

discounting an attack. The Navy “smoothed” the record, resulting in the “very substantial adjustment of data” (p. 147). Falsely accused, Hanoi became “stronger, better prepared, and better supplied” (p. 253). Ironically, Moïse observes, the Gulf of Tonkin incident “really had begun with an honest mistake” (p. 255). Many Americans would find truth in saying the same about the entire Vietnam War.

JAMES I. MATRAY
New Mexico State University

Sjahrir: Politics and Exile in Indonesia. By RUDOLF MRAZEK. Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1994. x, 526 pp. \$24.25 (paper).

Sutan Sjahrir was and remains one of the great enigmatic figures of modern Indonesian history. Born in West Sumatra in 1909, he was one of a group of Minangkabau nationalist leaders and politicians who was to play major roles in Indonesian politics in the two or three decades around the Second World War. He studied law in the Netherlands, was active in the nationalist movement in Indonesia on his return, and for his troubles was exiled by the Dutch to the notorious prison camp at Boven Digul in what was then Netherlands New Guinea, and then to the island of Banda Neira. During the Japanese occupation, almost alone of the nationalist leaders, he stood outside the occupation administration, leading the closest thing that Indonesia had to a resistance movement. The central figure in George Kahin's *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia*, he seemed to many liberal western scholars in the early 1950s to have emerged from the 1945–49 revolution as a powerful political leader and one who was likely to lead Indonesia in the direction of democracy and stability. His supporters in the Socialist Party of Indonesia (PSI) were amongst the best educated people in Indonesia, at least in western terms. But at Indonesia's first general elections held in 1955, Sjahrir and the PSI suffered a massive rebuff, securing just 2 percent of the popular vote. In 1962 he was imprisoned by the Sukarno government on political charges; falling seriously ill, he was released in order to seek medical treatment in Switzerland but died soon after arrival, in 1996.

For all this, though, Mrazek's is the first full biography of Sjahrir to appear. Working with a massive array of sources—colonial archives, nationalist and postwar newspapers, reminiscences of colleagues, interviews with those who knew him, and Sjahrir's own writings—Mrazek has produced an exhaustive account of Sjahrir's life and work. He says that one of his objectives in writing the book was to produce a “sort of autobiography of Sjahrir” (p. 2); to unearth this “autobiography” in its entirety, he says, and to read it with concern—“this was the principal ambition with which this book was written” (p. 2). This is probably an impossible task, but Mrazek has certainly gone a long way toward achieving it. Few stones can have been left unturned in his search for Sjahrir. We learn of Sjahrir's interest in soccer and in the stage, his taste in clothes and music, as well as his ideas about Indonesian independence, and his evaluations of writers and scholars ranging from Marx to Feith. As might be expected, the picture of Sjahrir that emerges is a complex one. He appears as an intellectual who is uneasy in his personal relationships, uncomfortable with political power, and happier at the periphery of politics than at the center. Indeed, Mrazek presents Sjahrir as being unable to cope with life at the political center. He links this attitude to Sjahrir's Minangkabau heritage, one in which the male members of a family are expected to leave the family home and seek their fortune in the outside world.

But toward the end of his life, his intellectual powers seem to have been in decline. He no longer read the latest books, preferring instead to return to older and more familiar ones.

For many western observers, Sjahrir came to be seen as a man too westernized for the Indonesian political scene. Mrazek clearly dispels this simplistic notion: Sjahrir was much more complicated than that. But what was his long-term impact on the Indonesian political scene? In his introduction to the book, Mrazek notes that several readers of earlier versions drew the conclusion that Sjahrir was a man who had failed. Mrazek comments that he “[could] not disagree more” (p. 1) with this opinion. It depends, I suppose, on what counts as failure, or success. Mrazek’s Sjahrir did not seek conventional political success, and indeed was positively uncomfortable with it. So the fact that he did not achieve conventional political success could hardly be held against him. Did he have any lasting impact on Indonesian politics or its intellectual life? Probably not. It may be unfair to call him a failure, but it would be just as unrealistic to call him a success either.

This book could perhaps have been rather more vigorously edited. The exhaustiveness of Mrazek’s research in seeking out the details of Sjahrir’s life occasionally exhausted this reviewer. Fact is piled relentlessly on fact. Mrazek’s style is rather heavy, with a tendency to long and rather convoluted sentences. The illustrations are curious. Some are of obvious relevance but others do not seem to be: the Map of the Netherlands (p. 75), for instance, and the set of three Japanese drawings made during the occupation (pp. 213, 222, 246). But these are minor drawbacks. This is a book which those concerned with Indonesia in the twentieth century should have on their shelves, and read.

COLIN BROWN

Flinders University of South Australia

Angels and Devils: Thai Politics from February 1991 to September 1992—A Struggle for Democracy? By DAVID MURRAY. Bangkok: White Orchid Press, 1996. xxvii, 314 pp.

While this is not, by the author’s own admission, an academic work, this by no means removes it from consideration by academics, who will certainly be impressed with Murray’s detailing of the events of 1991 and 1992. This includes the period from the military coup of February 1991 to the elections of September 1992, containing between these two endpoints “Black May” of 1992. The strength is in the details, and Murray winds them up by raising important questions rather than providing quick and easy answers.

Murray portrays military coups in Thailand as a normal part of the Thai political process—as a mechanism by which the military maintains a stable position in its negotiation of power with Thai bureaucratic elites. It is stability and an avoidance of excesses by one group or another that Murray views as critical to parties involved in the “power-sharing” between the military and bureaucratic elites. Murray also raises questions about whether this system will change, since the elections of September 1992 suggest to him that traditional patron-client political behavior and not the pursuit of democratic change conditioned the outcome of the elections. The electorate, especially in rural areas, voted along traditional allegiances, and Thais generally sought stability and balance within the system, rather than to change the system itself.