



# Satire and mockery through political caricatures against Negara Indonesia Timur (the State of East Indonesia), 1946–1950

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## Abstract

This article discusses satire and mockery of the State of East Indonesia establishment (SEI, 1946–1950) through political caricatures published in the pro-republic Revolutionary magazine. These mocking caricatures were one of the methods used by people who did not agree with the formation of the State of East Indonesia. There were other ways which had been done; demonstrations, motions of no confidence in parliament, etc. As historical research, this article uses several archives stored in the Jakarta National Archives, and the State of East Indonesia Archives which are stored in Makassar, South Sulawesi. Apart from archives, several newspapers published between 1946 and 1950 were also used. Satire and mockery were aimed at two things, namely (1) the process of establishing the SEI, which was the Dutch government's re-colonization project in Indonesia; and (2) the figures behind the SEI such as Hubertus van Mook, Charles Olke van der Plas, Soekawati, and Nadjamuddin Daeng Malewa. For pro-republican people, the establishment of the SEI and the figures behind it were nothing more than an attempt by the Dutch to return to their power in Indonesia which had been proclaimed on August 17, 1945.

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## Introduction

The establishment of a federal state during 1946–1950 was an important phenomenon after the declaration of Indonesian independence. On the one hand, the emergence of numerous federal states was an indication of state euphoria, but on the other hand,

it was a reflection of the numerous conflicts that occurred during the early years of the Republic of Indonesia's independence. The SEI was one of the federal states founded in 1946, with its founder Hubertus van Mook as 'Acting Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies'. (de Graaff, 1987; Husain, 2023a; Hoek, 2023; Oostindie, 2022).

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Different from several states in Indonesia such as the State of Pasundan (Frakking & Thomas, 2022; Suryadinata, 1991), the State of Madura (Matter, 1995), the State of East Sumatra (Pelzer, 1982; van Langenberg, 1982) which were geographically very small and homogeneous in political orientation, the SEI was a large state and its apparatus had very diverse and complex political orientations. However, based on various debates, intrigues, and disputes within the SEI, it was believed that the main current of these diverse political orientations was the establishment of an independent and sovereign Indonesian state. This was exemplified by the fact that the majority of participants demanded that the red and white flag be recognized as the state flag, the song Indonesia Raya be played, and so on (Husain, 2023b).

The fact that there were groups who wanted to make this state their political ideals and ultimate objective certainly could not be denied. However, along the pathway, this group had to acknowledge the determination of the State of East Indonesia people, including members of parliament, to pursue the unitary Republic of Indonesia as their ultimate political aim. With these different interests, throughout its existence, the SEI has never been devoid of conflicts of interest, both in parliamentary sessions and outside of parliament (Husain, 2023b).

Numerous motions of no confidence in the current governance were introduced during parliament debates, resulting in the cabinet's short tenure. Meanwhile, confrontations outside of parliament took various forms, including demonstrations, the distribution of leaflets and slogans, the publication of caricatures in newspapers, the display of posters in public places, and so on. All actions were intended to dissolve the SEI and return it to the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. The execution of the Polombangkeng Proclamation was marked as the culmination point of these protests and demands (Husain, 2014).

Many studies have found caricatures to be a tool for social and political protest, however, no caricatures or slogans have ever been used to condemn the presence of the SEI. In fact, during the establishment of the SEI, there were several demonstrations and caricatures made by the public and community groups in the area of this federal state. As mentioned in the description above, the article aims to analyze caricatures as a medium for demanding and criticism of the existence of the SEI.

The main question is how are the mockery, anger, and protests over the SEI conveyed through caricatures? Who are the figures behind the formation of SEI who are the targets of mockery in the caricature? Through the study of caricatures, it can be seen that

the debate about the SEI is not only conflict between groups that support and oppose the SEI, but many aspects that can be studied.

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## Literature Review

Agung (1996), Chaniago (2002), and Husain (2014, 2022, 2023) conducted studies on the SEI to provide a general understanding of the dynamics of this federal state. Gde Agung's publications record the history of the SEI, from its creation at the Malino Conference to the rise and collapse of various cabinets, starting with the first cabinet, the Nadjamoeaddin Daeng Malewa Cabinet, to the last cabinet, the Ir Cabinet. J. Potoehena. Unfortunately, this book does not record various acts of rejection of the union state, whether carried out in parliament or the form of public demonstrations, including the display of posters and caricatures. The same thing is not found in Chaniago's writings. Chaniago only briefly examined the influence of local leaders in the dynamics of two regions: South Sulawesi and East Sumatra. In other books, such as Kahin's *Nationalism and the Indonesian Revolution* (1952) and Abdullah's *Indonesia in the Flow of History* (2012), the existence of the SEI is not given significant emphasis.

In these various short articles, states including the SEI are always considered merely as puppet states of the Netherlands, and there is no analysis of posters or caricatures as a form of anti-SEI. Meanwhile, a study conducted by Husain in 2014 highlighted the significance of political changes, especially the establishment of the SEI on the labor movement during the 1946-1950 period. Meanwhile, the study conducted in 2022 focuses on the debate in parliament between the progressive faction which tends to be pro-republic, and the development faction which wants the SEI to remain standing. Unfortunately, despite having the same core of rejecting the presence of the SEI, Husain's writing does not pay special attention to the appearance of many posters and caricatures as an expression of rejection of the SEI.

Several individuals have utilized caricatures and cartoons to protest against power (Ahmad, 2001; Ersyad, 2020; Istiqomah & Sofyan, 2015; Laksono, 2005; Supriadi et al., 2019). In 2018, for example, Nur Rofa et al. (2018) released a paper titled "Political Cartoons in the Independent Daily in Indonesia during the Independence Revolution (1945-1947)". The article, which uses a caricature published in the *Harian Merdeka* newspaper as the subject of research, demonstrates that

the cartoon is a statement of resistance to imperialism, particularly against the Dutch, who sought to reestablish their dominance in the Republic of Indonesia. These caricatures generally contain anti-imperialist propaganda and implicitly invite the Indonesian people to unite together to fight imperialism to defend the independence of the nation. The caricatures that had been published can be divided into four major themes: (1) revealing the cruelty of the enemy, (2) encouraging the spirit of resistance, (3) mocking NICA-Netherlands, and (4) Indonesia, the Netherlands, and the International World. Temporally, this article has a connection with the temporality of my research, namely, 1946-1950, but unfortunately, Nur Rofa et al does not show any caricatures or cartoons that make the SEI a target for criticism.

Another article that uses caricatures and cartoons with a background of historical events as an object of study is the book written by Duta Fikra Abdul Hamid (2020). The book entitled "Posters of the Indonesian Revolution 1945-1950" uses posters published in newspapers and several archives as study material. These newspapers include *Kedaulatan Rakjat*, *Sinar Hindia*, *Asia Raya*, *Soeara Rakjat*, and *Seniman*. Unfortunately, even though the study period overlaps with the period that I would be researching, no posters were found that used the SEI as study material.

A political caricature that also uses historical events as material is Choirul Azmi's writing with the title "*Karikatur politik Star Weekly pada masa demokrasi liberal*" (Star Weekly Political Caricatures in the Liberal Democracy Era) (2021). Through this book, Azmi shows the intensity of the caricatures used in newspapers by politicians and community groups in voicing their protests over the colonial situation. Frequent cabinet changes in 1945-1950, inappropriate policy-making, the Asian-African Conference and the 1955 General Election were some of the problems used as material by *Star Weekly* caricaturists.

Studies that focus on caricatures published in newspapers or magazines are significant for understanding how people express their "anger" through political caricatures. These caricatures were published not only in various newspapers and magazines but were also posted on buildings or public places, however, in this article, we only use caricatures published in the *Revolusioner*. The protests of society and political groups represented through political caricatures eventually resulted in the dissolution of the SEI in 1950. All federal states were dissolved and merged into the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

## Methodology

This is historical research using material objects in the form of caricatures that were published in the *Revolusioner* in 1947, shortly after the establishment of the State of East Indonesia. "Revolusioner" is a magazine published by Pesindo or Indonesia Socialist Youth. Pesindo is a youth organization that adheres to the principle of socialism to uphold the Republic of Indonesia based on the sovereignty of the people. The use of caricatures published in various newspapers has been used by several historical researchers to analyze certain historical events, especially those related to political dynamics that occurred in a certain period as done by Zara (2021, 2024) and Suwirta (2015).

Caricature is derived from the words cartoon (English), and cartone (Italian), which means "paper" or picture. A cartoon is a depiction or symbolization shown in a satirical way, an allusion in a humorous expression (Laksono, 2005), whereas according to its lexical meaning as contained in The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English: "*Cartoon is a drawing (e.g. in newspaper or magazine) dealing with men and events (esp. politics) in an amusing way; a moving picture made of such drawings*" (Hornby et al., 1958). Aside from that, it is possible to deduce that drawings that evolved into caricatures were satires on political developments or persons who were "architects" of specific political developments or events.

As historical research, apart from using caricatures published in the Revolutionary Magazine, this research also uses written sources, especially archival documents of the Netherlands East Indies Forces Intelligence Service (NEFIS) or Dutch intelligence archives. This archive contains classified reports collected by Dutch intelligence regarding the situation and movements throughout the period 1945-1950. Apart from that, the SEI archives stored at the South Sulawesi Archives office in Makassar and the Jakarta National Archives also hold a lot of information related to this research topic. Apart from archival sources, various newspapers published at that time should be taken into account. Newspaper reports at that time were based on firsthand reports from journalists working in the field, ensuring that this type of source was extremely valuable. These newspapers include *Soeloeh Ambon* and *Pelita Rakjat*. After all sources had been gathered, they were identified and verified, as well as external and internal criticism. External criticism aims to ensure the authenticity of the source, while internal criticism seeks to prove that the testimony contained in

a source is reliable. In other words, internal criticism focuses on the information or statements contained in the source (Pradadimara et al., 2022). After validating all of the sources, an analysis was conducted taking into account the political environment of the time.

## Result and Discussion

### *Protest Against the Establishment of the State of East Indonesia*

Following the failure of several negotiations between the Indonesian side, represented by Prime Minister Sjahrir, and the Dutch side, represented by van Mook, van Mook decided to focus on constitutional arrangements beyond the borders of the Republic of Indonesia. The first step was to host the Malino Conference from July 16 to 18, 1946, which was attended by members from the Dutch government and the Eastern Region of Indonesia. (Presiden kita P.J.M. Tjokorde Gde Rake Soekawati melawat dari poelau ke poelau di N.I.T., n.d.). Furthermore, on November 12, in Linggarjati, the Dutch acknowledged de facto of Java, Madura, and Sumatra area. In addition, On January 1, 1949, the Dutch and Indonesian governments agreed to establish a United States of Indonesia connected in one Indonesian-Dutch Union.

The Linggarjati Agreement contributed to the establishment of the State of East Indonesia. For this reason, on December 7–24, 1946, the Denpasar Conference was held, attended by representatives of the State of East Indonesia people, to establish constitutional unity within an independent and sovereign Indonesian stated by paragraphs 2 and 4 of the Linggarjati agreement. In the Greater East region (East Indonesia) there were 115 *lanschappen* (territory controlled by a king who recognized the power and sovereignty of the Dutch government through a political agreement) out of 298 *lanschappen* throughout Indonesia. The number of representatives presented was 70 people from 13 regions, namely: 1) South Sulawesi; 2) Central Sulawesi; 3) North Sulawesi; 4) Minahasa; 5) Sangihe-Talaud; 6) North Maluku; 7) South Maluku; 8) Timor; 9) Flores; 10) Sumba; 11) Sumbawa; 12) Lombok; and 13) Bali. Of the 70 delegates to the congress, 55 were elected by the people of each region and 15 were appointed by the Dutch government. The purpose of this congress was to continue the ideals of the Malino Congress and the Pangkal Pinang Congress, as well as realize the decisions in the Linggarjati Agreement. After negotiations lasted for seven days, on December 24 1946 the SEI was

established with its capital city Makassar (Agung, 1996; de Waal, n.d.; Husain & Horton, 2023; Moe'tamar, 1946; Oostindie, 2002; Reid, 2010).

The SEI's future evolution was not without its challenges. In the years after the Malino Conference and the Denpasar Conference, the divide that had begun to appear became more pronounced. Motions of no confidence in the present administration gained popularity, ensuring that no single cabinet could remain long.

The political atmosphere in Makassar was quite stable at the beginning of the transfer of sovereignty (27 December 1949), but it did not last long. Around the end of January 1950, various actions demanding the dissolution of SEI increased. The cabinet led by J.E. Tatengkeng (27 December 1949–14 March 1950) was the first SEI cabinet within the RIS and D.P. Diapari (14 March–10 May 1950) was under constant pressure to disband the SEI. Diapari's cabinet was even forced to step down after ruling for only approximately 64 days.

Between January and May 1950, the unitary group organized several actions demanding the dissolution of the SEI, either through demonstrations, general meetings, or through pamphlets. At least 12 pamphlets were found demanding the dissolution of the SEI. Apart from putting up pamphlets, demonstrations, and giant meetings were also held. Similar actions also occurred in Gorontalo, Poso, Donggala, Takalar, Jeneponto, and others. In fact, on April 17, 1950, in Polombangkeng (south of Makassar) a proclamation took place which stated that it would free itself from the authority of the Law and the SEI Government and would maintain the SEI's areas as part of the Republic of Indonesia (Archive: Arnas. Perw. Sul-Sel, East Indonesia Government Archives 1946–1950, Reg 153).

### *Satire and Ridicule of the State of East Indonesia Establishment*

As stated in the previous section, the establishment of the SEI received opposition from various groups, especially pro-republican community groups. This opposition was carried out through various means such as demonstrations, boycotts in parliamentary sessions, and a motion of no confidence in the ruling SEI cabinet (Agung, 1996; Chaniago, 2002; Husain, 2023a). However, what was interesting was that this opposition was not only carried out through debates in parliament or elsewhere but also caricatures or cartoons.

Of the several caricatures related to protests against the SEI, four caricatures were representative enough to depict objections from various parties to the federal state, especially pro-Republican groups.



Figure 1 published in the 1947 in *Revolusioner* reads: V. Mook: “Look, the statue that we carved is ready. What a blessing.” It appears that van Mook, who was standing to the right of the statue, delivered the statement to van der Plas, who was positioned to the left of it. Meanwhile, the statue created symbolizes Tjokorda Gde Rake Soekawati, who became president of the SEI following its establishment at the Denpasar Conference on December 18–25, 1946. Soekawati was Bali’s son, born on January 15, 1899. According to Picard (2002), Soekawati was elected over Nadjamoeaddin Daeng Malewa and Tadjoeddin Noer due to his considerable influence and status as a “leading representative of the Balinese ruling family”. He was the son of the famous Ubud ruler Tjokorda Gde Soekawati. His title, Tjokorda Gde, shows that he was the highest knight from one of the four noble castes in Bali.

Meanwhile, Charles Olke van der Plas (1891–1977) was a civil servant in the Dutch East Indies who served as Governor of East Java until Japan conquered the Netherlands in 1942. He also served as chairman of the Dutch East Indies Commission for Australia and New Zealand, which advocated for Japan’s departure from the Dutch East Indies. When the Pacific War ended in October 1945, van der Plas returned to Java from exile in Australia as Chief Civil Affairs Officer, escorting allied soldiers (Zara, 2021). Van der Plas was van Mook’s right-hand man and, at the time, the Deputy Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies. Given his position, it was not unexpected that van der Plas was always accompanying van Mook. In addition, Van der Plas was a Netherlands civil servant in 1908 and served as the Netherlands consul to Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. He was influenced by the Netherlands Islamism scholar Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje and became an expert in Indonesian society and politics, Islam and Arabic.



**Figure 1** The State of East Indonesia (Negara Indonesia Timoer) in *Revolutioner*, 1947

The month in which the caricature was published is unknown, however considering that the SEI was created on December 24, 1946, it is reasonable to believe that it was published in early 1947. The caricature depicts Van Mook’s achievement as the mastermind behind the establishment of the SEI. This is evident from the quote underneath the photo, which appears to have been said by Van Mook. Aside from the quote “Van Mook’s words”, the statue’s caricature represents two layers. First, there is a larger statue, followed by another in front of the smaller figure. The first statue represents the Federalist group’s “victory,” while the second statue depicts a unitarist or republican group wearing a skullcap, kneeling helplessly in front of the Federalists.

Figure 2 illustrates the tight relationship between two SEI leaders, President Soekawati and Prime Minister Nadjamoeaddin Daeng Malewa, with van Mook standing next to him. The great thing about this caricature is that it captures the actual style of the SEI. This is evident in the comments by President Soekawati when hugging Prime Minister Nadjamoeaddin Daeng Malewa. The sentence reads:

Hoezee!!

Nadjamoeddin’s speech. Mynheer de President van Oest Indonesia ... Long Live de Koningin. Long Live Dr. V. Mook...Hoezee!!

In Den Pasar (Bali) Van Mook has printed “New State”, which is the state of East Indonesia with “President” Soekawati and “Prime Minister” Nadjamoeddin Daeng Malewa.

The caricature on the side shows what the “new state” actually looks like.



**Figure 2** Hoezee in *Revolutioner* 1947

According to the caricaturist, this was the SEI's style, since it continued to honor the queen and van Mook. Pro-republicans thought that the Dutch government, through van Mook, was working hard to use the SEI as a tool for reasserting power, particularly in East Indonesia, as well as an "incubator" for other nations. As a result, there was a tremendous split between advocates of the SEI and those who opposed it.

Initially, there were numerous directions, which later became factions. Mr. S. Binol refers to this polarization as the Noor directions and Soekawati directions, as well as the Noor flows and Soekawati flows (Roendingan Badan Perwakilan Sementara Negara Indonesia Timor; sidang pertama 1947, 1947). In parliament, these two groups combined to form two factions: the Development Faction and the Progressive Faction, both of which opposed the government, whose first cabinet was led by Prime Minister Nadjamuddin Daeng Malewa, who was supported by the Development Faction.

### *Mockery of the Figure Behind the SEI*

The SEI's creation and Dutch colonial recolonization activities in Indonesia were inextricably linked to the efforts of various Dutch political figures, including Hubertus van Mook, Charles Olke van der Plas, and Simon Hendrik Spoor. Spoor was the Chief of Staff of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army and the Royal Dutch Army in the Indies who commanded various attacks on Indonesian fighters. As depicted in Figure 2 (left), numerous of these figures were mocked by caricaturists. Here are the sentences from the caricature: "The Dutch-led combination brought death to Indonesia. VAN. Mook: Great leader; v.d. Plas: Islamic; Helfrichs: The instigator; Spoor: the slaughterman"



**Figure 3** "Dutch Leadership Combination" in the *Revolusioner*, (Th. II, No. 4, 1947)

Figure 4 depicts the roles fulfilled by each Dutch character. Van Mook, for example, was the most frequently referenced character in numerous sources as the creator of Dutch recolonization attempts in Indonesia, as well as the primary role in the establishment of several federal states. Van Mook was a key figure not only in the establishment of the SEI but also in parliamentary sessions, particularly in calming pro-republicans who wanted the song Indonesia Raya to be played and the red and white flag to be used as the SEI flag.

Van Mook was also the target of ridicule in Figure 4. The sentence in the caricature is: "Does it feel muddy?, Safe-Tranquil-Everything Goes Well!, Indonesian Republic Dutch Propaganda, Netherlands Population Area". The caricature illustrated van Mook's propaganda that everything was safe under Dutch sovereignty. Van Mook had various contentious policies. One of these measures was his proposal of an imaginary boundary separating Dutch and Indonesian lands during the Independence Revolution. The boundary was established following the First Mary Aggression, which violated the provisions of the Renville Agreement (Kahin, 1952). The van Mook Line, as it became known, sought to define Indonesia's destiny before Indonesia and the Netherlands established a definitive agreement. Van Mook favored limited independence for the Dutch East Indies or Indonesia.

Van Mook's influence on the formation and structure of the state of Indonesia, especially in the revolutionary period (1945-1950), was enormous. Five years later, what van Mook did is still discussed through a caricature published in *Star Weekly* on August 13, 1955 as seen in caricature number 5.



**Figure 4** "Does it feel like muddy, bro?" in *Revolusioner*, Th. II, No. 28, 1947

In Figure 5 there are three caricatures that all depict van Mook. The caricature drawn by Ramelan can be explained as follows. First, a person wearing glasses is squatting and holding a chicken cage that reads “*pendjadjahan*” or colonialism. Meanwhile, in the middle of the cage in the position where the prey is trapped, there is a rooster with the inscription “Republic of Indonesia”. The rooster was pecking at its food with the words “Renville and Linggarjati” written on it.



**Figure 5** Karikatur Sebagai Alat Perjuangan in *Star Weekly*, August 13, 1955

What is depicted in the caricature again wants to say how big a role van Mook played in the political constellation after the 1945 proclamation. If we look at van Mook’s role after the Renville and Linggarjati agreements, it appears that the unilateral actions he took led to the heating up of government in Indonesia (Kahin, 1952). The caricature is also like an alarm that is to be sounded to warn someone that they are in danger. If the rooster with the inscription “Republic of Indonesia” enjoys what he eats too much, namely, the Renville and Linggarjati agreements, then the “*pendjadjahan*” or colonialism confinement that van Mook is holding can catch him (Azmi, 2021).

As seen in the first caricature, the second caricature also focuses on van Mook leading an orchestra or musical ensemble. Van Mook is like a composer who creates or composes a song (music). The five people who were standing in front of van Mook with their hands behind them were Wiranatakusuma as the Head of Pasundan State, Sultan Hamid of West Kalimantan, Abdul Kadir as Deputy Lieutenant Governor General, Mansoer of North Sumatra State and Soekawati as president of East Indonesia. On the back of van Mook’s body there is a cannon and a bayonet that is ready to be drawn and on the upper left there is the inscription “Let’s Promise: Song of Indonesia United” (Azmi, 2021).

All caricatures depicting the period 1946–1947 actually want to explain that the Kingdom of the Netherlands has succeeded and was able to control, and control the entire Eastern Archipelago and almost all areas that produced export commodities in Java and Sumatra (Anderson, 2000). The control and establishment of a federal state only benefited the Netherlands, both from economic and political aspects. In addition, what is depicted in the caricature is the situation when van Mook succeeded in weakening Indonesia’s combat power and politics by turning it into a state or union.

## Conclusion

The establishment of the SEI was a major effort of the Dutch government, led by Hubertus van Mook and Charles Olke van der Plas. However, the creation of this federal state, which was physically the largest and had highly different political orientations, has sparked protests since its inception. Some of these protests were expressed openly, while others were wrapped in caricatures published in pro-Republican journals.

For the people, particularly republicans, the construction of this federal state was a strategy for the Dutch colonial government to retake control of Indonesia. The SEI was a prototype project for the establishment of various federal states following Indonesian independence. As a result, if this pilot project was successful, it would be simple to construct and operate in other federal states.

Throughout its journey, and even during its inception, this federal state faced several protests from citizens, particularly those who wanted to remain under the auspices of a unitary state. This group is often referred to as the unitarist group. Meanwhile, those who wished to remain within the jurisdiction of the Dutch kingdom were referred to as federalists.

Caricatures were a common tactic utilized by the anti-SEI community to launch their campaigns. Caricatures were used to mock the elite figures responsible for the construction of the federal state. These individuals include van Mook, van der Plas, Soekawati, and Nadjamoeidin Daeng Malewa. Van Mook was the primary architect behind the founding of the SEI, and van der Plas was his right-hand man who accompanied him on numerous occasions. Meanwhile, Soekawati was the President of the SEI, and Daeng Malewa was the Prime Minister. Given their significant positions, it was hardly surprising that the four of them were mocked in various caricatures published in nationalist journals.



A study on the use of caricatures as a medium of protest over the establishment of the SEI and the figures behind it has never been conducted. In fact, the use of caricatures was rampant at that time through several newspapers that were anti-SEI. However, the study did not have further access to newspaper sources containing various caricatures stored in the National Archives of The Hague Netherlands. Therefore, further research that uses caricatures and other forms of ridicule such as pamphlets is urgently needed.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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