

## **BUNG KARNO AND THE BINTANG MUHAMMADIYAH: A POLITICAL AFFAIR**

STEVEN DRAKELEY<sup>1</sup>  
*University of Western Sydney*

### **The Bintang Muhammadiyah Affair**

On 10 April 1965 a little known event took place in Jakarta when a delegation from the Muhammadiyah, Indonesia's massive modernist Islamic organisation, attended the Presidential Palace for an audience with President Sukarno.<sup>2</sup> The entourage of forty-five, led by Chairman K.H.A. Badawi, consisted of the Muhammadiyah national leadership, together with members of its various councils. Also included was Oei Tjeng Hien (Abdul Karim) a former adviser to Muhammadiyah with whom Sukarno had been closely associated in his Bengkulu days (1938-42).<sup>3</sup> The ostensible purpose of the delegation was to bestow on Sukarno the Bintang Muhammadiyah (Muhammadiyah medal) in recognition of his service to the organization. Beyond certain circles this event attracted only modest attention at the time and since then has almost disappeared from history. Perhaps now, however, a re-examination of this affair can shed some additional light on its chief protagonists and on the politics of 1965 Indonesia.

The delegates met the president with whom they chatted in the usual stage-managed informality for some time before the ceremony officially began. Badawi then made a short speech in which he explained that the bestowal of the Muhammadiyah medal on its 'loyal member' was for Sukarno's contribution to Muhammadiyah, to the reform (*tajdid*) movement,

---

My thanks for the very helpful comments on an earlier version of this work from Ed Aspinall, Stephanus Dharmanto, Keith Foulcher, Nicole Frost, and David Reeve.

<sup>1</sup> Steven Drakeley (s.drakeley@uws.edu.au) is a Senior Lecturer in Asian History and Politics in the School of Humanities and Languages at the University of Western Sydney.

<sup>2</sup> Details of the event are drawn from Djarnawi Hadikusumo, compiler, *Bintang Muhammadiyah*, P.T. Mega, n.d (1965?) (unpaginated). The translation of the document is my own with the much appreciated assistance of Stephanus Dharmanto.

<sup>3</sup> Bob Hering, *Soekarno: Founding Father of Indonesia*, Leiden: KITLV Press, 2003, pp. 259-60, 273, 321.

and for kindling 'the fire of Islam'.<sup>4</sup> He went on to stress the uniqueness of the Muhammadiyah medal (Sukarno was to be its only ever recipient) and described its bestowal as a 'glorious event in the history of the Muhammadiyah'. Badawi emphasized that the ceremony was occurring 54 years to the day (according to the Muslim calendar) from when K.H.A. Dahlan founded the organization/movement. Sukarno was then presented with a large document (a *piagam*) containing the official declaration of the Muhammadiyah leadership's decision (taken on 27 February 1965) to award Sukarno the medal. Badawi then pinned the elaborate medal high on Sukarno's right (and rather crowded) breast. Three centimetres in diameter and made of pure gold it reproduced the Muhammadiyah's symbol in the shape of the sun with spreading rays. 'Muhammadiyah' was written in the centre in Arabic script encircled by the confession of the faith.

Sukarno responded in kind, stating that he was moved to receive such a high and unique honour, particularly on such an auspicious anniversary.<sup>5</sup> Then Sukarno remarked that as a teenager in Surabaya while boarding at the house of Sarekat Islam leader Tjokroaminoto he had met Dahlan. Sukarno added that he heard Dahlan speak on a number of occasions around that time and that what he heard was 'planted deep in (his) heart'.<sup>6</sup> Indeed it was at this juncture, he claimed, that Dahlan's Islamic revivalist message became his 'guiding star (*bintang pimpinan*)'.<sup>7</sup> Sukarno finished by declaring that he would always wear the medal and called upon those present to continue the revival of Islam in Indonesia and throughout the world. Everyone present then trooped outside for a group photo with Sukarno on the palace steps, from where a large crowd of Muhammadiyah High School students could be seen holding banners just outside the palace grounds.

Apparently the Bintang Muhammadiyah affair of April 1965 was a lavish 'love-in' between Sukarno and Muhammadiyah during which the latter's ardent wooing of Sukarno was reciprocated with equal enthusiasm. A little over a year later, however, the devoted wooer abruptly broke off the 'affair', though not before issuing further protestations of love in the intervening months. Then, like many other lovers before and since seemingly embarrassed by its former passion, the Muhammadiyah immediately did its best to pretend the amorous encounter never happened. Obviously the abrupt change of heart was related to the dramatic decline in the political fortunes of Sukarno in the wake of the events associated with the alleged coup attempt by the 30 September Movement (G30S). Tellingly, the Muhammadiyah did not unambiguously sever the relationship until after it had become quite clear (several weeks after the 11 March Order in 1966) that Sukarno's political

---

<sup>4</sup> Djarnawi, *Bintang Muhammadiyah*.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

position was irredeemable. While not exactly amounting to a re-writing of history, the efforts to 'forget' the apparent closeness of the Muhammadiyah-Sukarno relationship in 1965 were largely successful.<sup>8</sup> Few are now aware of it and historical accounts that refer to it are almost non-existent. This is unfortunate because its inclusion provides a fuller picture of an important period in Indonesia's history as well as of both Sukarno and the Muhammadiyah.

### **The Sukarno-Muhammadiyah Relationship to 1965**

A clear understanding of the Bintang Muhammadiyah affair and its context is only possible in the light of the history of the Sukarno-Muhammadiyah relationship. As is generally well known, Sukarno joined the Muhammadiyah in 1938 upon his arrival in Bengkulu (southwest Sumatra), where he was to continue his indefinite sentence of internal exile after several years at Ende, on the island of Flores. In Bengkulu Sukarno taught at a Muhammadiyah school, was made chairman of the local Muhammadiyah Education Council, and participated prominently in local Muhammadiyah activities. It is there too that he met Fatmawati whom he was to marry in 1943. Fatmawati (originally Fatma) was the daughter of the local head of Muhammadiyah (Hasan Din). Sukarno's relationship with Muhammadiyah pre-dated his membership, however. Indeed Muhammadiyah leaders had lobbied the colonial authorities to have Sukarno moved from Ende to somewhere where he could work for the organization. Initially the objective had been for him to assume the position of technical director at a Muhammadiyah school in Yogyakarta.<sup>9</sup> But Sukarno's elaborate claims made in 1965 to have been deeply influenced by Muhammadiyah ideas as a teenager were something of a retrospective and dubious epiphany. It might well be the case that he met Dahlan at Tjokroaminoto's house as he stated in his speech at the Bintang Muhammadiyah ceremony. It might also be true that he heard Dahlan speak at the meeting hall opposite Tjokroaminoto's house, as he claimed in his autobiography (as told to Cindy Adams).<sup>10</sup> Muhammadiyah leaders were

---

<sup>8</sup> The process of 'forgetting' began early. For example, there was no direct mention of the bestowal on Sukarno of the Muhammadiyah medal by the central leadership in its report to the Muhammadiyah Congress in September 1968 ('Laporan Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah periode 1965-1968 kepada Mu'tamar Muhammadiyah ke 37 pada tgl. 21 s/d 26 September 1968 di Jogjakarta', Djakarta, 1968). Notwithstanding that the issues surrounding the Bintang Muhammadiyah affair were thoroughly canvassed in the otherwise politically uninhibited report.

<sup>9</sup> Hering, *Soekarno*, p. 253.

<sup>10</sup> Cindy Adams, *Sukarno: An Autobiography as told to Cindy Adams*, Hong Kong: Gunung Agung, 1966, p. 113. Much of the same story of Sukarno as a teenager in

certainly part of the multi-faceted milieu of social, religious, and political thinkers and activists in which Sukarno moved during his teens and twenties.<sup>11</sup> But there is little to suggest that Muhammadiyah ideas had a profound influence on him at this juncture. Indeed in the passage in his autobiography mentioned above he states that while he 'discovered Islam' at this point it was not until he 'was put in jail that [he] really and truly discovered Islam', that is in his late twenties, more than a decade later.<sup>12</sup>

Sukarno was an active member of Sarekat Islam in his youth and even when he became an established 'secular nationalist' leader in the mid-1920s he retained cordial contacts with many Islamist activists. (As an Islamic socio-religious movement Muhammadiyah was not formally involved in politics but many of its members were politically active, especially in Sarekat Islam.) During his exile and imprisonment Sukarno pursued an active correspondence with notable Muslim figures, particularly with the Islamic modernist Ahmad Hassan, and in general he improved his credentials with the 'Islamic nationalist' spectrum during this period. There were famous exceptions. His writings on Islamic reform in *Pandji Islam* in 1940 were sharply criticized by prominent modernist Islamic thinker Mohammad Natsir, who at the time was leader of the Islamic reformist Persis (Islamic Unity) and was later to become leader of Masyumi and prime minister of Indonesia (from 1950-1). Back in Java in 1943, courtesy of the Japanese, Sukarno immediately resumed his broad range of political contacts beyond the small world of Bengkulu, where apart with local Muhammadiyah figures such contacts had been severely restricted. There is no evidence, however, of an immediate rift between Sukarno and the Muhammadiyah, which as Sukarno's stocks rose taking him to the presidency in 1945 must have revelled in its privileged relationship with him. No doubt a matter for regret was the easy rapport Sukarno developed in this period with leaders of the Muhammadiyah's rival, the mass-based traditionalist Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). No doubt also Muhammadiyah leaders would have resented the resumed access and apparent influence on Sukarno of secularist politicians, nationalists, socialists, and especially communists. But they must have recognized the inevitability of some dilution of their formerly almost exclusive relationship with Sukarno after he became president.

The dilution of Muhammadiyah influence on Sukarno soon proved to be greater than expected. Relations between Muhammadiyah and Sukarno gradually cooled during the 1950s as Sukarno further emphasized his

---

Surabaya being 'captured by Dahlan' (a quote attributed to him) appears in *Suara Muhammadiyah*, No. 9, November 1965, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Legge comments that Tjokroaminoto's household was aptly described as a 'cradle of all the ideologies'. J. D. Legge, *Sukarno: A Political Biography*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984, p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> Adams, *Sukarno*, p. 113.

'secularist' stance and displayed his obvious antipathy towards Masyumi, the modernist Islamist party with which Muhammadiyah was affiliated. Coincidentally this cooling of the Sukarno-Muhammadiyah relationship paralleled Sukarno's estrangement from Fatmawati, culminating in 1955 with Sukarno's marriage to his lover, the leftist-inclined Hartini. It is unlikely that this development in itself damaged Sukarno's relations with Muhammadiyah much, but it did emphasize the loss of the personal connection with Muhammadiyah that his marriage to Fatmawati had symbolized. By 1965 Sukarno-Muhammadiyah relations had deteriorated considerably. A political gulf had opened up between them as Sukarno introduced guided democracy in 1959 and banned Masyumi in 1960, thereby denying a legitimate place within the formal political spectrum to modernist Muslims. The banning of Masyumi also involved the imprisonment of key Masyumi leaders (including Natsir), many of whom were also prominent figures within Muhammadiyah. From a Muhammadiyah perspective, the situation continued to deteriorate markedly as Sukarno lurched further leftwards in the 1960s. He developed closer relations with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), launched 'Confrontation' with Malaysia, withdrew from the United Nations (UN), and avidly pursued a radical anti-Western foreign policy. He also banned other political opponents, the Body for Upholding Sukarnoism (BPS) in December 1964, the Murba Party in January 1965, and suspended 21 'rightist' newspapers in February.

### **Muhammadiyah Motivations in the Bintang Muhammadiyah Affair**

Given the political context of 1965 it is not difficult to discern the Muhammadiyah leadership's motives for awarding Sukarno the Muhammadiyah medal. In the intense political atmosphere of the period, the Muhammadiyah found itself almost totally bereft of any capacity to influence the course of political events. Moreover, the Muhammadiyah was experiencing serious difficulties in some regions where over-zealous Sukarnoist local authorities had begun to curtail normal Muhammadiyah activities. Serious concerns were held that if the trend continued the organization's very existence might come under threat. Of particular concern in this regard were efforts by the Muhammadiyah's enemies to link it with the banned Masyumi. Similar charges were levelled at the Muslim student association, Himpunan Mahasiswa Indonesia (HMI, Indonesian Students Association), which the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) and its allies clamoured for Sukarno to ban throughout 1965, a step towards which Sukarno appeared to lean before pulling back from it right on the very brink of the G30S events. Muhammadiyah's political isolation was all the more galling because rival Muslim organizations, the NU and the Sarekat Islam

Party of Indonesia (PSII) had rather more successfully accommodated themselves to the prevailing political winds. Under these circumstances it made sense for the Muhammadiyah leadership to seek to mend its bridges with Sukarno in order to acquire his protection and, perhaps even, to influence his political direction.

Further evidence to support this interpretation of the motivations governing Muhammadiyah's actions can be found in the lavish booklet it produced commemorating the event.<sup>13</sup> Some forty pages in length, the hardback booklet features the Muhammadiyah symbol and the words Bintang Muhammadiyah in gold letters on a green cover. Its contents include an extensive photographic record of the ceremony together with the speeches given on the occasion, as well as a number of other revealing texts and images. The lavishness of the booklet itself clearly seems designed to flatter Sukarno thereby emphasizing the esteem in which he was held. Furthermore the flattering language of the piagam is reproduced in its entirety. Signed by Chairman Badawi and Secretary M. Djindar Taminy, including the entire array of Sukarno's titles, and concluding with a prayer it reads:

Piagam No. 4/1965. Conferring of the Muhammadiyah medal. The central leadership of Muhammadiyah in accordance with a decision made on 27 February 1965 confers upon Doctor, Engineer, Hadji Ahmad Soekarno [sic], faithful member of Muhammadiyah, the Muhammadiyah medal for his faithful service both as an individual and in his position and function as President, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia, Great Leader of the Indonesian People's Revolution, Hero of Islam and Independence in advancing and facilitating the Muhammadiyah movement, especially for his encouragement and promotion of reasoning (beridjtihad) in order to re-ignite the fire of Islam.<sup>14</sup>

The inclusion of several pages of Sukarno's writings on Islam, interspersed with excerpts from a study of these writings by the Muhammadiyah intellectual Solichin Salam,<sup>15</sup> also flatters Sukarno by suggesting his importance as a Muslim thinker.

Amongst the key texts contained in the booklet is an 'opening' (*sambutan*) from H. Moh. Moeljadi Djojomartono, the Coordinating Minister of People's Welfare and a member of the Muhammadiyah Central Leadership Board. The choice of Moeljadi for this role was highly significant. As a minister in Sukarno's government and a retired Tentara Nasional Indonesia

---

<sup>13</sup> Djarnawi, *Bintang Muhammadiyah*.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Solichin Salam also assisted with the production of the commemorative booklet.

(TNI, Indonesian National Armed Forces) lieutenant general, his presence demonstrated Muhammadiyah's acceptance in the corridors and institutions of power. More importantly, as one of two former Masyumi members expelled in April 1957 for agreeing to join Sukarno's 'extra-parliamentary emergency business cabinet' Moeljadi exemplified the distinction between Masyumi and Muhammadiyah and personified the latter's (apparent) loyalty to the president above its relationship with Masyumi.

The booklet is also clearly intended to display Sukarno's endorsement of the Muhammadiyah, and thereby the organization's legitimacy. One of the first pages contains a reproduction of the official but warm letter of thanks from Sukarno dated 18 June. The adjacent page has a photograph of Sukarno wearing the medal beneath (in large type) a quote from Sukarno: 'Once Muhammadiyah always Muhammadiyah (Sekali Muhammadiyah tetap Muhammadiyah)'.<sup>16</sup> Beneath the photograph Sukarno is quoted again (from the letter of thanks) promising to wear the medal often. ('Bintang Muhammadiyah ini Insya Allah akan sering saja pakai.')<sup>17</sup> A few pages further on, a full page is taken up with the large print reproduction of another quote from Sukarno: 'The more time goes by the more I love Muhammadiyah (Makin lama makin saja ini tjinta kepada Muhammadiyah)'.<sup>18</sup> This quote and several other aspects of the commemorative booklet, including the prominent presence of Oei Tjeng Hien, also served to underline the longevity of the Muhammadiyah's relationship with Sukarno.

It is also reasonable to assume that the decision to bestow a medal on Sukarno instead of some other gesture of esteem, or indeed some other object to symbolize it, was deliberate on the part of the Muhammadiyah leadership. A medal is a very personal form of recognition, one traditionally bestowed upon an individual in acknowledgement of some great service.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, its intensely personal nature is emphasized by its innate quality as a statement/adornment to be worn upon the person, indeed prominently upon the chest. Moreover, award of a medal generally implies a shared community membership between the recipient and the conferrer. Thus bestowing the Bintang Muhammadiyah upon Sukarno underlined the shared relationship (Sukarno's membership of Muhammadiyah) and its intimacy and significance more than any other object or any other form of recognition or demonstration of association could have. In addition, and crucially for the Muhammadiyah's purpose, the bestowal of a medal invites the recipient to collaborate in the meaning invested in its bestowal. Accepting an award or

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Sukarno originally made this statement at the closing reception at the Mu'tamar Muhammadiyah in 1962, quoted in *Suara Muhammadiyah*, No. 9, November 1965, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Badawi in his forward to the commemorative booklet discussed the function of a medal as a traditional expression of gratitude and acknowledgement.

gesture of a less personal nature does not imply the same level of commitment to its meaning on the part of the recipient as does the acceptance of a medal. Thus Sukarno's acceptance of the medal and especially his promise to wear it made him appear complicit in the Muhammadiyah's message. Thereby too he implicitly extended his personal political protection to the Muhammadiyah and demonstrated this fact whenever he wore the medal in public.

For evidence to support the interpretation outlined above concerning the Muhammadiyah's motives we do not need to rely on these deductions from the character and contents of the commemorative booklet and from the nature of the Muhammadiyah's gift to Sukarno. The Muhammadiyah leadership candidly outlined its intentions and the circumstances that gave rise to them in its report published in *Suara Muhammadiyah* in June 1966.<sup>20</sup> The report explained that in the pre-G30S period anyone deemed to be 'counter-revolutionary (*kontra revolusi*)' or opposed to the government would be 'marginalised (*disingkirkan*)', and that this atmosphere would be exploited by the enemies of Islam (against Muhammadiyah).<sup>21</sup> The report then quoted what it termed the 'accurate (*tepat*)' depiction of the Muhammadiyah's plight presented by the central leadership in the Opening Speech (*Chutbah Iftitah*) at the Muhammadiyah Congress (Mu'tamar ke-36) held in Bandung in July 1965:

- (1) Apparently there are those who deliberately attempt to distort the image of Muhammadiyah in the eyes of society, amongst other things by linking Muhammadiyah to the banned Masyumi.<sup>22</sup>
- (2) In some areas Muhammadiyah branches and Muhammadiyah members have been marginalised and elbowed aside with respect to government functions and national activities.

At the same time we see the reality that President Sukarno is the only political actor who is truly in power, and in fact, is the only decision-maker who enjoys immense public support. Therefore we take the view that it is merely being realistic that if efforts to improve

---

<sup>20</sup> 'Dari Mukhtamar ke Tanwir', *Suara Muhammadiyah*, Nos. 11-12, June 1966.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>22</sup> It was not difficult for Muhammadiyah opponents to link Muhammadiyah with Masyumi. While they were quite distinct organisations they were intimately linked both in terms of personnel and religious outlook. It is not correct, but it is not too far wrong, to regard Masyumi as having been the political wing of Muhammadiyah after the departure from Masyumi of PSII (1947) and NU (1952). Indeed, taking advantage of the intimacy and personnel overlap Masyumi continued to have a clandestine existence within Muhammadiyah, an existence coordinated by Faqih Oesman (Usman). He was a member of the Muhammadiyah central leadership body 1963-5, an adviser to it 1965-8 and became Chairman of Muhammadiyah in 1968.



Muhammadiyah's political position are to be effective then there is no way other than by seeking a rapprochement with the president, a course we have been pursuing for some time and with a positive response.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed the response was positive. Having taken the decision to award Sukarno the Bintang Muhammadiyah in February it proved possible to stage the 'love in' with him at the Presidential Palace in April. Then on the eve of the G30S events, on 25 September Sukarno accepted the title of 'Great Patron (*Pengajom Agung*) of Muhammadiyah' at a meeting with the Muhammadiyah leadership at the presidential retreat at Bogor. These were powerful public gestures whereby the president demonstrated the bestowal of his personal protection on Muhammadiyah.

The strategy of rapprochement with Sukarno bore further, more tangible fruit in the eyes of the Muhammadiyah leadership. At this juncture organizations such as Muhammadiyah needed official recognition as an 'ormas' (mass organization) in order to gain representation in various organs of the state, at central, regional and local levels. Gaining this official status, it was believed, would end Muhammadiyah's semi-isolation and put an end to its dubious legal status and to damaging rumours of its imminent banning. In direct response to lobbying in November 1965, Sukarno officially granted this status to Muhammadiyah and simultaneously granted the organization the right to publish a newspaper.<sup>24</sup> (*Mertju Suara* began publication on 1 February 1966.) The receipt of the official letter from Sukarno containing this decision elicited an enthusiastic response from the leadership, which declared that this proved that Sukarno truly was a faithful member and Great Patron of Muhammadiyah.<sup>25</sup>

Yet it is possible to read a degree of defensiveness between the lines in this perhaps overly effusive statement. Even in Badawi's foreword to the commemorative booklet there were some ill-fitting remarks that hinted at disquiet within Muhammadiyah ranks with respect to the leadership's strategy of pursuing rapprochement with Sukarno. While making a point about the uniqueness of the bestowal of the Muhammadiyah medal on Sukarno, Badawi seemed at pains to emphasize that the presentation of medals would not become a tradition for Muhammadiyah, implying that the practice is contrary to Muhammadiyah culture. Indeed the 'cult of the leader', ostentation and personal aggrandizement (such as a penchant for a chest full of baubles) have always been antithetical to Muhammadiyah culture and were characteristics associated with Sukarno that drew much public criticism

---

<sup>23</sup> 'Dari Mukhtamar ke Tanwir', p. 32.

<sup>24</sup> *Suara Muhammadiyah*, No. 4-5, February–March 1966, pp. 3, 11.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

from modernist Muslim quarters in 1966-7. One can safely assume that these critical views had aired in private for some considerable time beforehand. It was probably with them in mind that Badawi made the defensive remarks mentioned above.

Whatever voices existed within Muhammadiyah opposed to the leadership's strategy remained muted until mid 1966. From this juncture, however, the leadership's strategy of rapprochement was evidently the subject of much heated debate within Muhammadiyah branches. The issue seems to have come to a head in 1968 at the Muhammadiyah Congress in Yogyakarta. The leadership's report to the Congress refers to voices emanating from several branches, areas, and regions in 'tones ranging from polite (*halus*) to harsh and vulgar (*keras dan kasar*), accusing the central leadership of being untrustworthy...and a product of the old order ... (centred on Bung Karno)'.<sup>26</sup> The critics went on to declare the central leadership therefore 'not fit to lead the Muhammadiyah in the new order'.<sup>27</sup> At this juncture too the leadership defended its strategy in much the same terms as it had in 1965. The leadership's report explained that its actions were based on the calculation that if unchecked the PKI's machinations beneath the cover of Sukarno's power would continue and 'eventually the danger of Muhammadiyah being banned would become a reality'.<sup>28</sup> At the Muhammadiyah Congress of 1965, the report pointed out, it was deemed necessary 'for the safety of our movement' to implement a policy that was termed 'seeking the green light (*mentjari lampu hidjau*)'.<sup>29</sup> In other words, the 1965 rapprochement policy was governed by the pragmatic necessity of navigating the Muhammadiyah from a situation of peril to one of safety. Securing Sukarno's protection was deemed the only way that safety could be reached since 'Sukarno constituted the crucial factor'.<sup>30</sup>

The leadership's strategy could certainly be characterized as unprincipled, as the critics charged. Or as the Badawi leadership saw it, the affair and the strategy it encompassed could be seen as simply realistic political behaviour, even responsible leadership, on their part given the circumstances. Those with an appreciation of the movement's history could point with considerable justification to the Muhammadiyah's experience of the colonial period in which discretion was always seen as the better part of valour in order to avoid problems at the hands of the authorities. Then too, indeed from its very founding, the socio-religious objectives of the movement and its preservation in order to pursue them were regarded as

---

<sup>26</sup> 'Laporan Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah periode 1965-1968' p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

paramount, far exceeding the seeming imperatives of transitory political circumstances and goals.

### **Sukarno's Motivations in the Bintang Muhammadiyah Affair**

Sukarno was an astute and experienced politician without peer in manipulating the politics of the gesture and ceremony. It is therefore inconceivable that he was unaware of the politics of the Bintang Muhammadiyah affair and highly unlikely that it served no political purpose for him. Yet Sukarno was also an egoist and a sentimentalist. These aspects of his character suggest that it is inappropriate to judge his behaviour in this affair entirely within the parameters of *realpolitik*. The striking degree to which Sukarno cooperated with the Muhammadiyah's rapprochement agenda therefore may partly be due to personal considerations. This poses a problem of where the balance should be struck between the political and the personal in this analysis.

Not only did Sukarno agree to accept the Muhammadiyah medal, but he also agreed to do so with full ceremonial pomp at the Presidential Palace on a day when he was very busy with matters of state. The matter in question was the state visit of Kim Il Sung the president of communist North Korea, a matter which could hardly have been dearer to Sukarno's political heart. The visit by Kim Il Sung constituted a large feather in the cap of Sukarno's beloved international credentials and emphatically underlined Sukarno's radical foreign policy direction, the so-called Beijing-Pyongyang-Phnom Penh axis. Accordingly the visit received unprecedented levels of publicity and fuss in Indonesia and yet Sukarno made the time in his schedule for the Muhammadiyah. In fact the Bintang Muhammadiyah ceremony was scheduled immediately prior to Kim Il Sung's arrival at the palace. In some of the photographs in the commemorative booklet a suave palace aide can be seen discreetly reminding Sukarno that time is pressing. Yet despite the pressure of the following engagement Sukarno took the time to chat amiably with his guests and to pose for photographs after the completion of the ceremony.

Sukarno's acceptance speech was also extremely warm and personal. He could hardly have done more to display his affection for Muhammadiyah and to respond to its leaders' efforts to demonstrate the intimate and longstanding association between the movement and Sukarno. Clearly Sukarno's responsive demeanour went far beyond what was necessary to meet the Muhammadiyah's political purpose. It is therefore difficult to avoid the conclusion that Sukarno was genuinely pleased to receive this recognition from Muhammadiyah and valued the relationship's place in his life history. This is hardly surprising. Muhammadiyah had been genuinely important to

Sukarno personally (as well as politically) during his difficult period of exile, helping him to leave the extreme isolation of Ende and providing him with much appreciated social and intellectual stimulation in Bengkulu. No doubt there was additional satisfaction for Sukarno to be derived from the fact that the Muhammadiyah's portrayal of the relationship during the Bintang Muhammadiyah affair corresponded perfectly with the relationship's place in the legend into which he had woven selections from his past. Here is a clue whereby the dynamic between the personal and the political dimensions of the Bintang Muhammadiyah affair for Sukarno can be understood, indeed reconciled, because the personal dimension dovetailed neatly with his political agenda.

Sukarno, as the Muhammadiyah leadership had recognized, was the central figure of Indonesian politics during guided democracy. But his centrality can be understood on a wider plane, and certainly this is how Sukarno understood himself. His central political objective had always been the creation of an Indonesia of his own imagining, an Indonesia that reflected his own syncretic and left-leaning political tastes and featuring his focus on national unity and national grandeur. This was his life mission, and thus for him the personal was always inherently political and vice versa. In other words, for Sukarno his life journey and life mission were inseparable, not only from each other but also from the 'life journey' of the nation. In Sukarno's conception of his life journey and life mission alike the Muhammadiyah was integral. He had after all joined it (and not NU) and had remained a member. Moreover, as the principal embodiment of the Islamic Modernists, the Muhammadiyah was an essential component of the 'a' for agama (religion) in the acronym Nasakom (Nationalism, Religion and Communism), the slogan of national unity which embodied Sukarno's guided democracy presidency as well as embodying his lifelong political outlook. Thus for Sukarno, Muhammadiyah's reconciliation with him (not the other way around) was a welcome political outcome, a ratification of his political perspective and an endorsement of his Indonesia. Thus in his speech accepting the medal, Sukarno, ever didactic, reiterated to his Muhammadiyah audience his commitment to the Nasakom ideology and his view of Muhammadiyah's place in it and the worldview it encapsulated. Immediately after he mentioned meeting Dahlan at Tjokroaminoto's house, Sukarno added other names, including Semaun and Setiabudi. Semaun was the first indigenous leader of the PKI and Setiabudi (E.F.E. Douwes Dekker) was the founder of the radical nationalist Indies Party. Thereby Sukarno reminded his audience that while he honoured Muhammadiyah and Islam he also equally honoured communists and nationalists.

Aside from the overlapping political and personal reasons behind Sukarno's readiness to reciprocate the Muhammadiyah's proffered affection, the Bintang Muhammadiyah affair also provided Sukarno with a political

benefit in a narrower sense. It provided him with the opportunity to enlist the Muhammadiyah behind his political agenda. Sukarno's acceptance of the Muhammadiyah medal certainly benefited Muhammadiyah through the reactivation of its relationship with him, but thereby too it unavoidably associated Muhammadiyah with Sukarno's political agenda of the time. It seems that Sukarno was wily enough to see to it that the Muhammadiyah's implied political endorsement was underlined heavily on the day. He took his Muhammadiyah guests back into the palace after the group photograph where they waited together for the arrival of Kim Il Sung. It is difficult to conceive of a gesture that would better display Muhammadiyah's apparent affinity with the politics of Sukarno's guided democracy regime than its leadership's acceptance of the 'great honour' of accompanying the president when he welcomed Kim Il Sung. Kim was surely an incarnation of everything the Muhammadiyah leaders despised and of the communist future they feared for Indonesia, and yet they gritted their teeth and paid Sukarno's price.

## Conclusions

In essence the Bintang Muhammadiyah affair was a political affair rather than an affair of the heart. The behaviour of both Muhammadiyah and Sukarno in 1965-6 was governed primarily by the logic of their respective political situations. That logic induced the Muhammadiyah leaders to woo Sukarno in 1965 with as much ceremony and enthusiasm as they could muster, and induced Sukarno to requite the Muhammadiyah's affections, albeit on his terms. There was a difference, however, in the nature of the political logic driving the parties to their nuptials.

Sukarno's political motives were complex. While there was certainly calculation of immediate political advantage involved, for Sukarno his part in the Bintang Muhammadiyah affair was no mere manoeuvre of the moment. It fitted seamlessly into the political objectives to which he had committed the efforts of a lifetime, making the affair personal as well as political, and perhaps tempering his calculations with a measure of sentiment. Sukarno's wholehearted participation in the Bintang Muhammadiyah affair, together with his other positive gestures towards Muhammadiyah during 1965, suggests that the organization's support had some enduring value for him. It also indicates (though of course it does not prove) that Sukarno had no intention of leaving an Indonesia in which the Muhammadiyah had no respected place. In a small way therefore the Bintang Muhammadiyah affair adds weight to the view that Sukarno did not intend to bequeath power to the PKI.

For Muhammadiyah the political imperatives of the Bintang Muhammadiyah affair existed purely in the realm of real politik: a matter of

the organization's immediate survival. Accordingly, the Muhammadiyah's political calculations here were purely rational and unaffected by sentiment. Stark illustration of this is provided by the unceremonious manner in which the Muhammadiyah dumped its former paramour when a sea change in Indonesian politics in 1966 produced a very different political logic. The willingness of the Muhammadiyah leadership to display deference to Sukarno and to publicly embrace him in 1965, despite the distaste and objections of many Muhammadiyah members, is a telling indicator of the atmosphere at this juncture of Indonesian politics. It was an initiative borne out of desperation on the part of the Muhammadiyah leadership whose sober assessment was that the organization's safety was at stake. It was also of course a policy of accommodationism, a policy that evoked considerable torment within Muhammadiyah at the time and not a little embarrassment afterwards.