

The Peta army during the Japanese occupaton of Indonesia : Tentara PETA pada jaman pendudukan Jepang

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Abstrak

ABSTRACT

Writing the contemporary history of one's own country is hazardous in two respects, firstly, in the academic field there are still plenty of people who think that the events experienced by one's own generation do not properly belong to the realm of history. They cite the oft repeated dictum that historians should have sufficient distance from the occurrences they sought to describe and not infrequently accuse the contemporary historian of engaging himself in political pamphleteering or journalism rather than performing scholarly pursuits. Secondly, it is indeed, true that too many people who were involved in the events treated are still around, and it is unfortunately so that many of them would attack a piece of contemporary historical writing if they think that their role has been described less favorably or less expansively than they would have wished. Or again, they would criticize the historical treatise because personages, whom they like or adulate, are put in a less than bright spotlight. Or, because they are disappointed for the historian's failure to adhere to their point of view about various things, or because of what they perceive as the historian's scorn for their favorite cause.

Although aware of the difficulties involved in the writing of contemporary history of Indonesia, I do believe that the study and writing of contemporary history, including Indonesian contemporary history, is not only justified but also necessary. In Indonesia, as in most new nations, the story of the processes leading towards independence is foremost in the minds of those generations who have witnessed the transition from colonial domination towards national self-determination. In Indonesia, these are the periods covering the National Awakening in the period of the Nationalist Movement from 1908 (which was the year of the founding of the Budi Utomo as the first modern Indonesian association) down till the Japanese occupation of 1942-1945, as well as the period of the Revolution or War of Independence of 1945-1949.

For the latest generations, even the periods following the end of the War of Independence are important to satisfy their thirst for an answer on the why of the present situation. To present-day Indonesians the questions asked about the latest periods in their nation's history are looming very large indeed, larger than the questions asked about long bygone periods like that of the 18 or 19 centuries and further back. Social change during those mere decades has been both sweeping and swift leaving in its wake bewilderment and confusion. The urge towards achieving understanding about the happenings speeding past is not generated solely by curiosity but also by the necessity of charting a course in the turbulent waters of the ocean of the future.

Under these circumstances the study of history has a strongly pragmatic character. There is a powerful urge to conceive what I propose to call by lack of a better term, the "visionary" use of history. With this I wish to

denote the quality to give its students the meaning of the series of events it presents, giving them a vision, or outlook, or point of view, about the process, starting somewhere in the past, extending through the present and on towards the future. Without this quality, in the context of a new nation like Indonesia, history would be, I think, "meaningless" with the connotation of being "useless".

History has also, what might be called, a "technical" use. It provides for the empirical data as the product of its research to be employed both in other branches of learning -- particularly the social sciences -- and in more practical endeavors such as the instruction in tactics or arms development at military institutions. And finally, history has an "inspirational" use, needed particularly in the socialization process of succeeding generations to provide them with an image of their society, which, after all, will be theirs to develop further.

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