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The War in Indonesia.

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From the Mailbag

The War in Indonesia

To the Editor, European Edition:—

The editorial on "The Dutch Case" (reprinted in your issue of July 30, "from yesterday's New York Edition") contains a mistake which I find too serious to let pass uncorrected.

The author of the article first suggests that "Dutch officials... believed they had strong reasons for the action they took in Java," and then ventures the following statement: "The reasons were good enough so that the Dutch people, with the exception of Communists, gave wholehearted support to their government."

Now, that happens to be not so. The intransigent and aggressive policy of Dutch authorities in the East Indies has been sharply criticized—not only by Dutch Communists, but also by other groups of considerable importance. The opposition is widespread and articulate; it has its spokesmen even within one of the major parties forming the government coalition. It is true, the powerful Partij van de Arbeid has so far maintained an acquiescent line; but if the Socialist leadership seems reluctant to come out openly against the government, some of the more progressive Laborites have been remarkably outspoken in their public statements. A strongly worded protest against the present "police action" in Indonesia was signed by more than twenty influential representatives of the Partij van de Arbeid, and the language used by certain Left-wing Labor papers is indeed of extraordinary boldness. "Het Parool," for instance—an Amsterdam evening paper of great prestige and popularity—opened its front-page editorial of July 21 with these bitter sentences:

"At the beginning of the war against Indonesia—yes, unfortunately, we are de facto at war!—all the familiar propagandistic tricks are tried on our nation. Just as Hitler's march to Vienna was to serve only one lofty purpose—namely, the 'protection' of the poor Austrians—our 'Christian' radio now proclaims with blaring persistence that 'charity' is the sole motive behind the Dutch march to Djokja. Just as the Austrians implored the Fuehrer to rush to their help, the people of Indonesia—according to the official version—asked the Netherlands to protect them against the increasing terror." And so forth, in the same sardonic vein.

Considering the rebellious tone of "Parool" and other Labor organs, it may seem doubtful whether the Party of Work will be able, in the long run, to maintain its present policy of wary tolerance. An official split between pro-war and anti-war elements within the party is thought probable, if not inevitable, by most political observers here.

In addition to the Socialists, there are various other groups expressing their discontent in no equivocal terms. Protests against the colonial war have been voiced by independent liberal publications like "De Groene Amsterdamer," "Vrij Nederland," "De Vlam," and "Stem van Nederland"—all of them non-partisan weeklies of considerable influence—by distinguished writers like Henriette Roland Holst, the venerable poetess, who denounced the armed intervention in Indonesia as "the end of ethical politics"; by democratic youth organizations like the "Nieuwe Kreis"; by labor unions, artistic clubs, former members of the Resistance movement, and—most solemnly and emphatically—by the more progressive representatives of the Church. Clergymen—both Protestant and Catholic—are among the most vocal critics of

the government; Christian magazines like the Lutheran "Kerk en Vrede" (Church and Peace) and the Catholic "Toren" (Torch) play a leading role in the anti-war campaign.

There is one danger of which anti-war, non-Communist Dutchmen are acutely aware: The Communists—most vociferous in their pacifist propaganda—might succeed in convincing public opinion that they are the only ones to oppose the imperialistic adventure. If the Reds were actually accepted as the sole champions of Indonesia, the inevitable result would be, first, an increase of Communist prestige in the Netherlands and, secondly, a loss of Indonesian prestige in the world, especially in the United States.

It may be partly in order to avoid such an unfortunate development that Dutch Christians and liberals demonstrate their opposition so loudly and conspicuously. And even while they are doing so—even while the country resounds with their angry protests, one of the world's best-informed, most highly respected newspapers boldly asserts that the entire Dutch nation, "with the exception of Communists," is wholeheartedly behind the war effort!

The Herald Tribune's presentation of the Dutch case must have come as a somewhat painful surprise to millions of peace-loving, democratic Dutchmen—"with the exception of Communists." I suspect they were rather tickled.

KLAUS MANN.

Amsterdam, August 1, 1947.