

### **PART THREE - PULANG**

#### **Bondan the newsman**

When the initial excitement of the announcement of the Declaration of the Republic of Indonesia dies down in the hostel where Bondan is staying, he goes out into the streets of Melbourne. There, all he finds is an ominous silence.

Familiarity with Australian newspapers is Bondan's legacy from his time in the Cowra POW camp. Soon after his arrival at Cowra, he befriends one of the guards, who each day surreptitiously slips him a newspaper.

Using his English dictionary, Bondan painstakingly translates this English newspaper into Bahasa Malay. This means the internees are able to read current news, a luxury they never enjoyed at Tanah Merah, where any papers they did receive were at least three months old.

Bondan has continued to read the daily papers after his release from Cowra. By now, he is quite familiar with how the free press works in democratic Australia and is abreast of all the latest news from Australia and abroad.

#### **An ominous silence over the land**

The Dutch have thrown a heavy blanket of silence over the flames of nationalist fervour and news of the declaration of Indonesian independence does not reach the Australian press. Consequently, while the Digulists are able to spread the story very rapidly through their own social networks, they have no easy, immediate way of bringing the announcement to the attention of the Australian public.

Bondan immediately realises why the Dutch have suppressed any announcement of the declaration of an independent Republic in their former colony. The NEI Government in Exile is sitting in Camp Colombo holding all the cards it needs to very quickly and quietly re-establish itself as a colonial power in Indonesia.

The Dutch have a small but well trained and well-equipped army, money, a fully operational and efficient public service and an information and intelligence service. They also have a large fleet of ships based in Australian ports ready to take these key players back to Indonesia.

Furthermore, they also have another card up their sleeve. This is an agreement with the Australian Government to repatriate back to the NEI all Dutch citizens who have been living in Australia during the Japanese occupation. This is to occur within six months of the end of the war, at the expense of the Netherlands.

For the Indonesians, this spells imminent disaster. Indonesian seamen will soon be forced to sail Dutch ships carrying Indonesian soldiers back home to fight against the newly proclaimed Republic. Their political voice in Australia, the Digulists, will have a one-way ticket back to Boven Digul.

**Bondan journeys North - "There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune"** (William Shakespeare)

Just when it seems things could not get worse for Bondan, the Dutch order him to leave Melbourne and to go north to Brisbane. They have been watching him for some time, knowing that this man is a key supporter of Vice-President Hatta. They also know that he has some administrative ability and that he will never capitulate.

Bondan seizes the opportunity for a stopover in Sydney. There he meets with Suparmin and members of *Sarpelindo* to discuss the crisis with them. They all agree that they need a strategy to stop the Dutch ships from sailing.

Clearly, they now need Australian help in this, Indonesia's 'darkest hour'. As Bondan resumes his journey northward, Suparmin goes to see the Seaman's Union of Australia. From the start they have been good 'Aussie mates' and readily promise continued support for *Sarpelindo*.

#### **A movement throughout the land**

Meanwhile, Bondan arrives in Queensland and initially stays at a hostel the Dutch have provided for Indonesians in Brisbane. His mail is intercepted, so he and other single ex-Digulists who have gathered in Brisbane move to Camp Colombo, where all Dutch nationals are entitled to accommodation and may come and go freely.

There on the 21<sup>st</sup> September 1945, in the headquarters of the NEI, the Digulists set up a committee to promote the cause of the newly formed Republic of Indonesia in Australia, called the Komite Indonesia Merdeka, or KIM. Similar KIMs are established in Mackay, Sydney and Melbourne.

In Brisbane, the KIM executive is drawn from supporters of all the nationalist movements interned at Tanah Merah. Jamaluddin Taman is elected Chairman and Bondan becomes Secretary. He is hesitant, since he knows his written English is not strong.

Awiscarni, one of the English teachers, joins the committee, promising to help him. Awiscarni can see that Bondan, with his capacity for administration, for strategic decision-making and for management, will be a key member of KIM.

#### **The blockade begins**

On the very day Bondan and his fellow Digulists are forming KIM, another movement is also beginning in Brisbane. There are several Dutch ships at the wharves, and as one is being loaded, some Indonesian seamen on board find a container of ammunition. Immediately both Petty Officers and seamen walk off.

They head for the Queensland office of *Sarpelindo*, which is in the Trades and Labor Council Building on Wickham Terrace. There, the office bearers of *Sarpelindo*, (who include Simon Pinontoan and Nayoan) take them to see Michael (Mick) Healy, the General Secretary of the Queensland Trades and Labor Council.

Once he hears their story, Healy immediately contacts the national executive of the Waterside Workers Federation (WWF). A call goes out to its members nationwide, but particularly in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney for assistance.

WWF members respond by placing a ban on the loading of all Dutch shipping in Australian waters. Other maritime unions join them. Within one week, the black ban have spread overseas to New Zealand, Singapore and even further.

The Communist Party of Australia (CPA) is at its strongest, with members among the executive of maritime and land transport and engineering trade unions. Since the CPA dominates the waterfront and its associated industries, it has no difficulty in extending the black bans to ensure that goods destined for Dutch ships are not even transported to the wharves.

### **Ships with nobody to sail them**

Following the example of their fellow countrymen in Brisbane, Indonesian seamen everywhere walk off Dutch ships. Militia, aircrew ground staff, civilians and even some soldiers follow suit.

Bondan is delighted to find the story of the black bans and striking seamen have made headlines in Australian newspapers and even rate a mention overseas. Indonesian Nationalist Committee members and *Sarpelindo* are frantically busy working with the Australian maritime unions.

Many of the Indonesian seamen have no money and nowhere to stay. Public meetings are held and donations canvassed to assist the seamen. There is an outpouring of generosity from Australians in general and trade unionists in particular.

The unions help the Indonesian seamen to find accommodation. Some stay in seamen's hostels, while others even find a temporary bed in the Brisbane Trades Hall, where the black ban began.

Sardjono, the former PKI leader, is now in Brisbane and he calls on the assistance of the Queensland CPA. When Indonesian seamen are arrested and stand trial there prominent Brisbane CPA barrister, Max Julius, donates his services free to mount their defence. Sadly he is unsuccessful and they go to prison.

However, in recognition of Max Julius' efforts, one the PKI Digulists in Mackay names the latest addition to the family after him. This makes a lasting impression on the midwives of Mackay!

### **"The Empire strikes back" - Dutch style**

With assistance of the British, Indian seamen are brought in by the Dutch to act as strike breakers. They too walk off the Dutch ships. Now Australian unionists rally around the Indians, mounting a campaign for their repatriation to India.

More seamen are brought from Indonesia, but they also refuse to man the ships. Many seamen are arrested and imprisoned under immigration law, but the Australian

Government will not allow the Dutch to take them back to Indonesia.

In the short term, in order to sail ships that already have cargo on board, Dutch officers must shovel the coal themselves. Industrial action by miners in Bowen prevents the Dutch from loading coal there, so that with support from Allied naval vessels, the coal is transferred onto the Dutch ships offshore.

Most Indonesian soldiers remain loyal to the Dutch, but a few mutiny. Mutineers are sent by plane to Merauke and from there to Boven Digul. The Australian Government cannot intervene, since this is deemed to be a Dutch military matter.

Loyal soldiers are used to transport cargo and then to load it onto ships. The Dalgety Company allows them to use its wharves. Conservative newspapers such as the *Brisbane Courier Mail* and the *Melbourne Herald* and magazines such as the *Bulletin* write articles that are critical of the strikes.

There is a large Dutch presence in Queensland and they are developing a significant political support base with the Country Party of Australia, lead by Arthur Fadden. At a time when Australians are just beginning to learn about the sufferings of Australians in Changi and other infamous Japanese POW camps, the Dutch describe the Republican Government as one that is "made in Japan".

Robert Menzies, the Leader of the Opposition, is a fervent anti-communist. He opposes the black bans because he regards them as an attempt to sabotage the Australian industrial and arbitration system and to interfere with the internal affairs of another country.

Under an arrangement negotiated once the Netherlands has been liberated, the Dutch also bring young volunteer soldiers out to Australia. Realising they are there simply to learn how to defend a colonial empire, the Australian Government reneges on an agreement to allow them to be trained in Australia. The recruits are therefore sent untrained into Indonesia.

Finally in the end, the Dutch have to bring sailors from the Netherlands. Most ships are held up for some time before this option is adopted in desperation. These ships include the *Karsik*, which will take Dutch currency back to the former colony, and the *Van Heutz*, which will carry the NEI Administration from Brisbane to Jakarta.

### **The Indonesians begin to speak with one voice - the formation of CENKIM**

In the meantime, back in Brisbane, Bondan and the other executive members of KIM, after conferring with their interstate compatriots, decide to centralise their organisation. The Brisbane KIM becomes the Central Komite Indonesia Merdeka, or CENKIM.

This enables them to speak out with one voice on behalf of all Indonesians in Australia regarding the Republic. CENKIM's first important role after its establishment is to try to find a way of getting the Indonesian seamen back home and safely into Republican hands.

In order to do this, two things are required urgently. The first is to get support from the Australian public and the second is to gain the agreement of the Australian Government.

CENKIM produces more pamphlets for distribution at rallies in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. More public meetings are held. Much to the joy of the Digulists, they are free to hold a public demonstration and to march down the streets of Melbourne shouting: "Long live the Republic of Indonesia".

After the long years in Boven Digul, this is 'heady stuff' for the Indonesians! Many Australians simply see them as friends who helped to fight the Japanese and now need a 'hand to go home'. Australian servicemen, savouring at last their own homecoming, march along side them, recognising the justice of their cause.

From his daily ritual of reading, Bondan is happy to see that the Australian unions' black bans are keeping the Indonesians cause in the newspapers. He senses also that the Australian Government wishes to repatriate the Indonesians as soon as possible, and now he knows that there is significant sympathy for them among its constituency at large and not simply CPA dominated unions.

Furthermore, though CENKIM does not yet appreciate it, Australians now have two new players who will treat the Digulists with the greatest of fairness and humanity.

#### **New players in the Australian team**

Australia has a new leader. Joseph Benedict Chifley, the wartime Treasurer and Minister for post-war reconstruction, has become Prime Minister following the death of John Curtin. Chifley is a largely self-educated man of Irish Catholic background and a fervent unionist with strong sympathy for the underdog. He is also a non-Marxist socialist.

Although not stridently anti-colonial, in the pre-war period Chifley had made a study of labour practices in the NEI. Therefore, he is now well disposed to representations written by non-communist, socialist, Indonesian nationalists like Bondan.

In the final months of 1945, Dr Evatt, who is the Minister for Foreign Affairs, brings a key new member onto his senior staff. This man, the second of the two new key players, is to play a critical role in the turbulent, immediate post-war years in establishing Australia on the world stage. He is Dr John Burton.

After completing a doctorate at the London School of Economics on a Public Service Scholarship, Burton returns to Australia in 1941 and joins the Department of External Affairs. Dr Evatt, 'the Doc', immediately seconds him to be his private secretary, a post he holds for three years.

Burton is the son of the Secretary General of the Methodist Church in Australasia, and he has grown up in a home where people of diverse ethnic background were welcomed. He is firmly committed both to the principles of Wesleyan social humanism and Keynesian economic theory.

During the three years he has been secretary to 'the Doc', they have had many hours of discussion over which they have become friends. Evatt knows they hold similar views on foreign affairs and he trusts him. At 29, John Burton becomes First Secretary, Economic Relations Division and then on the 1st October 1945 he is promoted to Acting Head of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

### **Someone has a brainwave**

Australia's first Minister for Immigration is Arthur Albert Calwell. A former public servant from Melbourne, Calwell is one of the authors of the "White Australia Policy". His xenophobic advocacy will ensure this remains official Australian Labor Party (ALP) policy for two decades.

Calwell is keen to see all Asian and non-Caucasian workers out of Australia as soon as possible. He therefore becomes an unlikely ally of Dr John Burton, the forward thinking advocate of multiculturalism, who is acting head of the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The Australian Government is definitely not prepared to allow the Dutch to force the Indonesians to go back home against their will. However, for quite diametrically opposing reasons, leading figures within the government want them repatriated.

Suddenly, someone within the Australian government has a clever idea. Australian troop ships are bringing Australian POWs home from SE Asia, having sailed there empty. The Indonesians could be loaded onto one of these ships in Australia and dropped off at a port controlled by the Republican forces.

All the parties involved, except of course the Dutch, think this is truly a brainwave. As luck will have it, there is just such a ship available.

### **The *Esperance Bay* gets some unexpected passengers**

A British troop ship, called the *Esperance Bay*, is on loan to the Australians and is due to sail from Sydney to Japan in order to bring back Australian servicemen. It can easily transport the Indonesian seamen home to Republican territory on the way to Japan.

Of course the *Esperance Bay* is under Allied military control. The plan cannot proceed until Australian government officials receive a communiqué from Mountbatten's staff authorising its use for this non-military purpose.

As soon as the Government receives the 'go ahead', a call goes out for the Indonesians to pack up and be ready to leave. Naturally, Digulists also put their hands up to be taken, since for some, such as Sardjono, it is about eighteen years since they have set foot on Javanese soil.

CENKIM sends a deputation to see the Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell. Another Digulist, Soedijat, who is head of one the Independence Committees, leads this delegation. He receives assurances from Calwell that the Indonesians on board the *Esperance Bay* will not be handed over to the Dutch.

Soedijat's request for an Australian trade unionist to accompany them as observer is denied and the Government instead sends an Australian Army Lieutenant, Kenneth Plumb, who has been an Australian Army liaison officer with the Dutch Intelligence Services, as its official government representative.

Although original memoranda suggest five hundred seamen will be repatriated, by the time the *Esperance Bay* is ready to sail there will be approximately fifteen hundred Indonesians on board.

Indonesian seamen and some Digulists travel up from Melbourne. For those with money, goods such as clothing, bicycles, cooking utensils and medicine are hastily purchased.

### **The *Esperance Bay* departs from Sydney Harbour**

On the evening before the *Esperance Bay* is due to depart, the Australia Indonesia Association holds an Information Evening at the Sydney Town Hall, sponsored by the New South Wales Trades and Labour Council.

The Indonesians give exhibitions of Javanese dancing and *pencak silat* (Indonesian form of martial arts). There are speeches by Australians and Indonesians and the AIA formally resolves to do all it can to support the Indonesians.

In accordance with this resolution, Molly Warner and several other AIA members go to the wharf next day to farewell the ship. When they arrive at the dock, they find the embarkation is somewhat chaotic. There are many more Indonesians than first anticipated. The Consul General for the Netherlands in Sydney arrives and requests to go on board. This request is denied and he is forced to walk away to the sound of loud jeering from some of the Indonesians.

In the meantime, Molly and the other members of the AIA are approached to see if they are able help with another problem. When an Indonesian was paid while working in Australia, some of the salary was withheld. Now the Indonesians want this back pay. However the Dutch are refusing to pay it. The Indonesians require a person or an organisation to obtain this money and forward it to them.

Molly agrees to do this as a representative of the AIA. The Indonesians need time to write out Powers of Attorney for the AIA to collect this money on their behalf. Therefore she volunteers to travel to Brisbane and collect these when the ship arrives there.

Finally, the *Esperance Bay* sails out of Sydney Harbour on its journey to Brisbane. As it leaves the docks, the Indonesians sing *Indonesia Raya* and *Bengawan Solo*. This is a very special moment for both those on board and those left behind.

### **Molly arrives in Brisbane**

Molly takes holidays from work and catches an overnight train to Brisbane. When she arrives at the wharf in Brisbane, she collects the Powers of Attorney for the Indonesians' back pay. She also finds there is a further problem. Many Indonesians

still have Australian money and they have just been informed that they are not allowed to take this out of Australia.

Molly volunteers to take the money to the bank. There it will be counted and Government Bonds will be purchased until such time as it can be transferred to its owners in Indonesia.

A police escort is provided for Molly to travel with the money to the bank. When the money is finally counted, Molly finds to her horror that the amount she has carried is £60,000 which is a very considerable sum of money at this time.

There is one further problem with this money. Molly has banked all the money but has not received all of the Powers of Attorney. Furthermore, she and CENKIM need to know what is to be done with the interest that will accrue on the money before it is returned to its owners. She receives assurances that the remaining Powers of Attorney will be collected before the *Esperance Bay* arrives in Darwin and will be posted to CENKIM.

#### **CENKIM has a new recruit**

When Molly establishes contact with CENKIM, she finds they are very short of workers. Having taken her holidays and needing to resolve the issues surrounding the money before she returns to Sydney, Molly volunteers to give them a hand.

Molly's father is an artist and a printer and she has, in the past, helped him run his business. Therefore she is quite at home with one of CENKIM's key jobs, that of producing broadsheets to promote the Indonesian nationalist cause. Soon, one the Indonesians responsible for writing these broadsheets asks her to assist him with his English.

Time flies. Molly uses up all her holidays and resigns from her position in Sydney to stay on helping CENKIM. Bondan has returned from Mackay and soon Molly is also helping him with his English expression when he writes to the Prime Minister and to other Cabinet Ministers in his role as CENKIM Secretary.

All the members of CENKIM and Molly have been living off their savings, and when these run out, they take jobs. Meanwhile, CENKIM's work is increasing. Once they are authorised to use the interest from the Government Bonds for CENKIM costs, they are able to buy a radio receiver.

This will prove most useful, since they can now monitor events in Indonesia, where a very great deal is happening.

#### **Meanwhile, back in the Republic .....**

While all this is going on in Australia, the fledgling Republican government is rapidly establishing itself. Under Japanese occupation, Indonesians have taken over the administration of the country in a way that the low "glass ceilings" of Dutch colonial rule had never allowed them to do.

They use the time bought by the Australian black bans to establish their currency and to enlarge, train and equip their army.

During the Japanese occupation, many Javanese youth are taken away from their villages and put into special army training camps. Dislocated from their own culture, these young men now only live to be soldiers. They are a well-trained killing machine and provide the Republic with a basis from which to rapidly develop a volunteer army.

As the Japanese retreat and surrender, the Republicans snatch up discarded Japanese weapons and equipment. Many Indonesians have suffered terribly under Japanese imperialism and they have no intention of allowing a colonial power to take over their country again.

On the other hand, the Dutch are returning to the NEI with two principal objectives. The first of these is to regain control and re-institute colonial rule and the second to punish those who have collaborated with the Japanese. Antagonism to the nationalists is increased when some young Japanese-trained nationalist soldiers massacre Dutch women and children just after they are released from an internment camp.

Lord Mountbatten, Commander-in-Chief of the British, heads the allied armies that liberate Indonesia from the Japanese. Mountbatten, who will later oversee the demise of the British Empire in India, is not particularly enamoured of Dutch colonialism. The Australian armed services now take orders from him, rather than the American commander, General Macarthur.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF, which already has a military presence in Indonesia, is given responsibility for all the islands east of Lombok (Nusa Tenggara), Celebes (Sulawesi) and Borneo (Kalimantan). Its role is to liberate Australian POWs and ensure their repatriation to Australia.

As well as this, the Australians are to ensure that the Japanese surrender and are returned as Prisoners Of War to Japan. The 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF achieves this quite quickly and easily. They retain control, allowing the Dutch only to establish civilian administrations.

The British forces, which do not arrive until the 9<sup>th</sup> September 1945, will be responsible for Java, Madura, Sumatra and Bali. They have the same brief as the Australians. Their task is far more difficult, however, since the Republicans already control the administration of Java.

When the British come to Surabaya they have no intention of fighting Indonesians, but the fledgling Indonesian army stands up to them and in the early stages has the upper hand. This gives the Indonesians great confidence.

Unfortunately, after negotiating peace with the nationalist leaders, the British commanding officer, Brigadier General AW Mallaby, is killed by Republican troops. He is travelling in a car bearing a white truce flag.

He was a good leader and a brave soldier who has led his fiercely loyal Ghurkha troops through a long, hard war. Unfortunately but understandably, these Ghurkhas will continue to harbour some anger against the nationalists for this violation of the international code of conduct of warfare.

By the time the British have control of Surabaya in early November 1945, about sixteen thousand Indonesian and two thousand British lives have been lost. However, for the Indonesians, the Battle of Surabaya is to remain forever a defining moment in the history of their nation.

Finally, the world can see that the Dutch imperialists will never be welcome again in Indonesia.

### **The *Esperance Bay* arrives at its first port of call in Indonesia**

During the journey to West Timor, the Indonesians elect Soedijat as their leader. Fellow Digulists, Soeparmin, Sardjono and Senan are also on board. The Australian officers, including Lieutenant Plumb, are impressed by the peaceful, dignified demeanour of these Digulists.

A young man called Lumanauw is Soedijat's deputy. He is tall and strong and a fiery orator. He has already attracted quite a following among the younger Indonesians on board.

During the journey from Sydney, the Dutch have also been busy applying pressure on Mountbatten, who issues an order that the Indonesians are to be left in Timor. The Australian Government refuses to agree with this, since there are not sufficient supplies for the number of Indonesians being repatriated.

Finally the Dutch supply a list of forty men whom they want detained and not handed over to the Republicans. A compromise is reached whereby only the forty 'trouble makers' are to be left there. The list is inaccurate, since some names on it are not on board and others are misspelt.

Tensions mount, since both the Australians and the Indonesians are unhappy with this order. Plumb, who has worked in the past with the Dutch, realises they are particularly targeting the Digulists, whom all the officers have grown to respect.

He manages to prune the list to eighteen names, which sadly include the Digulists. Plumb is particularly unhappy that he has to include a man, his wife and young children. He has no choice, because the woman is unable to look after the children on her own without her husband.

A further problem emerges, since it is discovered that no proper search was made of the Indonesians' luggage before embarkation and many knives and a couple of pistols have been smuggled on board. Since there are many more Indonesians than Australians and Lumanauw seems capable of inciting a riot, the officers are very grateful for the calming influence of the Digulists.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> October 1945, the *Esperance Bay* and the *Arunta* finally approach Kupang (Koepang), the main centre of West (Dutch) Timor. Kupang is under the military control of the 2<sup>nd</sup> AIF Timforce, commanded by Brigadier Dyke, although the Dutch are carrying out the civilian administration.

The Australian commander comes on board. He observes that Lumanauw has stirred up many of the Indonesian seamen. The seamen say that they will not allow the people named on the Dutch list to be off loaded at West Timor, unless all the Indonesians go with them.

Brigadier Dyke realises that a physical confrontation will inevitably lead to significant loss of life on both sides. He also knows that there is not sufficient food, water and shelter on the island for an additional fifteen hundred people, since he was the one who had previously advised the Australian Government of this.

After a consultation with the Australian officers, Dyke makes the decision that the *Esperance Bay* will proceed to Jakarta without the disembarkation of any of the Indonesians.

In doing this, he directly defies orders and may face a court-martial. However, Cabinet overwhelmingly endorses Dyke's actions when the Minister for the Army, Frank Forde, makes his report to them. Dr John Burton, who has worked hard behind the scenes to achieve this outcome, is very relieved.

#### **The *Esperance Bay* arrives home**

When the *Esperance Bay* finally arrives in Jakarta, the Australians very quickly realise that there is no hope of negotiating the release of any of those on the final list of eighteen. They are greeted by a boat of British Ghurkhas with orders to use whatever force is necessary to ensure that everyone disembarks, except those whose names are on the list.

Unlike the Australian diggers, the Ghurkhas are not particularly kindly disposed towards the Republicans because of the circumstances surrounding the very recent death of their commander Brigadier General Malleby. The situation very quickly threatens to boil over into violence.

The Australian officers have the task of explaining to Soedijat and Lumanauw that if they do not come up the gang plank when their name is called, the Ghurkhas will go down to get them. They point out that the space below is confined and the Ghurkhas have orders to use their guns and legendary Ghurkha Kukri knives if necessary. The Digulists co-operate and allow themselves to be isolated from the other Indonesians.

Lumanauw, on the other hand, is not prepared to co-operate. He has now supplanted Soedijat as leader and continues to stir up the Indonesians to resist the disembarkation, which they do. The Australian soldiers are obliged to manhandle Lumanauw, taking him out of sight of the others and locking him in a room.

After this, the seamen settle down and disembark in an orderly way. By the end of two days, all the Indonesians and their luggage are removed except for those on the

list. By now, Plumb has added Lumanauw's name to the list of eighteen.

Despite his best efforts to try to convince the British and Dutch to allow the family on the list to go ashore, nineteen militants and this one family are transferred to the destroyer, *Arunta*, which returns them to Kupang.

**"You must be the change you wish to see in the world."** (Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi)

The Australian officers and crew of both the ships are most unhappy when the *Arunta* sets sail for West Timor. They feel they have been a party to the Australian Government's renegeing on the commitment Calwell had given to the Digulists. This feeling will linger with many of them long afterwards.

These Digulists have certainly earned the respect of the Australians. Despite being bitterly disappointed at not being allowed to disembark on Javanese soil and feeling greatly angered by Calwell's betrayal, they remain steadfastly non-violent and deeply committed to the nationalist cause to the end.

Because of the Digulists' commitment to non-violent struggle, not a single person has been harmed. The Australians know that without these fine men there could have been a very different outcome. They feel ashamed of the injustice they have been ordered to hand out to them.

### **The long way home**

Upon arrival back in Kupang, the eighteen single men are transferred to Semau Island, where Brigadier Dyke ensures they are provided with basic shelter, food and clothing. He also allows them to use the Army mail service, so they can write to their supporters in Australia. The family is placed under house arrest in Kupang.

The men on Semau Island establish a local Indonesian Independence Committee, fly the Indonesian flag and try to recruit the locals to the Republican cause. Before they can be reprimanded for this, Tim Force is withdrawn and the Australian Government arranges for them to be transferred to Labuan via Singapore.

On Labuan Island, they are under the command of the British Army and so lose their mail privileges. They can no longer maintain contact with anyone in Australia and as time passes people seem to have forgotten them.

Fortunately, there is one organisation in Australia that is still able to help them. This is the Australian Red Cross Society, which has been sending them parcels while they are on Semau Island and cannot find where to send their parcels once they leave Kupang.

The Australian Delegate to the International Red Cross approaches Dr John Burton, who, realising the British are soon to withdraw from Singapore, hastily makes arrangements for their transfer back to Indonesia.

Under the watchful eye of the Governing Board of the International Red Cross, they

are transported to Jakarta and from there to Cirebon, a Republican area. It has been nine months since they left Australia, but they return home as committed to the nationalist cause as when they left.

#### **CENKIM's work continues ...**

No sooner have the Indonesians on the *Esperance Bay* arrived home safely, than Bondan writes on behalf of CENKIM to the Australian Prime Minister, Joseph Chifley. He inquires about the possibility of a second ship being provided to repatriate more Indonesians.

In his most polite Javanese style, he points out the financial difficulties that beset the Indonesians and expresses their desire not to be a burden on the Australian people for longer than is necessary.

Chifley refers the matter to the Foreign Affairs Department but unfortunately Calwell decides it is a matter for the Department of Immigration, and time drags on as he exchanges correspondence with the Dutch.

CENKIM knows it needs to keep the issue of Indonesian repatriation before the Australian government. Bondan goes to Sydney, where he has meetings with *Sarpelindo* and with the Australian unions to co-ordinate the continuing support of both organisations. He then enlists the help of a very creative Dutchman.

#### ***Indonesia Calling***

This Dutchman is Joris Ivens, a famous radical Dutch filmmaker. Ivens has recently accepted the position of Film Commissioner for the NEI and travelled to Australia to wait there for the end of hostilities in the Pacific. As soon as he arrives in Australia he realises that the Dutch have no intention of relinquishing their Empire and resigns his position.

He is a communist and is sympathetic to the nationalist cause. Ivens is therefore very happy to meet with Bondan and promises to produce a short feature film free of charge. This film will promote the cause of Indonesian independence in Australia.

The Waterside Workers' Federation offers to sponsor the film, which Ivens names *Indonesia Calling*. Made in the style of a documentary newsreel, the film retells the story of the departure of the *Esperance Bay* from Sydney Harbour.

This film is cleverly conceived. In 1946, a ticket to the cinema entitles the purchaser to see two feature films with an "Interval" between, in which newsreels were shown. When *Indonesia Calling* is played in the "Interval" time slot, viewers believe it is a real newsreel, which has been filmed as the events are occurring, rather than a reconstruction at a later date.

For expatriate Indonesians, the film makes them feel a little homesick, since there is footage of Javanese dancing and a Moluccan band. The enthusiasm and sincerity of the amateur Indonesian actors adds to the appeal of the film.

*Indonesia Calling* is well acclaimed and helps to keep the plight of the Indonesians, still to be repatriated, in the mind of the Australian public. The Digulists manage to have some copies smuggled back to Indonesia. The film is a great success there, but unfortunately all the copies are lost during fighting with the NEI troops.

#### **The *HMAS Manoora* has a new job**

After the successful repatriation of so many Indonesians on the *Esperance Bay*, Bondan, as Secretary of CENKIM, continues his requests for repatriation. There are fourteen hundred Indonesians still remaining in Australia.

He explains this comprises a diverse group of mutinous seamen and military personnel now in custody in three States; Digulists and their families living in Mackay; tubercular seamen at the Dutch hospital at Turrumurra and Indonesians who have worked for the Dutch or Australians during wartime, but are now considered 'non-co-operators' and are living independently on their own resources.

In a new ploy to try to have the black bans lifted, the Dutch declare their government does not wish to assume responsibility for the Indonesians who remain in Australia. This means that it will be Australia's responsibility to repatriate them and to handle them as illegal immigrants if they remain in Australia more than six months after August 1945.

This puts pressure on Calwell, as Minister for Immigration, to find a vessel as soon as possible. The *HMAS Manoora* is chosen and the Navy says it will be ready by mid February 1946. The Indonesians are delighted.

Indonesians in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Mackay pack their belongings and when the ship finally leaves Australia, there will be eight hundred and twenty-one passengers, including sixty-one women and ninety-three children. However, as excitement mounts, events that have been happening over the past two or three months in Indonesia lead to frustrating delays.

#### **Australia makes its first diplomatic moves in Indonesia**

Following the difficulties that arose during the voyage of the *Esperance Bay* to Indonesia and subsequent adverse publicity printed in some Australian newspapers, Dr Evatt decides to send an Australian fact-finding mission to Jakarta.

Macmahon Ball and Joseph Isaac are in Jakarta from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> November 1945. Their brief is broad, being to find out what is happening, how strong the nationalist movement is, and how Australia can help with humanitarian aid.

They meet firstly with British and American representatives, who express the view that a UN mediated peace will be the best outcome. They also pay a visit to Sukarno and receive his thanks for Australian support of the Republic to date. On several occasions they are able to meet with the Indonesian Prime Minister, Sutan Sjahrir.

When they lunch with Charles Van der Plas he is quite friendly but Hubert Van Mook is somewhat frosty and will only see them for a very brief time. The Dutchman who

gives them the best hearing is Colonel Frowein, Prince Bernard's emissary. Macmahon Ball is able to set up a meeting between Frowein and Sjahrir.

While Macmahon Ball believes his mission is not successful, it has two important positive outcomes. The first is that he convinces Dr Evatt not to commit troops to Java and to distance Australia from the British in the region. The second is that Sjahrir is now convinced that Australia is a truly independent and sympathetic neighbour.

The British do manage to broker talks between Van Mook and Sjahrir which are occurring as the *Manoora* sets sail from Mackay. Because of these, the Allied command in Jakarta requests the RAN delay the arrival of the *Manoora* until after the 20<sup>th</sup> March 1946.

### **Embarkation**

When the Indonesians finally board the *Manorra* in Sydney, a thorough search is made and one handgun is confiscated. Otherwise, all goes smoothly. On the other hand, in Brisbane, where most of the members of CENKIM are to embark, there is a problem.

Remembering what happened on the *Esperance Bay*, the Digulists are afraid that some of them will be off-loaded. They have asked that a unionist be with them on the journey. This request has been denied and the Indonesians refuse to go on board the *Manoora* when it reaches Brisbane.

The Australian Government has appointed its own official, independent observer who is authorised to sail on the *Manoora*, which is a naval vessel under Allied command. Bondan and Mick Healy talk with the authorities. When they are both satisfied that no one will be off-loaded on this journey, the Indonesians agree to go on board and the *Manoora* proceeds on its journey to Mackay.

### **Farewell to Mackay**

With all these delays, the community of Digulists at Mackay have plenty of time to make preparations for their departure. They use this time wisely. Since they have contact with Indonesia through CENKIM, they know what conditions are like in the Republic.

During their time at Boven Digul, some exiles who worked there accumulated savings, which are transferred to bank accounts with the Commonwealth Bank of Australia when they arrive. Some also have savings from their allowances and wages earned in Australia. Now, the Digulists either buy Australian Government bonds or convert money into goods that can be taken home.

They purchase items such as bicycles, clothes and cooking utensils, which may be hard to obtain once they are home. The most popular items they are taking are bicycles and torches with batteries. They lash strips of bamboo to the side of the bike wheels to ensure they don't buckle during transit.

Everything is packed carefully, so the customs officials in Mackay can easily inspect the luggage. The Indonesians have every intention of ensuring that a repetition of events on the *Esperance Bay* does not occur. However, it takes time, and the customs officials are still checking luggage as the *Manoora* sails majestically into Mackay harbour.

Parents of children who have attended the Mackay North State School (including Maleo Siregar, Kadiroen, Tatar Siregar and Soebroto) write to the *Daily Mercury Mackay*, expressing their thanks for the good education their children have received during their time at the school.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> February 1946, the Digulists place an advertisement in the *Daily Mercury Mackay*, inviting their Australian friends to join them at 8.00 pm on the next evening for a social in the Britannia Hall. The Indonesians have made many friends in Mackay, so their excitement at going home at last is tinged with the sadness of saying farewell.

### **The *Manoora* journeys home**

Because Captain Cousins of the *Manoora* has orders to delay the ship's arrival if possible until after the 20<sup>th</sup> March, the ship progresses slowly up the Queensland coast, taking the scenic Great Barrier Reef route.

Cognisant of the number of children on board, Cousins orders the crew to participate in especially organised activities for them. When one girl has a birthday, he has a cake made especially and when they are about to arrive in Jakarta, he gives them a large party, courtesy of the RAN chefs.

Upon arrival in Jakarta, a British officer and six Dutch soldiers from Port Security board the *Manoora*, announcing the Indonesians are to be searched. The Indonesians refuse.

A second English officer from headquarters arrives and Captain Cousins reassures all the officers that the Indonesians have been thoroughly searched before departure. Much to the relief of the Indonesians, the request to conduct a search is withdrawn.

Republican representatives come on board next and express official thanks and appreciation of the manner in which the voyage has been conducted. Following this, the Indonesians disembark. For some, it is almost twenty years since they have been on Javanese soil, so it is a moment of great happiness.

### **CENKIM's work continues**

This departure of the *Manoora* leaves CENKIM significantly depleted in numbers. Slamet, who had been a teacher before being sent to Boven Digul, steps in as Chairman. Bondan remains as Secretary and immediately writes to thank Prime Minister Chifley for the successful repatriation of the Indonesians and to praise the manner in which the journey has been conducted.

With generous practical support from Mick Healy and the Australians working at the Trades Hall in Brisbane, CENKIM is able to carry on its work, despite its depleted numbers. It continues to type out reports and to roneo broadsheets containing information obtained by monitoring the daily broadcasts of the *Voice of Free Indonesia* on their radio.

In this way, CENKIM is able to monitor the progress of talks leading up to the initialling of the Linggajati Agreement in November 1946, in which the Dutch acknowledge Republican sovereignty of Java, Sumatra and Madura.

Since its reports are reliable and up-to-date, CENKIM develops links with the Australian newspapers. Some begin to rely on them for news of what is happening in Indonesia. Soon CENKIM information is going all over the world and the days when the Dutch can suppress knowledge of what is really happening are gone forever.

### **CENKIM tries its hand at publishing**

In 1946, CENKIM's activity is expanded by the production of two small publications, *Republic of Indonesia* and *Merdeka*, which mark the six and twelve month anniversaries of the birth of the Republic.

In compiling its first publication, *Republic of Indonesia*, CENKIM endeavours to provide information about both the new Republic and the Indonesian nationalists still living in Australia.

CENKIM begins by writing a story on the independence movement to which the Proclamation is attached. Then there is a brief outline of the new government's political manifesto from the Minister for Information.

An article, written by Hatta, on the aims and ideals of the new Republic is included. In this, he refutes the Dutch assertion that the Republic is 'made in Japan'. At the conclusion of the publication, Bondan writes on the relationship between the Indonesian struggle for independence and world events.

*Republic of Indonesia* also aims to talk about the Indonesians living in Australia and how they are promoting the nationalist cause. Hatta has written a special message of support for them. There are photographs of CENKIM (taken before the *Manoora's* departure) and the Indonesian protest marches in Melbourne and Sydney.

There is also a photograph of some Indonesian soldiers imprisoned for refusing to fight against the Republic at Lytton, near the Port of Brisbane. These soldiers do not show any signs of mistreatment by their Australian guards. This is contrasted with those under Dutch jurisdiction at Casino, where one Indonesian has been killed.

CENKIM ends its first publication with acknowledgment of those who have so ably supported it. There is an article by Mick Healy in his role as General Secretary of the Queensland Trades and Labour Council and photographs of the striking Indian seamen and a group of loyal Australian friends and supporters outside the Trades Hall in Brisbane.

With *Merdeka*, CENKIM aims to celebrate a very significant milestone, and it does this in three ways. Firstly, it includes a series of messages that reflect upon what has been achieved by the fledgling Republic. Secondly, it discusses the barriers to the continuance of the Republic and its prospects for trade. Finally, it thanks those in Australia who have offered friendship and support.

*Merdeka* begins with a series of messages from leaders within the Republic, including Sukarno, Hatta, Sjahrir, Sjarifoedin (Minister for Defence), Soedirman (Commander of the Armed Forces) and Rasjidi (Minister for Religion). Rasjidi stresses how religious freedom and tolerance are to be found in the Republic's constitution.

Next there are messages of support from India (to which Indonesia has sent rice); politicians in the UK and the US; the British Communist Party; *Vrij Nederland* (a very left-wing Dutch newspaper); the Australian maritime trade unions; the Queensland Trades and Labour Council and the Australia-Indonesia Association.

Bondan writes an article on future trade with Indonesia while Slamet pays a tribute to the hard work and sacrifice the Indonesian people have made in taking the new nation forward. There is an article on Dutch neo-fascism in Indonesia, which forecasts that the Dutch will fail to adhere to the peace the agreements.

*Merdeka* contains the text of a letter from Sjahrir, thanking the Australian Government both for its hospitality and for the successful repatriation of all Indonesians who lived in Australia during the war. It concludes by acknowledging every Australian union involved in the black ban of Dutch ships.

### *Over the border of time*

On the 5<sup>th</sup> October 1946, Bondan and Molly become man and wife. Although they notify a "Mohammadan Priest", it is a Salvation Army Officer who marries them. Simon Pinontoan and one of Molly's relatives by marriage are the witnesses.

The bridal couple have no time for a honeymoon; since they are working hard trying to ensure the *Manoora's* second repatriation voyage goes ahead as planned in November 1946.

Simon Pinontoan, their "best man", is a passenger on this second voyage. One thousand pounds of medical supplies for the Republic have been obtained by CENKIM through the Australian Red Cross Society. Simon is travelling with these supplies to ensure their safe delivery into Republic hands.

In the first year of their marriage the newly-weds also work tirelessly to assist the wives of Indonesians left in Australia when the third and final voyage of the *Manoora* occurs in May 1947. These wives have been denied entry into Indonesia. CENKIM does what it can to provide them with financial assistance, but some suffer great hardship and will never be re-united with their husbands.

Bondan, the groom, has long been acknowledged as the peacemaker among the expatriate Indonesian community. One day, he will also be called the "gentlest of

revolutionaries". It is ironic that he would have a wedding anniversary date later called "Army Day".

### **Australia plays its first big role on the international stage**

In the first half of 1947, Bondan, on behalf of CENKIM, continues to act as the unofficial spokesperson and negotiator for the Republic in Australia. In January 1947, CENKIM petitions the United Nations to recognise the Republic as a separate country.

Bondan goes to see Dr Evatt on behalf of the political prisoners still held by the Dutch in Tanah Merah. He tries very hard to foster trade between Indonesia and Australia and to encourage Australians to invest in the new Republic.

Although Bondan has on more than one occasion been praised for his work in representing the Republic, he repeatedly urges the Republican government to send an official representative to Australia. In June 1947, Usman Sastromijoyo arrives in Brisbane to meet with Bondan en route to Canberra. He is Indonesia's first unofficial Ambassador to Australia.

Near the end of July, the CENKIM office is abuzz with excitement as Molly, Bondan and Slamet listen to the *Voice of Free Indonesia*. The Dutch have reneged on the Linggadjati Agreement and are attacking Republican areas. Bondan translates and dictates and Molly types. In no time at all, the Australian press have been given the story and the world knows the truth.

The Australian Government takes action. It takes the conflict to the United Nations Security Council under Article 39 of the UN Charter on behalf of the Republican Government. The UN calls for a cease-fire and the establishment of a Good Offices Committee (GOC). Indonesia appoints Australia as its representative, the Netherlands appoints Belgium and both select the US.

Australia sends first Justice Kirby and later Thomas Critchley to the GOC. Both men work hard to learn about the newly established Republic and to become friends with the Indonesians. In particular Thomas Critchley forms a friendship with Hatta. As Australia's representatives, Kirby and Critchley do their best to ensure that, despite their reluctance to do so, the Dutch uphold the terms of the Linggajati Agreement.

By now, the Australian Government is becoming increasingly alienated from its former wartime ally. Burton has grown to mistrust the Dutch and this will have significant consequences for the future of CENKIM.

### **Time to say 'goodbye'**

Before the last Digulists depart Melbourne, they decide to thank the Australian people for their friendship and support by giving them a gift of one of their most precious possessions.

This is the gamelan that was made at Boven Digul and bought all the way to Melbourne. An Indonesian national called Jack Zakaria is entrusted with the task of

presenting the gamelan to the Museum of Victoria, and he does this in August 1946.

Once the *Manoora* begins its third voyage, Bondan and Slamet are the last Indonesian refugees left in Australia. Since Indonesia now has a representative in Canberra, CENKIM is not needed and the Australian Government can no longer continue to extend their visas. Both Bondan and Slamet are anxious to return home and Molly wishes to go with them.

The Dutch Ambassador is very annoyed when the Australian Government welcomes and accepts Usman Sastromijoyo. He pays a visit to John Burton to make a very offensive complaint about Molly Bondan, who is of course, an Australian national.

Burton is not inclined to believe the Dutchman, so he decides to travel to Brisbane to meet the Bondans for himself. He realises immediately that the Dutch Ambassador's complaint is a complete fabrication and finds Bondan and Molly both likeable and well informed. He goes straight back to Canberra to negotiate their safe return to Indonesia.

He makes an agreement with the Ambassador, by which Bondan, Slamet and Molly will fly to Indonesia in an RAAF transport plane that is already going there on UN business. They are to be delivered safely to Republican territory.

### *Pulang*

By now Molly and Bondan have a baby son, Alit, who is six weeks old. On the 12th November 1947, baby Alit, his parents and Slamet fly out of Darwin. Their first stop in Indonesia is Surabaya.

As soon as they touch down on the makeshift tarmac in Surabaya, the Dutch seize Bondan, Slamet, Molly and Alit and offload all their luggage. They refuse to allow the RAAF officers on the plane to make a phone call.

It is not until the pilot returns home that he is able to contact Dr John Burton at the Foreign Affairs Department to report what has happened. Burton tells the Dutch Ambassador that if he does not have the Bondans and Slamet released immediately there will be serious diplomatic consequences.

In the meantime, Bondan, Molly, Alit and Slamet have been detained for ten days while they are questioned and their belongings thoroughly searched. Finally, they are taken to Jakarta, where they remain another two days before being allowed to travel to Jogjakarta, their final destination.

When Molly, Bondan and Alit arrive in Jogjakarta, they are greeted warmly by a number of their old friends. For Molly, this is the beginning of an exciting new life; but for Bondan, the exile, is it simply *pulang*.

CENKIM is no more but its words will linger on as a lasting testament to the wonderful work it has done:

“..... we are content to rest, knowing that firm foundations have been laid for

mutual understanding and assistance between our two countries. We salute the free peoples of Australia and Indonesia.”