Students of Indonesia, confronted with massive amounts of European materials which generally tell them less than they wish to know about Indonesians, have often turned to the relatively few incidents of Indonesian social protest or armed struggle in the Indies to provide them with better insights into conditions and changes within indigenous societies and into the dilemmas and paradoxes Indonesians were facing in the Dutch era. Both because these incidents readily lend themselves to social analysis and because they were likely to have elicited deep contemporary administrative research into their causes and courses, actions such as the Diponegoro War,¹ the Aceh War (Useful recent works are Reid 1969, Van 't Veer 1969 and Beamer thesis 1969) and the Bantam Revolt (Sartono Kartodirdjo 1966) in the nineteenth century and, in the twentieth century, the Saminist Movement,² the rapid growth of Sarekat Islam,³ the Jambi Revolt, and the 1926/27 Communist Uprisings⁴ have attracted considerable scholarly attention.⁵ This attention has been richly rewarded. Studies of particular incidents of popular rebellions and unrest in the Indies have accumulated into a body of literature that both is fascinating in its own right and also forms a major introduction to wider, theoretical studies of the nature of peasant life and protest in general.⁶ In addition, however, these studies have uncovered much thought-provoking information about the feelings and reactions of different groups of Indonesians toward such major innovations as the alteration of land-tenure systems, the introduction of the money economy, of taxation in cash, and of large-scale commercial agriculture, and the widening and deepening of the administration, transportation, communications, and education systems in the Indies. This has been possible because popular movements provide the opportunity, and the documents, for scholars to see at close range the forces and drives within Indonesian communities which European observers and officials ordinarily ignored, were unaware of, or took for granted.

Elsewhere in colonial Southeast Asia, research into popular revolts in the 1930s has done much to illuminate how harshly the economic climate of the Great Depression affected a large part of the native populations and how few political tools those populations had available to attempt to alter that climate or to ameliorate its effect on them. The Saya San Rebellion in Burma in 1930-1932 (Adas 1974: chapter 8; Scott 1976: 149-156), the Nghe-Tinh Soviets in Vietnam in 1930-1931 (Duiker 1976: chapter 12; Scott 1976: 127-149), and the Sakdalista Uprising in the Philippines in 1935 (Sturtevant 1976: 215-255) have all been studied in some detail. The most striking thing about these incidents is the blending of traditional appeals and modern aims which marks the attractiveness of the leaders in them. But underlying this, and prompting the majority of the participants to reach out for the hope of relief offered them in revolt, were the distressing economic conditions afflicting the people who became the rank and file in these movements. Crop failures in Nghe-An and H-Tinh Provinces in Vietnam, depressed rice prices in the Irrawaddy Delta in Burma, and land shortage and weak markets for export crops in areas in Cavite, Laguna, Tayabas, and Bulacan provinces in the Philippines, when
combined with unrelaxed exactions from farmers and agricultural labourers, produced situations where hunger threatened to become starvation. Faced with that threat, thousands of people moved in these revolts and hundreds died. Though the political aims of the leaders were not realized, the uprisings did draw official attention to the plight of peasants, and some measures were taken to grant relief in areas hard hit by depression.

In the Indies, there were neither revolts nor large-scale popular unrest in the 1930s. Following the uprisings in West Sumatra and Bantam in late 1926/early 1927, the attitudes of the Dutch colonial administration toward political organizing among Indonesians grew increasingly skeptical. Police spies were numerous and clever, harsh legal strictures made for easy detention of reckless popular leaders, and, after A.C.D. de Graeff was succeeded as Governor General by the more conservative Jonkheer B.C. de Jonge in 1931, repressive measures came to assume more of a preemptory than a retaliatory nature. While this stifling political atmosphere would have made preparing for rebellion a risky process in any event, there were also economic factors which militated against a popular surge toward revolt. There is no doubt that the Great Depression brought hardship to a large number of Indonesians. The Indies government, facing crisis after crisis in the great export businesses which dominated commerce, favored Dutch-controlled firms to the detriment of the indigenous peoples (O'Malley thesis 1977 : Chapter 2). The flow of cash into Indonesian hands dried to a mere trickle, but those hands still had to yield up money for the payment of taxes of various kinds. Things which Indonesians had come to take for granted, expanding educational and employment opportunities, improved government services, even new clothing once a year, were suddenly denied them. Difficult though all this might have been for Indonesians to accept, it still must be pointed out that few indeed were threatened with starvation in the 1930's in the Indies. For the fact that conditions in the countryside were changing rapidly because of the Depression did not mean that the population was growing short of food. Some urban workers rendered jobless by sluggish economies in the cities returned to their villages to farm. 7 Plantation laborers no longer needed in the Outer Islands were shipped back to work the land in rural Java. Fields earlier planted in export crops were given over to general agricultural use. Though these developments meant vast, and painful dislocations in the village world, they still did provide increased means for food-crop production. In addition, government policy acted to prevent serious food shortages. When the post-war depression of the early 1920's resulted in hunger and disorder in places in Sumatra and Java where people could no longer fend for themselves, the government responded not only by squelching the disorder but also by making attempts to monitor the condition of crops and the supply of foodstuffs throughout the Indies in order to prevent any future breaches of 'rust en orde'. 8 While the overall change in policy emphasis indicated by the switch from the major tenets of the Ethical Policy to the new slogan 'No One Goes Hungry Under the Netherlands Flag' may have represented a reactionary diminution in the aspirations of colonial government, the willingness of the administration to underwrite some of the costs attendant upon transporting food to and distributing it in areas threatened by crop shortages meant that there occurred practically nowhere in the colony the kind of desperation that might lead men to revolt.

On the whole, then, Dutch concern with security and with preventing starvation combined with the general effects of the Depression to insure that there was no