. 457x/40 in V 10-4-40-R24; Mr. 492x/40 in Vb. 24-4-40-V25.
- 43) "Sebab Apa "Soeara Oemoem" kena Persberidel?," *Sin Tit Po*, 29 June 1933.
- 44) For biography Soekarno, see Bernhard Dahm, *Sukarno and the Struggle for Indonesian Independence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969); John D. Legge, *Sukarno: A Political Biography* (New York: Praeger, 1972); Bob B. Hering, *Soekarno, founding father of Indonesia: a biography* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002).
- 45) Its Dutch translation was published in 1931. Soekarno, *Indonesië klaagt aan!: pleitrede voor den Landraad te Bandoeng op 2 December 1930 gehouden door Ir. Soekarno* (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderpers voor het "Fonds Nasional," 1931). Soekarno, *Indonesia accuses!: Soekarno's defence oration in the political trial of 1930* (Kuala Lumpur, New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).
- 46) "Soeara Oemoem" Ditoeteop: Moelai besok pagi sampe tanggal 23 Agustus," *Sin Tit Po*, 15 Agustus 1933.
- 47) Savitri Scherer, "Soetomo and Trade Unionism," *Indonesia*, No. 24 (October 1977), pp. 27-38.
- 48) Interview with Ms Yasuko Hakim in Jakarta on 17 February 1999. Ms Hakim was born in Soerabaja with Japanese father and Javanese mother. Her father was a friend of Dr. Soetomo and her family was often invited to Dr. Soetomo's second house. The second floor of her father's house was a hangout for Japanese journalists such as Kaneko, Mominoki, Kozumi, and Kondo, and moreover Indonesian journalists often joined nightlong discussions.
- 49) "Sebabnja "Soeara Oemoem" Ditoetoep," *Sin Tit Po*, 17 August 1933.

- 50) "Ir. Soekarno Ditangkep Lagi: Kenapa Diwaktue Malem!" *Sin Tit Po*, 3 August 1933.
- 51) "Tentang Penangkapan Ir. Soekarno," *Sin Tit Po*, 4 August 1933.
- 52) "'Soeara Oemoem" Ditoetoep: Boeat delapan hari," *Sin Tit Po*, 12 August 1933.
- 53) This is what *Sin Tit Po* claims in its article, "Sebab Apa 'Soeara Oemoem' kena Persbreidel?," *Sin Tit Po*, 29 June 1933. The watch-list appears to include major local newspaper. In January 1934, a Jakarta-base daily, *Mataram*, received the warning for persbreidel, allegedly, due to its articles that invoked hatred towards the government. "Persbreidel di Vorstenlanden?" *Sin Tit Po*, 4 January 1934.
- 54) Audrey Kahin, *Rebellion to Integration: West Sumatra and the Indonesian Policy, 1926-1998* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1999).
- 55) Along with Iljas Jacoub, other two Permi leaders, Muchtar Luthfi and Djaluluddin Thaib were exiled to Boven Digoel at the end of 1934. Kahin, *Rebellion to Integration*, pp. 53-56.
- 56) Audrey Kahin, "Repression and Regroupment: Religious and Nationalist Organizations in West Sumatra in the 1930s," *Indonesia*, No. 38 (Oct. 1984), pp. 41-42.
- 57) "Apa Sumatra maoe berontak?," *Sin Tit Po*, 7 June 1933. *Sin Tit Po* received the news from *Pewartu Deli* on 6 June 1933.
- 58) Mr. 1296x/33.
- 59) *Ninik-mamak* is a Minang term for *penghulu adat* (adat chief). *Adat* means custom.
- 60) Mr. 1296x/33 appendix.
- 61) Takashi Shiraishi, "Policing the Phantom Underground," *Indonesia*, No. 63, (1997), pp. 1-46.
- 62) "Schema politiek maatregelen, Persbreidel" in Parket van den Procureur-Generaal (R. Verheyen), 19 December 1933, No. 6929/A.P. Geheim aan den Gouverneur-Generaal, in Mr. 1559x/1933; "Uittreksel uit de Nota der Algemeene Secretarie: Schema politieke maatregelen. Persbreidel," in Mr. 604x/1934.
- 63) "Uittreksel uit de Nota der Algemeene Secretarie: Schema politieke maatregelen. Persbreidel," in Mr. 604x/1934. This proposal was finally realized after the Netherlands was occupied by Nazi Germany in May 1940.