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From the Resistance into the Cold War: The Dutch Socialist Politician and Publicist Frans Goedhart and the Indonesian Struggle for Independence *

To anyone intending to write a biography of the Dutch socialist politician and publicist Frans Goedhart it will be clear right from the start that a whole chapter, if not more than one, of that biography could easily be devoted to Goedhart's deep concern with Indonesia. The reason for this is obvious. In the decade from 1943 until 1953, the years under consideration here, Goedhart not only became deeply interested in the future of the Dutch East Indies but was also highly involved politically in the painful Dutch decolonization process. Even after sovereignty was transferred to the Republik Indonesia Serikat in December 1949, he could not help following intensely the development of the new nation. He lost interest only after a highly disappointing personal confrontation with the country's political, social and economic situation in 1952. Goedhart's biography in the second half of the 1940s and the early 1950s, consequently, has to be located firmly in the history of the sad story of the Dutch negative response to the Indonesian striving for independence.

Speaking about 'biographies in a colonial context', one may argue that the major theme of Goedhart's Indonesia period was his quest for the margins set to western decolonization. As a socialist member of parliament, and often the Dutch Labor Party's spokesman for Indonesian affairs during the late 1940s and early 1950s, Goedhart had to face the Dutch Labor Party's inherent ambiguities and constraints, imposed upon the party by its origins, its anti-colonial program, and the realities that the party as coalition partner in government had to cope with. Goedhart's political life, then, at least during the crucial years of the Indonesian struggle for independence, has to be understood as the confrontation of an entirely Eurocentric-minded socialist with the implications and consequences of his socialist anti-colonial ideology.

Only briefly, during the postwar period of reconciliation, reconstruction, and renewal from 1945 until summer 1947, were Dutch socialists able to perceive the Dutch colonial heritage with a relatively open mind. After that period, the Cold War, strengthening the Eurocentric concept of decolonization, helped to disperse definitively any doubts and frustrations about the rightness of the Labor Party's course concerning Indonesian nationalism. In the end, after the transfer of sovereignty to Indonesia in December 1949, cold war ideology lay at the root of the Dutch Labor Party's embracing of a neocolonialist stance in the Western New Guinea question.

Goedhart's political evolution runs parallel with this development of the socialist position concerning Indonesian nationalism. It has been pointed out that Goedhart's life could be divided into three periods: one before, one during, and one after the Second World War. Before 1940, his life was dominated by the urge to fight totalitarianism; during the occupation, he actually fought against national-socialism; and after the liberation his whole political career was aimed at saving Western democracy from the totalitarianism not defeated in 1945, but, on the contrary, grown ever stronger since then: Soviet communism, which eventually joined hands at the end of the 1940s with Mao's Chinese variant of bolshevism. This being a rather schematic representation, it explains fairly well Goedhart's dramatically changing perceptions of Indonesia in the years between 1943 and 1953. They reflected the rise of neocolonialism that went along with that of the Cold War ideology.

One cannot do justice in an article to all aspects of Goedhart's political and journalistic career in the period under consideration. My intention is rather to focus on the question of how and why Goedhart's "resistance" concept of decolonization changed into the Cold War notion of neocolonialism. By this

biographical approach I hope to deepen our insights into Dutch socialist decolonization ideology and practices. Not yet having introduced Goedhart here properly, I will start with a short survey of his political and journalistic career until the 1950s, identifying at the same time the various influences, ideas, and significant personalities in his life that were crucial in the evolution of his attitude toward Indonesian nationalism.

In the crisis-ridden decade preceding the outbreak of the Second World War, the journalist Frans Goedhart (1904-1990) had to struggle hard to earn a decent living. After a brief stay in Belgium in the late 1920s, he returned to Amsterdam to become employed by the Dutch communist daily. He turned out to be not only a highly socially and politically engaged reporter but a devoted member of the party as well. After a couple of years, however, he could no longer support the party's policy. A short period of internal opposition followed, and in 1934 he was expelled from the party. Briefly, he became active in one of the other small radical leftist parties flourishing in the Netherlands in the mid-1930s. Although he gradually became sympathetic toward socio-democracy, he never became a member of the Dutch Social Democratic Workers' Party (SDAP). At the end of the decade, he was a freelance correspondent of a Belgian socialist daily. When the Germans invaded the Netherlands in May 1940, Goedhart did not flee the country. Three months later he brought out the forerunner of the resistance paper *Het Parool*, to be published from 1941 until the liberation. In 1945, as a logical utcome of his prewar and wartime political and journalistic career, Goedhart sought to combine both once again, inseparable as they were in his opinion. In the first postwar months, he was the substitute editor-in-chief of the daily *Het Parool.* From August 1945 on, he headed the foreign policy section of this independent socialist paper, which, under one of his most capable wartime co-editors, was soon held in high regard. At the same time, his prominence as a resistance worker earned him a place in the temporary parliament that functioned until the first postwar elections, in May 1946. Although a prominent member of the new Dutch Labor Party, founded a few months earlier, he did not succeed in becoming a member of the newly chosen parliament. But when, in September 1946, the Laborite Willem Schermerhorn was sent by the new government to Batavia as chairman of the *Commissie-Generaal* (the Commission-General, which had to negotiate with the Indonesian Republic), Goedhart took his seat in the Second Chamber (the Lower House).

Although highly critical of the Dutch prewar rule over the Dutch East Indies, Goedhart had, during the war, upheld the view in *Het Parool* that, to the benefit of both Indonesia and the Netherlands, the political, cultural, and economic bonds with Indonesia had to be maintained in the future. Indonesia should be kept part of the kingdom of the Netherlands, eventually as a self-governing country in a Dutch-Indonesian Union. His standpoint and that of *Het Parool* were basically congruent with those of the socialists during the war. In the fall of 1945, however, fundamental differences in mentality and approach came to exist between a leftist group in the party and the party leadership. Next to Goedhart, the publicists Jacques de Kadt and Sal Tas, among others, joined this group. De Kadt and Tas had both left the SDAP in 1932 in protest against the reformist position of the party. Like Goedhart, they had moved toward social-democracy after the mid 1930s. After the war, again like Goedhart, Tas became a member of the party as it changed into the new Labor Party. De Kadt, who was in the Dutch East Indies during the war, returned to the Netherlands in March 1946, immediately becoming a member of the new party. It was only in 1948 that he got a seat in parliament. De Kadt and Tas were both employed by *Het Parool*, which from 1945 onward gave expression to the group's opposition to the colonial policy of the Labor Party and the Dutch government.

Goedhart's ideas about the future of Indonesia changed almost immediately after Sukarno and Hatta had declared Indonesia's independence on August 17, 1945. His opinions were strongly influenced by the position De Kadt took as a correspondent for *Het Parool* in articles sent from Indonesia. Before the war, De Kadt rejected colonialism, which he took as the ultimate form of capitalistic exploitation. In 1945 he proposed that the Netherlands, given the attitude of the Western allies, had to stimulate the founding of an independent democratic Indonesia. All that the Dutch could hope for was some kind of alliance with their former colony.

In 1946, Goedhart was the first Dutch journalist to visit the center of the Republic's government, Yogyakarta. In his travelogue *Terug uit Djokja* [Back

from Yogyakarta], published at the end of that year, he gave a very sympathetic account of his experiences with the nationalists of the Indonesian Republic. He had been truly impressed by what he had seen. The revolutionary mood of the Republic had strongly appealed to him. While postwar fundamental social and political renewal of Dutch society had failed, Goedhart felt that in Yogyakarta the revolutionary radical *élan*, which he had longed for during the German occupation, was alive and well. In the Netherlands, Goedhart was regarded as almost a fellow traveller, whose views one did not have to take very seriously. In Indonesia, however, 'Toean Baik Hati' (meaning man with a good heart, the literal translation of his name) Goedhart won a lot of goodwill. The Dutch Labor Party acknowledged that Goedhart could be a valuable asset in the party's striving after accommodation of the internal opposition. In order to keep the party in government (and thus stimulate a progressive political line concerning Indonesia), it had to be kept together at all costs.

In the summer of 1947, Goedhart was sent as the Dutch Labor Party's deputy to Indonesia to explain the party's political stance to its Indonesian sister parties and organizations. On July 20, only a few weeks after his arrival, the Dutch launched a military attack, the so-called first Police Action, against the Republic. Almost immediately, Goedhart took the plane home, deeply shocked by the use of violence against his friends, the nationalists of the Republic of Indonesia.

To conclude this episode of his life, I will cite part of Goedhart's letter to Schermerhorn, written on July 21, while still in Batavia. It strikingly shows his opinions about the Labor Party's policies of decolonization. Goedhart wrote:

> this evening, Dutch soldiers have been dispatched by Van Mook [the head of the government of the Dutch East Indies], authorized by the Dutch government in the Hague, of which six ministers are members of the Labor Party. I am strongly convinced that the socialist masses of our people will oppose this colonial war that has been started on behalf of the Labor Party as well. We face a terrible crisis. The incompetence of the socialist leaders, their impotence, their failure to defy the bourgeois reaction, and the fact that some members of the party leadership are not real socialists at all, have now come to light. Because of the countless mistakes made by our party, the warmongers could no longer be resisted. As a result, they are now trying to solve the Dutch-Indonesian conflict by force. This is insane and utterly hopeless. This "restricted military action" will only intensify the aversion, the distrust, and the hatred felt by the Indonesians toward us. They can be beaten by military force, but the willingness of the Republic to cooperate voluntarily with the Netherlands will vanish completely. The Dutch are doing this out of despair: to nobody's benefit. Guerrilla warfare must be anticipated, with unforeseen attacks on our army's long-distance connections. Acts of resistance, assaults, and arson against everything Dutch will occur. The party leadership in the Hague can boast of its complicity in this adventure and this bloodbath, being justified by nothing more than the lack of patience, the presumptuousness, and colonial arrogance of the *blanda*-community in Batavia and its many strongholds in the Netherlands.
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> I have no task to fulfill any more. The Labor Party that sent me to this country on a goodwill mission, in order to strengthen the confidence of the Indonesian people in the Dutch socialist party, this same Labor Party collaborated in this attack on the Republic with tanks and bombers six weeks later. Face to face with my many Indonesian friends, I feel deeply embarrassed. I am going back to Holland as soon as possible to induce the mass of our party to revolt against the party leadership that failed.

After his traumatic experience in Indonesia in July 1947, where he was struck by his most embarrassing position as a powerless member of a party co-responsible for a colonial war, Goedhart had to think his position over. The gap between principle and practice in the social democratic anti-colonial program; the dilemma of colonial emancipation versus national integration of socialism; the primacy of social

reform and its relationship with the economic argument of colonialism; the blindness towards the revolutionary aspect of the struggle for independence; and, finally, the argument of avoiding a more conservative stance toward the Republic of Indonesia: all these explanations for the co-responsibility of the Dutch Labor party for the colonial war have been duly put forward in the past by historians. That summer, Goedhart must have realized that, compelled to choose between the Dutch and the Indonesian cause, he, too, could not but forsake the latter.

In August, the Labor Party held an extraordinary congress to let the party's rank and file work off the party's co-responsibility for the police action. Fearing a split within the party, the opposition was willing to follow the party leadership in keeping the Labor Party in government in order to prevent a further escalation of the situation and to find a solution of the conflict according to the Linggadjati Agreement. Only a few members who opposed the party's line felt that the Labor Party's support of the police action should have to result in their leaving the party. Goedhart preferred to stay a member, intending, he wrote to a puzzled friend, to win the party over to his stand, inducing the party leadership to a more radical Indonesia policy and a tough line toward the Roman Catholic coalition partner in government. He did not consider himself co-responsible for the military action.

Until the transfer of sovereignty in December 1949, Goedhart kept on stating his original opinion. He agitated against the Dutch government and the Labor Party's leadership, warned for the consequences of using violence (exposing time and again the violent excesses committed by the Dutch military), and spoke out against the second police action, launched in December 1948. With De Kadt and other members of the party opposition he branded the decolonization policy of the Dutch government as a 'policy of missed chances' (see the subtitle of De Kadt's book, *The Indonesian Tragedy*, published in 1949, about the Indonesian question). He denounced the position which successive governments had taken as a series of failures and errors, to be explained not least by the Labor Party's conservative leadership that subordinated the Indonesian question to the exigencies of domestic policies. This analysis shows clearly the party opposition's fundamental unwillingness to acknowledge that policy makers in a democracy need to cultivate carefully the goodwill and consent of the broad citizenry. Dissidence by temperament, so characteristic of Goedhart (and, for that matter, of De Kadt and some others as well), seems to explain the continuous incongruence between the political principles put forward publicly and the political practices actually followed.

This precarious situation of having no alternatives, and, consequently, of always having to comply in the end with the party leadership's position, was solved by the Cold War ideology that froze relations between East and West from 1947 onward. Goedhart's extreme susceptibility to the threat that communism posed to Western democracy and civilization can be explained by his own experiences of betrayal and treachery when he was a member of the communist party in the early 1930s. Indeed, since then he had always followed the developments in the communist world with suspicion. In 1946, moreover, he himself had been a target of vicious communist attacks during the elections campaign. His embracing of Cold War ideology, however, is largely due to his deep frustrations about socialist decolonization politics. Although he was avowedly against the use of violence in this case (Goedhart was not an antimilitarist or pacifist in principle) and sympathetic to Indonesia's independence, the supposed communist threat to that part of the world nevertheless thoroughly changed his perception of decolonization.

Goedhart's "resistance notion" of decolonization was to be replaced by a Cold War concept of releasing bonds with Indonesia. The former policy emphasized the indisputable right of Indonesia to the status of a self-governing country, preferably in close, especially economic, cooperation with the Netherlands. The latter, however, saw Indonesia's eventual full sovereignty as almost conditioned by its professed and exclusive economic and political alliance with the countries of the Western democratic world.

Goedhart's tendency to interpret the post-independence political process in Indonesia exclusively in terms of the dichotomy of communist or non-communist orientation, was the reason why soon after 1949 he became alienated from his Indonesian friends. Finally he would lose all Indonesian goodwill. In 1950, Subandrio, the Republic's ambassador in London, severed relations

with his old friend Goedhart. In the spring of that year, Goedhart had asked him whether Indonesia was really willing to cooperate with the Netherlands and with the free democratic world. Only in that case, he argued, would the Dutch government be prepared to give financial aid to Indonesia. Subandrio wrote Goedhart a private letter that triggered a brief debate about principles and politics. Subandrio argued that in order to understand the situation in Indonesia, one had to be "objective, tolerant, and modest." When a politician decided he was always right, there was no point in exchanging views any longer. He wrote:

> Do not think, Frans, that I intend to teach you politics, but it seems wise to wonder what the other partner thinks and to try to find reasonable explanations for the other's actions, and not to interpret everything as one sees it oneself. Even in politics, "facts" have to be separated from "purpose" as much as possible; one must not allow "facts" to serve ends. Only in this way we can almost eliminate emotions. I don't believe that we can apply the theme of physical science to politics completely, but nevertheless the present problems of the world can be solved only in a realistic and sensible manner.

Goedhart retorted that he did not want to be right all the time. The problem was that the Indonesians never told him exactly what was happening and what their opinion was. Although the situation in Indonesia was for a great deal the outcome of Dutch rule, there was no point in throwing the past in each other's teeth. Present problems had to be solved in a businesslike way. but considering such "facts" as "the neutralism the Republic was striving for, the large deputation to Moscow, the infiltration of communists from Malacca into Sumatra, the mass demonstrations in Jakarta and elsewhere with people carrying portraits of Stalin and Mao, the apparently weak authority of government, the bad treatment of the Dutch," one could not but admit that here emotional issues were not at stake nor a determination to be always right. After this letter the correspondence ended.

Two years later, in the fall of 1952, Goedhart made his third trip to Indonesia, now as a journalist of *Het Parool* and as a guest of President Sukarno. The pessimistic and highly critical articles about his experiences this time, and the no less critical diary of his travel, characteristically entitled *Een revolutie op drift* [A Revolution Adrift], published shortly thereafter, caused a stir in the Netherlands and in Indonesia as well.

Goedhart's book tragically marked the end of his many years of functioning as a go-between, a position that, by its nature, is never valued in the country of the middleman's origin. The book alienated him definitely from the Indonesians, who felt deeply hurt by Goedhart's rude and biased analysis of Indonesian politics and society. The book was even forbidden in Indonesia. In the Netherlands its reception was hardly any better. Progressive reviewers joined conservatives in condemning Goedhart's lack of understanding, his impoliteness toward a country by whose president he had been invited, his Eurocentrism, and his rationalist arrogance. Conservatives triumphantly underscored the belated insight of this notorious socialist anticolonialist. Progressives condemned the superficialities and inadmissible generalizations in the book. The former administrator on Java and Madura, A. Alberts, who, after returning to the Netherlands, became a well-known writer of several novels and stories about his Indonesian experiences, called Goedhart an outright neocolonialist. Henk van Randwijk, Goedhart's friend in the leftist resistance movement, wrote a long article to demonstrate Goedhart's utter lack of understanding of the long-term results of colonial exploitation and colonial rule. The reactions in general, whether from the left or the right, were basically manifestations of deep embarrassment and irritation about Goedhart's harsh criticism, which compelled the Dutch to reconsider their relationship with their former colony yet again.

Only diehards like the Cold War socialists De Kadt (he had just published his political study *Pogrom, Praag, Moskou* [Pogrom, Prague, Moscow]) shared Goedhart's views. With the publication of *A Revolution Adrift*, Goedhart and the party's former opposition finally fell into line with the Labor Party, which by then had come to realize that one colonial problem had yet to be solved: the position of Western New Guinea, which was left undetermined in 1949. Before his journey through Indonesia, Goedhart took the position that this last remnant of Dutch colonial rule in the east was only a nuisance to the Dutch treasury, and that it would be more economical to

relinquish it. From 1953 on, however, Goedhart opposed surrendering Dutch sovereignty over Western New Guinea to Indonesia. In his opinion, the new nation appeared to handle its problems far from adequately. It refused to give up its neutral foreign policies, and, because of that, Goedhart argued, was prey to communism. The traditionally fervently anti-communist Labor Party, which at the time had not yet taken a clear position on the Western New Guinea question, was all too happy to follow Goedhart and his political friends in this matter. Now it had clearly turned out that the gap between Dutch socialism and Indonesian nationalism was too wide ever to be bridged.

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