
“EITHER ONE IS A FASCIST
OR ONE IS NOT”:
THE INDIES’ NATIONAL–SOCIALIST
MOVEMENT, THE IMPERIAL DREAM,
AND MUSSERT’S COLONIAL
MILCH COW

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trans. Benedict R. O’G. Anderson¹

May 1940: The Germans invade the Netherlands. In the Netherlands Indies, too, the shock is devastating. Naturally the question is whether a Japanese invasion is coming. As a precaution, people suspected of treasonable intentions are arrested—meaning Germans and leaders of the Indies’ Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging, or NSB (National-Socialist Movement). At the very end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942, after the war with Japan has broken out, 146 persons, believed to be especially dangerous, are shipped to Surinam (also a colony of the Netherlands) and there interned. Later on,

¹ Tessel Pollman’s breezy, satirical prose requires some freedom for an effective translation. She has looked over this English version and has given it her approval. A few footnotes are added by the translator to explain terms or allusions immediately understood by her Dutch readers, but probably not by English-speakers. There are a few other places where her explanation is inserted directly into the text itself. This essay was originally published as: Tessel Pollmann, “‘Men is fascist of men is het niet’: De Indische NSB als imperiale droom en koloniale melkkoe,” in *Het koloniale beschavingsoffensief, wegen naar het nieuwe Indië, 1890–1945*, ed. Marieke Bloembergen en Remco Raben (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij Leiden 2009), pp. 169–87.

this deportation and interning get written about indignantly, not without good reasons, but also with the self-pity and lack of remorse that are characteristic of post-war NSB culture. As they would have it, the members of the Indies NSB had been simple conservatives, standing up firmly for the fatherland, the House of Orange, and the colonial government, and completely averse to Japan. But anyone who peruses the NSB's publications and the colonial government's judicial reports will see something rather different: constant attacks on democracy and the Dutch government, virulent anti-semitism, adoration of Mussert, Hitler, and Mussolini, the conquest of *Lebensraum* as a national calling, and a plea for the preservation of an authoritarian regime over the indigenous population, the so-called "natives" (*inlanders*).

By May 1940 all this—especially the constant attacks coming from the Netherlands itself—was enough to make the government in the Netherlands East Indies suspect the NSB followers of treasonous inclinations. But does this mean that the Indies NSB had developed an authentically fascist perspective on the colony? On this question there is still little clarity. All the more reason to pore over the publications and reports of and about the Indies NSB—in search of the movement's ideology.²

"Either one is a fascist or one is not," said Anton Mussert,³ party leader of the Dutch NSB, in 1935, on the occasion of a visit to the Netherlands Indies.⁴ This was his answer to the question of whether Indies NSBers could be members of more than one political movement. True enough, Mussert had originally declared that this multiple membership was okay. But he later reversed himself: it was now out of the question, for fascists had their own party, and that was plenty!⁵ And Mussert was a real fascist. For some Dutch readers today, this may be shocking news. In the Netherlands it is quite common to find Mussert categorized as a conservative-liberal, a liberal-nationalist, a nationalist-populist, or an ordinary conservative, patriotic, petty bourgeois. Mussert himself, however, claimed that he had developed a Dutch variant of fascism and national-socialism—oddly enough, his personal account is the only one not taken seriously. The Dutch have a tendency to trivialize fascism and nazism in their own country, and to reduce them to innocent ideologies. Indeed, it's more comforting for the national conscience to point to the Germans as Nazis than to

² *Het Nationale Weekblad*, May 29, 1939; see also Twan van den Brand, *De strafcolonie: Ein Nederlands concentratiekamp in Suriname, 1942–1946* (Amsterdam: Balans 2006); C. van Geelkerken, "De nationaal-socialistische beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië," in C. van Geelkerken, ed., *Voor volk en vaderland: Tien jaren strijd van de Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging der Nederlanden 1931–December 14, 1941*, 2nd ed. (Utrecht: NENASU [Nederlandsch Nationaal Socialistische Uitgeverij], 1943), pp. 203–7. (The first printing, in 1941, was titled *De strijd der Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging, December 14, 1931 to May 1941*); B. C. de Jonge, *Herinneringen van Jhr. B. C. de Jonge; met brieven uit zijn nalatenschap*, ed. S. L. van der Wal (Utrecht: Historisch Genootschap, 1968); and J. E. Stulemeyer, *Kamptoestanden in Nederlands Oost-Indië en Suriname, 1940–1946: Een doorgaans onbekende historie, die toch ons allen aangaat; Getuigenissen en commentaren* (Amsterdam: De Pauw, 1978).

³ See the issues of the NSB organ, *Volk en Vaderland*, March 8 and March 31, 1935.

⁴ Anton Adriaan Mussert was born in 1894—five years after Hitler, and eleven after Mussolini—in northern Brabant, close to the border with Belgium. His father was a conservative Protestant schoolteacher who was active in the movement opposed to universal suffrage, while his mother was Catholic. The family was petty bourgeois. Mussert was baptized as a mainstream Protestant. He formed the National-Socialist Movement in 1931. After Hitler's armies invaded the Netherlands, Mussert actively collaborated with Nazi rule. In May 1946, one year after the Allies' liberation of the country, he was executed for treason.

⁵ See the issues of the NSB organ, *Volk en Vaderland*, of March 8 and 31, 1935.

recognize that in the Netherlands fascism and national-socialism had substantial popular support. The paradox is that, today, “NSB-er” is the strongest word of abuse that exists in the country; but the term only became popular because it equated the NSB with betrayal of the country, not because it condemned the NSB’s fascist outlook.

But what about the fascist character of the Indies NSB? Was it a sort of Indies variant of metropolitan Dutch fascism and national-socialism? One can get some insight into this question by reading the two publications of the Indies NSB: *Indië Hou Zee* (Indies, Take Heart!)⁶ and *Het Nationale Weekblad* (The National Weekly). We will immediately see that the Indies NSB never developed its own variant of metropolitan fascism and national-socialism, and that its members had to make do with what was proffered from the mother country: Mussert’s points of departure for a colonial policy. These we can easily retrieve from his speeches and the many articles he wrote for the metropolitan NSB publications *Volk en Vaderland* (Folk and Fatherland) and *Het Nationale Weekblad*. This pair was a source on which the colonial *Indië Hou Zee* and *Het Nationale Weekblad* drew, without any reservations, and their editors were also happy to reproduce articles from other virulently racist publications of the metropolitan NSB.

MUSSERT’S DREAM

The Indies NSB was little more than an instrument in Mussert’s hands. So we have to begin with the leader himself. In Mussert’s articles, always skillfully written, even if rather rhetorical and a bit long-winded, the main points of the metropolitan fascists’ program were repeatedly and neatly laid out. In the New Order to come, the Netherlands would become a godly state with a strong defense. The national community would become one, abandoning pluralism, public debate, parliamentary democracy, and political parties. The “pillarization” of Dutch political life⁷ would come to an end, and the future of the religion-based educational institutions, the bedrock of the political and religious life of the country in the interwar years, was far from guaranteed. Within a powerful one-party state, class struggle would be replaced by a model of corporatist harmony. In the early days, the kind of racism characteristic of national-socialism found no place in Mussert’s program. It is generally supposed that Mussert only began to develop his racist notions in 1935 when he became an anti-semitic. But anyone studying Mussert’s colonial policy will see that, from the start, racism was a conspicuous element, shown in the very hard line taken towards the “native.” The “native” had to give up every form of indigenous nationalism and campaigns for equality of legal status.⁸ Mussert’s dream was a white-ruled Dutch imperium stretching from Surinam, the Antilles, South Africa, Flanders, and the

⁶ The call (minus “Indië”) is said to have been coined for his seamen by the great Dutch admiral Michiel de Ruyter (1607–76), who regularly defeated British and French navies, and even burned his way up the Thames to within twenty miles of London. With “Indië” added, it became the ritual greeting within Indies NSB circles.

⁷ Translator’s note: This is the usual English translation of *verzuiling*, a curious, oligarchic form of democracy by which the four nineteenth-century-derived ideological blocs, Calvinist, Catholic, (economic) Liberal, and Social-Democrat maintained their own educational, social, and political party institutions, and governments were formed by behind-the-scenes deals among the power holders in each. Orthodox socialists and communists (both small minorities) were not usually included in this system.

⁸ J. Zwaan, “De NSB in Indië,” in J. Zwaan, ed., *Zwarte kameraden: Een geïllustreerde geschiedenis na de NSB* (Weesp: Van Holkema en Wardendorf, 1984) pp. 151–74.

Netherlands as far as Padang and, of course, Batavia. Mussert did not think of himself as a “colonial” type, but something much grander: he called himself an imperialist.

In Mussert’s economic thinking—a feeble side of Dutch fascism—the Indies was of the first importance. Like so many of his contemporaries, he seriously believed in the motto *Indië verloren, rampspoed geboren* (The Indies Lost, Disaster Born). He also believed—and on this he was even less alone—that a strong state had a “calling” to possess colonies. Germany needed *Lebensraum* and had the right to demand the return of the colonies confiscated by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Italy had the right to Abyssinia.⁹ And the Netherlands, with its “God-bestowed unity,” needed national-socialism because “national-socialism is essential for the preservation of the Empire.” Mussert called his form of imperialism “unegoistic.” “Those who love their own people can also help other peoples in need.” Of course, national-socialism would respect the culture and morals of the “native,” but this did not grant the “native” any right to open his mouth. “The native” had no mature political ideology, and the political cement of the colonies was its European rulers. Behind these Europeans stood “a powerful, young Dutch people, fully aware of its calling in the world.”¹⁰ Mussert’s dream of an empire under fascist leadership—which he called the Great Netherlands—fitted well with his view that a worldwide struggle among the races was under way. “The great struggle, which is being waged all over the world, is the struggle of the white race against the increasingly aggressive coloured races.” Just for this reason, the Europeans in the colonies had to stand together. “If the white race is to maintain its position, it will have to move as fast as possible to recover its unity.” Japan and “Asiatic Russia” were always lying in wait.¹¹

About Japan, Mussert had mixed feelings. He wrote approvingly of the Japanese as having turned themselves into good fascists, liberated from American–British Giant Capital, and they had need of *Lebensraum*.¹² Just so long as they did not seek this *Lebensraum* in the Netherlands Indies! This was why the defense capabilities of the Indies had to be steadily expanded. One had to fight against the naïve idiots and pacifist preachers who were prepared to hand over a defenseless nation to the enemy.

Just look at what is happening in a period in which Japan has conquered Manchuria and is pressing on towards Tibet, while the United States is concentrating its fleet in the Pacific Ocean, and England is readying a naval headquarters in Singapore. Exactly in the same period, the Dutch fleet in the Indies consists of a very weak squadron, while the government has cut back the budget for new [naval] construction from ten million guilders to one and a half, thereby losing 85 percent of our insurance premium.¹³ Therefore, the so-called right-wing government must be made fully conscious of the fact that the Dutch

⁹ *Volk en Vaderland*, January 14 and February 2, 1938.

¹⁰ Translator’s note: “Europeans” was the classical euphemism for “whites.”

¹¹ *Indië Hou Zee*, Java edition, November 15 and December 4, 1937.

¹² *Volk en Vaderland*, February 25 and August 6, 1938.

¹³ Mussert regarded the profits generated in the Indies as the fundamental guarantee of the health of the Dutch economy.

nation stands and falls along with the Indies, and that our people will be hurled into the deepest misery if the Indies are lost to us.¹⁴

As a convinced nationalist, Mussert could not admire enough the Dutchmen who made the colony such as it was. But the fact that the colonial masterbuilders had sexual relations with, and even married, local women made him hesitate on the subject of miscegenation. On the one hand: three quarters of the Indies NSB membership was “of mixed blood,” and thus termed “Indo-European,” or simply “Indo.” On the other hand, he was well aware that “National-socialism is opposed to racial mixing, for many superior peoples went under because they did not restrain themselves from such relationships. We have taken the lessons of history to heart.”¹⁵ This was why, as we shall see, the question of “racial mingling” within the Indies NSB was never resolved. Any Indo could understand that Mussert regarded him or her with great ambivalence. Cornelis (Kees) van Geelkerken, Mussert’s right-hand man, also understood this very well. In 1938, when he was in the Indies, the question arose within the ranks of the Indies NSB of why “Indo youngsters do not feel attracted to the NSB.” One of the leaders compared the Indo with “*Jan met de pet*” in Holland, by which he meant lower-middle-class people who wore only a cap, not a proper hat. Van Geelkerken replied: “The Indo youngsters will join us as the years go by. To gain their trust, we have to let them feel that we accept them as fully Dutch.”¹⁶ But this task was not that easy, if at the same time one spoke out against racial mixing. Developing a position on the “natives” was much simpler. Given Mussert’s colonial ideas and his attitude towards the “natives,” once he decided that they had to know their place, they could be ignored. Mussert wrote almost nothing about them; they merely formed the décor against which his leadership would radiantly stand out, in the event that he also became The Leader in the colony.¹⁷ For the rest, so long as the indigenes were loyal, it might be best if they became members of the NSB so that in “peaceful cooperation” with their betters they could help build the Empire.¹⁸ In fact, indigenes almost never became members of the NSB. The idea that, in principle, the door was open to them originated simply from a casual instruction from Mussert, who knew almost nothing about the relations between social groups in the Indies. In 1938, the prominent NSB leader M. V. E. H. J. M. count de Marchant et d’Ansembourg said—but only in the movement’s inner circle—that “loyal natives and Dutch-minded Chinese could only become members of the NSB under special circumstances.”¹⁹

An Instrument in Mussert’s Hands

In 1933, when the Indies NSB was founded, the Netherlands Indies, like the rest of the world, was in the midst of a vast economic crisis. Suffering was widespread, and the colonials began to fear that the crisis would lead the indigenes of the colony to

¹⁴ *Volk en Vaderland*, February 25 and August 6, 1938.

¹⁵ *Indië Hou Zee*, Java edition, November 15 and December 4, 1937.

¹⁶ The Centraal Archief Bijzondere Reschtspleging in the National Archives: the Cab Geelkerken dossier, report on meetings of NSB functionaries in Sumatra and Java, September 1938.

¹⁷ Translator’s note: *Leider* meant the same as *Führer*, but it sounded more down-home.

¹⁸ *Volk en Vaderland*, August 17, 1935.

¹⁹ See footnote 16 above.

rebel. Needless to say, the Indies had long been a stage on which wars, uprisings, and disturbances had occurred: the Java War and the Atjeh War, above all. But there were also continual small rebellions. The KNIL (Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger, Royal Netherlands-Indies Army), originally simply titled the NIL, was always on the warpath to crush insurgencies. In 1926–27, both in Java and Sumatra, there were disturbances that took the form of communist uprisings and other agitations. It seemed as if these rebellions had been successfully suppressed. Just for this reason, the mutiny organized in February 1933 by the indigenous crewmen on the warship *De Zeven Provinciën* was such a blow to the colonial establishment, and grist for Mussert's mill. Who was to be blamed for allowing things to get so far out of hand? In the first place, the indigenous trouble-makers—that went without saying. But it was also the fault of the authorities in the Netherlands and the Indies, who had, so to speak, encouraged the mutineers by the decades-long policy of soft accommodation to the indigenous population. Worse still, after the mutiny was over, the authorities had allowed Menadonese soldiers in the KNIL, loyal, but still “natives,” to guard the ship's naval officers in case of further disturbances. Mussert wrote: “The native troops will not easily forget the task they were assigned. Yet one more case of how to contribute to the destruction of our authority in the Indies.”²⁰

At the start, at least, this kind of talk was lapped up by many whites and Indos who felt threatened by sixty million indigenes. The Indo-Europeans, in particular, had every reason to be alarmed. Like the whites, they were a small minority, but they did not belong to the colony's elite. As part of the lower middle class, in many cases working as civil servants or clerks on the plantations and in other businesses, they were not just threatened by indigenous nationalism and the desire for self-rule. Competition with the Indonesians in the labor market was also a source of worry. The Inlands Bestuur (Native Administration), the indigenous branch of the Binnenlands Bestuur's (BB) territorial administration, was taking over tasks that had earlier on been established/set up by the BB's European branch, known as the Europese Bestuur. In addition, more and more Indonesians were going to school: in the 1930s, about 60,000, a significant number even if still a tiny percentage of the population as a whole. More than ever before, they were gaining higher levels of education and so were taking over jobs in the colonial administration and business.²¹

The policy of turning over to indigenes positions that had earlier been destined for whites or Indo-Europeans was called “indianization,” and inevitably gave cause for gloom and anger. To whom could they turn? Those who, for various reasons, had not, and never would, identify themselves with the “natives,” and who rejected the very idea of equal legal rights for all, could appropriately turn to De Vaderlandsche Club.²²

²⁰ *Volk en Vaderland*, March 1 and 25, 1933.

²¹ See Kees Groeneboer, *Weg tot het westen: Het Nederlands voor Indië, 1600-1950. Een taalpolitieke geschiedenis* (Leiden: KITLV, 1993), p. 488; and G. F. E. Gonggrijp, *Geïllustreerde encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië* (Leiden: Leidsche Uitgeversmaatschappij, 1934), pp. 1018–19.

²² Translator's note: This “club” was a very right-wing political association in the Indies. I think the word “club” was chosen because of its classy “English” and “all male” connotations. Political clubs were an important part of the political life of Britain and France from the early eighteenth century on, and were ancestors of nineteenth-century political parties. They had restricted memberships and were financed mainly by dues.

But the Club was a bit on the “classy side.”²³ Also terribly white. For the Indo-Europeans, there was the Indo-Europeesch Verbond (IEV, Union of Indo-Europeans), where one could, amongst one’s own, discuss the group’s far-from-rosy social position.²⁴

The IEV was not a powerful lobby, even though it had representation in the Volksraad, the Indies’ proto-parliament, whose many indigenous members were entitled to join the assembly’s debates on the basis of equality. But just because of its partly indigenous membership, the Volksraad was not an acceptable political forum for everyone. Those who believed that the Volksraad should be abolished could not expect much from the IEV. In addition, the IEV believed that the bond between the Netherlands and the colony could well be loosened up a bit.²⁵ But here, too, there was no unanimity. Ultra-conservatives could support Mussert’s hostility to the Volksraad, and his insistence that anything bordering on a taste for “the Indies-independent-from-the-Motherland” was a form of treason.²⁶ Furthermore, those who demanded a stronger defense for the colony had an additional reason to feel comfy about The Leader. All this pushed the retired Indies official W. E. Scheurer to weld together various small fascist groupings in the Indies to become the NSB in 1933.²⁷ At the headquarters of the NSB in the Netherlands, Mussert appointed representatives to take care of matters in the Indies. The most important among them was A. J. W. Harloff, a retired member of the Raad van Indië (Indies’ Council of State).²⁸

The Ideology of the Indies NSB

The development of the Indies NSB we can decipher by reading *Indië Hou Zee* and *Het Nationale Weekblad*, the most important of the organization’s publications. *Indië Hou Zee* appeared in various local editions and was edited by the highest relevant NSB functionary, the regional commissioner. The paper’s reporting was generally focused on the Netherlands and Europe and drawn from the metropolitan NSB press, demonstrating very clearly to what extent the Indies NSB was an instrument of Mussert and the NSB in the fatherland. Most of the articles were about the spineless regime in the Netherlands, perfidious Albion, the SDAP (Social-Democratic Workers’ Party), and the splendors of Germany and Italy—all in great detail. Completely absent were critical articles about the issue that concerned the Indos the most: their weak social position and the danger posed by “indianization.” The absence of such articles was not in the least fortuitous, as we shall see. No less striking, almost nothing appeared about the rising nationalism of the indigenous population, which in both the labor market and in politics was becoming a threat. Simply put, they weren’t there.

²³ P. J. Drooglever, *De Vaderlandse Club, 1929–1942* (Franeker: Wever, 1980); and Hans Meijer, *In Indië geworteld: De twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2004), pp. 117–21.

²⁴ J. J. P. de Jong, *De waaier van het fortuin—van handelscompagnie tot koloniaal imperium: De Nederlanders in Azië en de Indonesische archipel, 1595–1950* (The Hague: SDU, 1998), p. 551.

²⁵ Meijer, *In Indië geworteld*, pp. 114–28, 138–43.

²⁶ *Volk en Vaderland*, March 8 and 31, 1935.

²⁷ Geelkerken, “De nationaal-socialistische beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië,” p. 202

²⁸ CABR, dossier titled Harloff, G. W. Jonkeer to the procureur-fiscaal (top public prosecutor), July 19, 1946; and the dossier on Harloff to Jonkeer, May 2, 1946.

How to explain all this? The attitude of the whites, but also of the Indo-Europeans, towards the indigenes was, to put it gently, peculiar. As the Indies journalist D. M. G. Koch observed: "A background of ignorance, lack of interest, and false notions born of *kwaadsappigheid* separated the Europeans from the indigenous population."²⁹ Beneath the surface lay the "rarely spoken of fear ... that dissatisfied groups among the dominated were looking for a chance to turn existing social relations upside down."³⁰ Public expression of this fear was virtually taboo, and considered a self-fulfilling prophecy. Even talking about it in public could be interpreted as opposition to the government, which might then fail to maintain law and order. Hence, criticism of the colonial government on this matter was uncharacteristic of both the metropolitan and the Indies NSB. This stance is rather remarkable for a movement self-described as fascist. The metropolitan NSB spent night and day attacking the home government, the Catholics (Mussert's favorite bugaboo), and the Reds. In Batavia, however, the ruler was Governor-General Jonkheer Mr. B. C. de Jonge, and in the eyes of the metropolitan NSB he was doing a fine job.³¹ Mussert's motto was: "Stand up with De Jonge, shoulder to shoulder, against the colored races." Hereby the concerns of the "little *bung*" (Indos of modest means) were completely subordinated. The struggle against the colored races was, above all, carried on, so Koch observed, by trivializing the rising tide of indigenous political protest. The only time that the Indies NSB wrote about the indigenes, the tone was scornful, and the content perfect evidence of a total lack of knowledge, so typical of the de facto apartheid that then prevailed. The "natives," so wrote the Indies NSB, were a primitive people. It was absurd that now they were getting more and more education, since they were not destined for it. Nothing good could be expected of "natives" involved in politics. Primitive peoples consisted of tribes who did nothing but fight one another. No coherent political visions could be expected from them. They could not form the "cement" of colonial society, which was exactly what the united Europeans did so well. Standing up firmly and in solidarity for the interests of the Netherlands Indies was something of pure Dutch origin. Like the knights of yore in Europe, the Dutch formed the ruling caste in the colony. As the Indies NSB press put it: "Together we form a grand Order of Knights in the Indies, in line with the Order of the Teutonic Knights, the Maltese Order [Knights Templar], and other similar institutions that we have read about."³²

Somewhat in conflict with the idea that the cultures of the indigenes were tribal was the panicked anxiety about communism, to which all these tribes could attach themselves. Over and over, *Indië Hou Zee* came back to the communist peril, which was not merely a threat in the Indies, but was permitted and nourished by the red social-democrats in the motherland itself. Should communism strike in the Netherlands, then Dutch monopoly rule in the Indies would come to a speedy end. Fear of the Soviet Union was outsize. This outlook helps explain the airy way the Indies NSBers dealt with the fate of the (suspected) indigenous communists who were interned in the

²⁹ Koch invented this wonderful word, meaning something like "malevolence."

³⁰ D. M. G. Koch, *Batig slot: figuren uit het oude Indië* (Amsterdam: De Brug-Djambatan, 1960), p. 156.

³¹ National Archives, Archive of the Ministry of Colonies, Secret Archive 1901–1940, secret, *verbaal* from the Attorney-General to the Governor-General, February 25, 1937 G, communication from the Attorney-General to the Governor-General, February 4, 1937.

³² *Indië Hou Zee*, Java edition, January 5 and February 29, 1936; *Indië Hou Zee*, April 16 and December 15, 1937.

government’s concentration camp at Boven Digul in what was then Nieuw-Guinea. There the heat was lethal and escaping meant death. In fact, the internees of Boven Digul had a good deal in common with those NSBers who, in 1941, were packed off to Surinam and interned there in the so-called Jewish Savannah. After the war, the Indies NSBers made a bitter hullabaloo about their own internment, without realizing for a moment that conditions in Boven Digul were worse, or recalling that, in the 1930s, they had easily accepted internment in Boven Digul as a just punishment for indigenous “trouble-makers.”³³

Alongside the fear of communism, a second matter of immediate concern was, naturally, the improvement of the colony’s defenses, given the threat of Japanese expansion. The Indies NSB kept a sweet eye out for England, in a way that Mussert himself could not endorse—but, like it or not, military support could be expected to come faster from Singapore than from Berlin. Another short-lived, jarring note was struck by a protest against the position of the Indies as the milch-cow of the Netherlands. This occurred only late in the 1930s, after *Indië Hou Zee* was absorbed (1938) into *Het Nationale Weekblad*. In 1939, the latter proclaimed: “It seems that the Motherland’s only concern in the Indies is to maintain a constant flow of gold into the moneybags of the ‘rulers.’ She rejects an Indies that makes an appeal to her.”³⁴

All in all, both *Indië Hou Zee* and *Het Nationale Weekblad* were fairly circumspect, strongly anticommunist and antidemocratic, but not fascist. In their pages, there is no trace of a vision of the future, of a national-socialist ideal, or of a new order in the colony. All the fascist and national-socialist elements appearing in these papers were taken from the metropolitan NSB press—e.g., the ultra-nationalist concept of the “people” as a mythical ur-community, the abolition of democracy, corporatism, the destruction of the pillarized political parties, the one-party state, and the greatness of Hitler and Mussolini. But all these topoi were the concerns of Europe, not of the colony. If, once in a while, *Indië Hou Zee* expressed opposition to developments in the colony, its targets were not state functionaries, but “humanitarian and semi-religious organizations,” which, in the colony, formed a powerful lobby in favor of their own particular confessional circles. As in the Netherlands, so in the colony, the Catholics were the main target. In February 1934, the metropolitan episcopate began openly opposing Mussert, who, as a result, lost support from half the Dutch population, people who might otherwise have become members of his NSB.

The Old Dung Cart

Once in a while, *Indië Hou Zee* and *Het Nationale Weekblad* shot from the hip. In 1934, the Department of Justice compiled some of their incendiary statements in a file, and the attorney-general went on the offensive, proposing to the governor-general that civil servants be forbidden to join the NSB. He took particular offence at a piece that *Indië Hou Zee* had taken from *Volk en Vaderland*, which was a frontal attack on the government in the Netherlands. Here is an extract from this article:

³³ *Het Nationale Weekblad*, May 39, 1939; Stulemeyer, *Kamptoestanden*.

³⁴ *Het National Weekblad*, February 2 and June 24, 1939.

The blood rises to our faces in shame, when we realize what grand moral and material values have been entrusted to the rulers of the Dutch Imperium, and how little worth they have attached and still attach to them ... In the Far East the thunderclouds are piling up and the most important strategic positions are practically undefended.³⁵

What the attorney-general also found offensive was the comparison of the “state-system” with an “old dung cart,” full of patches and make-do repairs, and with an “empty jam pot”—a pot that has been licked clean. Furthermore, the slap was directed at democratic Holland, not the colony. The attorney-general observed that the target of the Indies NSB was plainly The Hague, not Batavia, and wanted to find out just how dependent the Indies NSB was on Mussert. He asked the local NSB group leader, D. C. M. Bauduin, “What is the NSB’s aim with regard to the colony’s social relations and structures?” The answer was: “To be ready at the moment Mussert is ready.”³⁶ Bauduin’s words indicated with precision what the bottom line for the Indies NSB amounted to—The Leader in his own good time will tell us what we should think—an attitude that, in the authoritarian ambiance of the colony, was scarcely strange. In this manner, the Indies NSB refrained from any criticism of the colonial administration of the time, and this fitted with Mussert’s line, as we shall soon see. This obedient attitude was also rewarded. The attorney-general’s proposal to bar civil servants from becoming NSB members—something that, in the Netherlands itself, had been policy as far back as from 1934—was not accepted by Governor-General De Jonge. He found the NSB to have no significance, and so did nothing. The attorney-general did, however, achieve a temporary ban on *Indië Hou Zee*, on charges that it had revolutionary objectives and showed contempt for the metropolitan state-system.³⁷ The governor-general could well regard the Indies NSB as insignificant, since his government kept a close watch on the Movement, exactly as it monitored the rising indigenous movements. This policy can be nicely illustrated by an official report on an incident that occurred in Surakarta, where, on August 25, 1934, the state-employed civil engineer D. G. Romijn, the NSB’s local leader in Semarang, gave a public lecture, which the local assistant chief inspector of police attended as part of his duties. Romijn spoke about leadership and complained that, as a civil servant, he had very little power. As was often the case with the civil engineers, Romijn was upset that the government officials did not have more power. He said that, for every decision he took, he had to ask for advice from all kinds of councils “who were in no position to do anything.” Addressing his public, Romijn continued, alluding to himself, “you may well ask why the government refuses to give such a man the power to handle things? Well, it’s because they don’t trust him.” In effect, he was complaining about very slight democratic tendencies in the state’s management of public works. At this point, the

³⁵ Nationaal Archief, Min. Kol., geheim archief, geh. verb. February 8, 1935 E 16, procureur-generaal aan gouverneur-generaal

³⁶ *Verslag van de Volksraad over de toepassing der persbreidel-ordonnantie op Indië Hou Zee, Handelingen van de Volksraad, 62ste vergadering, zittingsjaar 1934–1935* (Batavia: Volksraad van Nederlandsch-Indië, 1935); Secret Archive of the Ministry of Colonies, secret *verbaal*, August 2, 1935 E 161; communication of the Attorney-General to the Governor-General, dated October 31, 1934; S. Stokman, *Het verzet van de Nederlandsche bisschoppen tegen nationaal-socialisme en Duitse tyrannie: Herderlijk brieven, instructies, en andere documenten* (Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 1945).

³⁷ De Jonge, *Herinneringen*, pp. 344, 347; Mirjam Maters, *Van zachte wenk tot harde hand: Persvrijheid en persbreidel in Nederlands-Indië, 1906–1942* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1998), p. 238.

assistant police inspector stepped in. Romijn was told to moderate his language. But Romijn refused to be silenced. He emphasized that “Fascism in the Netherlands Indies does not seek state power, and will not take a seat in any Councils, etc. The Fascist methods adopted in the Indies should differ from those in the Motherland, but Holland and the Indies must remain a unitary state. We are fundamentally opposed to any ‘Separate from Holland’ system. We also oppose parliamentarism.” One can see that the confusion of messages in Romijn’s speech nicely reflected the general confusion in the Indies NSB’s ideology. The assistant chief inspector also noted the debate that followed between Romijn and the Jewish lawyer De Vries. Romijn expressed his approval of the expulsion of Jewish capitalists from Germany. Dutch Jews who transferred capital outside the Netherlands should also be expelled, he said.

It is clear that the Indies NSB was busy appropriating the originally still mild anti-semitism of the metropolitan NSB. Instead of fighting against the “natives,” whom one might expect to have served as the enemy nearest at hand (but Mussert would have none of this), people began to concoct a “Jewish Question” entirely irrelevant in the Indies. In fact, only a few Jews resided there. It goes without saying that the colony had some experience of anti-semitism, but the fervor with which the Indies NSB campaigned against Jews, in articles taken up from the Netherlands, exhibited a fanaticism to which the colonials were not accustomed. In its early days, the Indies NSB had said that Jews could become members of the Indies NSB so long as “they do not regard Palestine as their Fatherland, since no good Dutchman could think that way.”³⁸ A couple of years later, when Jews were kicked out of the metropolitan NSB, the few Indies Jews were treated to weekly torrents of insinuations and insults, a good portion of which were borrowed from the Netherlands NSB publications. This deliberately cultivated hatred for Jews led, in 1938, to the circulation in Java of the violently anti-semitic newspaper *Het Licht*, set up by a faction within the Indies NSB. The German consulate in Batavia supported it financially, and it was read mostly by Germans residing in the colony. The Indies NSB leader in 1938, L. Th. Becking, asked Mussert to support him in disavowing *Het Licht*, but the support never came.³⁹ Mussert had his own special intentions for the NSB in the Indies, and anyone who tracks carefully his tour of the colony in 1935 will immediately see what these intentions were.

Mussert to the Indies

Much has been written about Mussert’s tour of the Indies. He was twice received by Governor-General De Jonge, who was therefore suspected of some sympathy for the NSB. De Jonge himself put it another way. He had rubbed it in to Mussert that no chatter undermining the colonial authority would be tolerated; otherwise, The Leader would immediately be expelled from the Indies. This warning helped. Mussert was as domineering a man as De Jonge, and a strong state authority fitted well with the catechism of fascism. So Mussert could accept De Jonge’s stance.⁴⁰ In all other respects,

³⁸ Secret Archive of the Ministry of Colonies, secret *verbaal*, August 2, 1935 E 16, Surakarta police criminal investigation section, on the NSB meeting of November 19, 1934.

³⁹ Zwaan, “De NSB in Indië,” p. 66.

⁴⁰ De Jonge, *Herinneringen*, pp. 314–20.

Mussert had every reason to be pleased: he was enthusiastically welcomed in the colony. Whenever he gave a speech, many high-ranking officials would be sitting in the front row, and tickets for each venue were sold out. In fact, his speeches almost never touched on the Indies, and he offered his audiences no sketch of a fascist program for the colony. After all, the Indies was already moving in the direction that he desired. "Government policy in the Indies is mainly fascist," he announced, and called on everyone to support it.⁴¹ His dissatisfaction involved only the Netherlands, its spineless government, and the general lack of nationalism.

Should one attribute Mussert's persistent avoidance of any discussion in which the colonial government might crop up to ignorance or strategic calculation? The latter was surely the more important. Mussert was perfectly capable of studying a complex dossier over a couple of days and then giving an informed speech: he was generally quick on the uptake. But he had not the slightest thing to gain by turning the governor-general against him. Campaigning against De Jonge would mean a serious quarrel, and Mussert's own expulsion; in turn, such an event would discredit the Indies NSB, and its usefulness to the metropolitan NSB's finances would disappear. Besides, an attack on the existing colonial government would only play into the hands of indigenous nationalism. The proper stance was thus, as we have already seen, to stand shoulder-to-shoulder behind the governor-general. Mussert's scenario for the Indies NSB thus amounted only to avoidance of any political action against the government in Batavia. His scenario made membership in the Indies NSB seem dull, and even partly superfluous. What was in it for you, especially if you were a little *bung*, if you could not grumble once in a while about your rulers? In this manner, Mussert undermined the dynamism of the Indies NSB.

Mussert himself only once spoke out critically against the colonial rulers—but his criticism was directed against past actions. In 1935, while keeping his Indies NSB on a leash, he wrote in a brochure entitled *Gezagsondermijning in Indië: Het wanbeleid van drie gouverneurs-generaal* (The undermining of authority in the Indies: The mismanagement of three governors-general), aiming his attack at J. P. Count of Limburg Stirum, Jonkheer A. C. D. de Graeff, and D. Fock, all of whom failed to be tough enough in handling the indigenes.⁴² Fortunately, this critique related only to years gone by. Mussert's Indies program for the present amounted to nothing more than a demonstration of support for the white autocracy and the unity of the imperial state. But if that was all, why did the Indies NSB exist?

No Mass Movement

Mussert did not envision the Indies NSB as a mass movement—perhaps this attitude reflected a condition that De Jonge had laid down. Mussert himself imposed a ban on the organization's further growth in Java. It is likely that the membership there in 1935 numbered, at most, 2,500 people. But they ought to collect money for the cause.⁴³ Above all else, the task of the Indies NSB was to provide material support for

⁴¹ De Jong, *De waaier van het fortuin*, p. 551; S. L. van der Wal, "De nationaal-socialistische beweging in Nederlands-Indië," *Bijdragen en Mededelingen van het Historisch Genootschap* 82 (1968): 48.

⁴² The book was published in Utrecht by the NENASU.

⁴³ *Volk en Vaderland*, March 8 and 31, 1935.

the metropolitan party. In this regard, it was quite successful. The Indies NSB allocated half of the money that came in for its own activities in the Indies. The other half was sent to NSB headquarters in Utrecht. In its salad days, this amounted to about 50,000 guilders a year. Later, the annual subsidy declined to 40,000, and by the end was only 25,000.⁴⁴ To be a little more specific, Java and the Great East (Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and the Moluccas) committed themselves to send an annual 18,000 guilders to the Netherlands. In return for all this effort, they earned only the right to follow The Leader.

Blood and Spirit

Mussert's words—"quiet in the Indies"—had a beneficial effect on the hearts and minds of the administration. In 1937, the attorney-general no longer saw any reason to bar civil servants from becoming NSB members; they were now generally "moderate." The authorities connected this moderation with Mussert's visit in 1935: it seemed that he had everything under perfect control.⁴⁵ Then, quite suddenly, this control over the Indies NSB fell apart. At the end of 1937 and the beginning of 1938, the top Indies NSB leader, A. van der Laaken, lost his position. Behind his fall lay his opposition to the contempt for products of "race-mixing." The leadership of the Indies NSB was becoming more and more "white," and the Indo Van der Laaken was upset. So he decided to let Mussert know how he felt. On December 1, 1937, Mussert wrote back to him:

Great-Netherlanders are those who support the Dutch imperium. Not skin-color but spirit is what's decisive. Thus, a conscious Great-Netherlander Indo is such through his sense of racial solidarity. It pains me that subversive forces inside and outside the Movement have worked to cause suspicions on this score, even though for the past five years we have campaigned for the preservation of the Dutch imperium, which in this anxious time so sorely needs our spiritual solidarity.⁴⁶

The Indo was thus a Dutchman so long as he believed in Great-Netherlands, just as Jews could join the Indies NSB so long as they did not regard Palestine as their fatherland. But Van der Laaken was not fooled by this reply. What he wanted above all was equal rights, within the Movement, for Indos and whites. Furthermore, he was no longer inclined to submit to Mussert's bullying. At the NSB's December 1937 congress in Batavia, he stated that he himself wanted to participate in Indies politics and take part in elections. This stance went down very badly with Mussert, who wanted no NSB involvement in Batavian politics. The final disaster was a rumor spread by Van der Laaken that the metropolitan NSB, via Mr. M. M. Rost van Tonningen, an NSB member of the metropolitan parliament and editor-in-chief of *Het Nationale Dagblad*, had secretly circulated a directive targeting Indies officials who were of mixed blood and/or had one or more indigenous wives. No one has ever seen any such directive, and if it really existed, it was a well-kept secret. But enough people believed the rumor.

⁴⁴ Van Geelkerken, "De nationaal-socialistische beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië," p. 204.

⁴⁵ Meijer, *In Indië geworteld*, pp. 114–28, 138–43.

⁴⁶ Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie (NIOD), Amsterdam, archief van de Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging (NSB), inv. nr. 73, Mussert aan Van der Laaken, 13-1-1935.

Once Mussert ousted Van der Laaken, many Indos left the Indies NSB. Van der Laaken himself returned to the Netherlands.⁴⁷

The conflict between Mussert and Van der Laaken only deepened the crisis within the NSB. J. W. Trouw, government solicitor and the second regional NSB commissioner for Sumatra, wrote that, "Overall, trust in the NSB leadership was shaken by the frequent derailments of men in key positions." There can be no doubt that he was thinking not only of the fall of Van der Laaken, but also the expulsion of the parson G. J. van Duyl, once Mussert's closest advisor, who had given lectures in the Indies. In Trouw's view, this expulsion came about far too easily—how could people deal with a party where leaders who had made great contributions could so summarily be kicked out? The party's "holy fire," Trouw continued, was now burned out. People in the Indies also felt that they heard too little from the Netherlands. "In reality, the Movement here in the Indies has only a small group of loyal followers," he concluded. He had often opposed anti-semitism in the Indies NSB, and eventually abandoned the organization.⁴⁸

The people who remained members were those who expressed themselves in *Het Nationale Weekblad* more virulently than had been typical before. Anti-semitism became endemic. On more than one occasion, the Department of Justice banned the weekly for its attacks on the Dutch government, while the editors opposed more strongly than ever any form of equal legal status between indigenes and Europeans. The editors also protested against the fact that Dutchmen could not purchase land, while the indigenes could—a regulation designed to protect the indigenes against Big Capital. They compared the Europeans in the Indies with the oppressed Dutch at home, who also had to watch Jewish industrialists buy up large estates and refugee Jews open small businesses in the Wieringermeer Polder, north of Amsterdam. In fact, the Wieringermeer was a training compound for three hundred Jews who wanted to migrate to Palestine and needed to learn a trade or learn to farm. It was paid for by Dutch Jewish businessmen. Like these three hundred Jews in Holland, who got some land to work on, in the Indies, "the native population is doubly favored and protected in its ownership of the land, while the descendants of the Dutchmen who wrested the Indies from the tropics, as their forefathers had wrested the Motherland from the sea, were by law blocked from acquiring property in cultivated land. The rights of the Dutch remain no more than leasing-rights." In this way, the "doubly favored" indigenes were aligned with the Jews who took refuge from Hitler in the Netherlands.⁴⁹ This juxtaposition reflected very nicely the view that the Indies NSB had of the indigenes: they were simply a burden.

Meantime, both in the Indies and the Netherlands, the NSB was slumping. The difficulties began in 1935, when Mussert announced his approval of the Italian

⁴⁷ Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie (henceforward NIOD), Amsterdam, Archive of the Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging (NSB), inventory no. 73, Mussert to Van der Laaken, January 1, 1938; L. de Jong, *Het koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog, Deel 11a: Nederlands-Indië, I* (Leiden: Nijhoff, 1984), pp. 383–84; Open Letter from Mussert dated December 1, 1937, in *Het Nationale Weekblad* (c. January–February 1938).

⁴⁸ NIOD, the NSB Archive, inventory no. 73, J. W. Trouw to A. J. W. Harloff, March 26, 1938; L. de Jong, *De koninkrijk*, pp. 381–84.

⁴⁹ *Het Nationale Weekblad*, May 29, 1939.

invasion of Abyssinia as an expedition to acquire *Lebensraum*. There followed the Anschluss of Austria into Germany, accompanied by virtually naked violence and a campaign of terror against the Jews in Vienna. The menace of war became ever more real, even if momentarily averted by the Munich Pact signed in September 1938. To control the malaise in the Indies, Mussert sent a number of well-known propagandists and mediators there. In July 1938, two of the top NSB leaders in the Netherlands, Van Geelkerken and d’Ansembourg, arrived in the colony, where, unlike Mussert in 1935, they were not received by the governor-general.⁵⁰ The pair made a lecture tour and attended many of the internal party meetings, where the problems facing the NSB were discussed.

One can see from the reports on these discussions that Van Geelkerken understood very well what was at stake: in itself, he said, national-socialism was warmly received in the Indies. But not the NSB. It is not only “our fellow-countrymen” who have a negative impression of the organization, he said, but also many ex-NSBers. The NSB gave off the odor of a “sect in the making,” he added, warning firmly against the trend. But it was clear that time was running out for the NSB. Once Mussert ever more openly sided with Hitler’s Germany, especially after the German invasion of Czechoslovakia in October 1938, the Indies movement was on its last legs. By March 1, 1940, only 1,500 members were left. By May 1940, the smell of the NSB was so bad that every present and past member of the organization was suspected of plotting treason in the event of a Japanese invasion. This led to the internings of 1940, over which, after the war, the surviving Indies NSBers so fiercely expressed their astonishment and indignation.⁵¹

For the rest, as late as 1943, six years after his conflict with Van der Laaken, Mussert was still preoccupied with the question of race-mixing. Quite contrary to the position of the “God-given” Führer, Mussert asked Hitler whether it wouldn’t be a good idea to admit Indos living in the Netherlands to the SS and the Landsturm. Mussert felt their exclusion to be “degrading.” Later he wrote: “I asked the Führer for a pronouncement on the question of the legal equality of those Dutchmen with some Indies blood alongside the rest of the citizenry—of course it went without saying that prudence and statecraft would be needed if they were to be put in high-ranking positions.” One shouldn’t rebuff loyal people, he continued. They should be able to render valuable services in the event that “we” (Mussert and Hitler) move to open up Central Africa. After all, Western nations had the right to *Lebensraum* not only in Asia but also Africa. For this mission, the Indos would come in very handy. But best not to include them in the “higher functions.”⁵²

In the end, the Indies NSB was doomed to fall on its own sword. The more Mussert shifted from fascism to national-socialism, with its racist doctrines, the more visible became the schism within the Indies’ NSB. The crux of the matter was “race-mixing.” Mussert’s ban on any opposition to the colonial government was also fatal. If one was forbidden to criticize Batavia, then for whom and against whom was one supposed to fight? According to Van Geelkerken, the task of the NSB in the Indies was to preach

⁵⁰ NIOD, the NSB Archive, inventory no. 62, from an adjutant of the Governor-General to the NSB regional commissioner in Java, for transmission to the NSB in the Netherlands, August 3, 1938.

⁵¹ See footnote 2 above.

⁵² A. A. Mussert, *Vijf nota’s van Mussert aan Hitler over de samenwerking van Duitsland en Nederland in een bond van Germaansche volkeren, 1940–1944* (The Hague; Nijhoff, 1947), p. 91.

national-socialism. But then what was in it for the “little *bung*”? Nothing! In this way, an ideological vacuum arose, which Mussert was unable to fill. Van Geelkerken understood only too well that this vacuum was breeding tensions. In 1943, he wrote: “The [German language] watchword sent by the NSB to the Indies—*Zahlen und Maul halten* [Pay and Shut Up!]*—*naturally provided very little in the way of spiritual satisfaction, while among the many well-regarded and ardent leaders within the Movement, it was surely seen as a sign of ingratitude.”⁵³ Indeed, Mussert used the Indies more as a money-machine than anything else. Exactly what Governor-General De Jonge had shrewdly noted.

⁵³ Geelkerken, “De nationaal-socialistische beweging in Nederlandsch-Indië,” p. 204.