

JERS: 4216

23 November 1960

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IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF INDONESIA

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JPRS: 4216

CSO: 1173-S

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IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF INDONESIA

[Following is the translation of an article by H. Moh. Ansar Surjohadibroto entitled "Soal Peladjaran/Pendidikan Agama Di-Sekolah² Umum Di-Indonesia" (English version above) in Penuntun (The Guide), Vol XIV, No 5-6, Djakarta, May-June 1960, pp 16-18, 22]

Allow me first to describe briefly the history of religious education in public schools.

During the time of the first cabinet of Indonesia in 1945, circulars were sent to various regions by the first Minister of Education and Culture, the deceased Ki Hadjar Dewantara, which stated that the teaching of character building which was introduced during the Japanese period may be replaced by the teaching of religion. But those circulars had no strong foundation, especially with regard to who are to be allowed to be religious teachers, with regard to the qualifications that must be met by religious teachers, and also with regard to the status of religious teachers as employees. Thus conformity to these circulars was voluntary, especially on the part of the teachers. Therefore religious instructions could only be given in some schools.

In 1946, during the Jogja government, representatives of the Islamic people in BP KNIP [Working Body of The Central Committee of National Indonesia] proposed, in the name of the Islamic people, that religious instruction be given in public schools. With that decision, the Ministry of Religion began to make plans and instructed the C Department [not identified in source] because at that time the time had not ripened for the establishment of a Department of Religious Education.

Because the Ministry of Religion did not have schools where candidates for religious teaching could be educated, school teachers were hastily called from the Jogja area, to be tested as religious teachers.

Among those who took the test were also teachers from PPK. (Ministry of Education and Culture) schools, and a number of them passed. After the test, the appointment of religious teachers for public elementary schools was begun. Teachers who originated from the religious schools were appointed as permanent teachers, while elementary school teachers, called replacement teachers at the time, who passed the test were appointed honorary teachers.

In this way in tens of the elementary schools in each of the areas controlled by the R.I. [Republic of Indonesia government] of Jogja, religious instruction was begun.

It was not until after the surrender of the sovereignty, in the year 1950, that the Ministry of Religion opened schools for religious teachers (PGA), which take five years to train candidates for elementary teacher.

Not until 1952 could this PGA produce religious teachers, who in two years were trained to be teachers; this was because they were graduates of junior high schools (SMP) or junior secondary schools of religion.

When their job as teachers was carefully examined, their deficiencies were discovered, so that in 1953 final examinations were no longer held; instead to the training period was added one year so that the five-year School for Religious Teachers became the six-year School for Religious Teachers. In each residential area a four-year School for Religious Teachers was opened; and in each province a High PGA for graduates of the four-year School for Religious Teachers. This last school began turning out teacher candidates in 1954. Because it was desired by many religious teachers, the Ministry of Religion also gave the opportunity to experienced teachers of the religious school who to take the religious teachers test on condition that the candidate must have at least a high school diploma and a religious school diploma.

Those who pass are placed in the elementary schools and are in the B group in the National Government Wage Regulation (PGPN), and later on they are in group C. In addition, without examination they can be appointed school teachers in public schools, arbitrators of the Islamic people, teachers in Normal Islam, Islam College. Others whose diploma was considered equal to that of the First Teacher School (SGB) and Higher Teachers School (AGA) also had the same opportunities.

Before the second disturbance, the Ministry of Religion had also opened up a Teachers School of Islamic Religion (SGAI) at Solo. But this school never produced teachers, because the second disturbance broke out. In place of this, after the second disturbance was over, Schools for Religious Teachers and Judges (SGHA) were opened at Malang, Jogja, Bandung, and Bukit Tinggi. At these schools religious teachers candidates and candidates for religious court judges were trained.

Those were the efforts of the Ministry of Religion, which was established without having any traditions whatever because during the previous governments there had never been a Ministry of Religion. It is easy to understand how heavy is the task entrusted to the Ministry of Religion, which, moreover, has a very limited budget.

Religious instruction in the public schools is based on Article 29 of the '45 Constitution. In July 1951 a Joint Regulation of the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Religion was issued, based on the Temporary Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Article 41, paragraphs 1 and 3; Article 43, paragraph 1; and Statute Number 4, 1950. With regard to training and instruction, Article 20 supported the

position of religious instruction in public as well as private schools.

This Joint Regulation was for the purpose of establishing religious instruction in elementary and secondary schools. In the ordinary group in the elementary schools two hours weekly of religious instructions was given for each class, starting with the fourth grade. In the special groups this instruction was given for four hours weekly at the most for each class, starting with the first grade.

Special groups are the in the Municipalities or Regencies which, because of the strength of their religious life, and at the request of the residents are designated as special groups.

In the instructions for carrying out the Joint Regulation, in Article 3 is mentioned forms which are filled out by parents to state whether or not their youngsters may participate in religious instruction, although the religious instruction given may be similar to the religion held by the student's family.

The Joint Regulation with its explanatory and implementing instructions which aimed at regulating religious instruction, frequently gave rise to interpretations which made the carrying out of religious instruction in public schools difficult. For example:

I. People who have always felt that public schools must be neutral toward religion are of the opinion that religious instruction should be given outside the regular schedule. This opinion actually has been answered by the existence of the Joint Regulation, which states that this instruction must be given during the regular schedule.

This neutralist attitude toward religion is an inheritance from colonial education. After the Dutch government had failed in its Christianization policy, it turned to the neutralist attitude for its schools, perhaps in order to prevent the easy incursion of Islamic religion into its schools.

During the period of Dutch occupation in East Java, at the conference with the government of the Nederlands Indies in Surabaya, was attended by the public school teachers and chaired by Van der Plas with his Islamic League for the specific purpose of balancing the politics in Indonesia, it was explained by Van der Plas that in the public schools it was necessary to give religious instruction according to each student's religion. But the religion which was actually aimed at was Islamic religious instruction.

After one headmaster of the secondary school, who still firmly held the neutralistic attitude toward religion, had disagreed with the inclusion of religious instruction in public schools, how did Van der Plas answer that neutralist opinion? He said: "This neutralism exists only in Indonesia. Indonesians do not know that in Holland since 1925 this neutralism no longer exists. In every school, public or private, religious instruction has been given." That is how Van der Plas answered this authority, who was loyal Dutch citizen.

Our hope is that the Indonesian people, already free and sovereign, will willingly discard the spirit of Dutch state regulations, colonialist in spirit. If people still think according to this Dutch state regulation,

inevitably they will clash with the spirit of the majority of the Indonesian people.

II. Under normal and perfect conditions, that is, if all parents are no longer illiterate, the system of filling out forms can be honestly practiced. But the facts that we now frequently meet are:

a. The filling out of the forms which are handed to illiterate parents are forged. It is left to the administrator of the forms to fill out whatever he likes, and generally the content is a statement of disagreement with the religious instruction that is to be given the student.

b. The forms are actually for the students who are to be given religious instruction for the first time, that is those students in the regular groups who have just entered the fourth grade, but in actuality all students, either those who just got into the fourth grade or fifth grade are made to fill out the forms every year.

c. There was also subtle threats directed toward students as well as parents, threats which if crystalized into words sound as follows: "Watch out, if you or your children follow religious instruction surely you will suffer."

d. There were large or small number of students in each class who did not attend religious instruction. These students were gathered to be given general instruction by teachers who at the time happened not to be teaching. Frequently explanations were given to the effect that those who did not attend religious instruction were very lucky because they would be able to pass the entrance examination to higher schools.

III. There are also those who think that of the two religious instruction hours only one hour should be allowed for religious instruction and the other hour for:

a. character building instruction to be given by the teacher.

b. extra general instruction in the sixth grade to prepare the students for examinations.

IV. At one of the schools it was decided by the school conference that religious instruction be discontinued and replaced by free spirit education based on the Five Principles.

V. In the Home Economic School for Girls up to the present, according to its schedule, there has been only one hour of religious instruction. This is contrary to the Joint Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture and the Minister of Religion.

Those are the difficulties which delayed the carrying out of religious instruction in the public schools. Many other examples could be given, justifying the conclusion that there are still a lot of sectors, private as well as organizational which do not like religious instruction in public schools.

We are of the opinion that it would be well if the already existing Joint Statement, with its explanatory and executing instructions, were to be reexamined and changed, and all doubtful clauses that cause difficulties in their execution were removed. We wish to insert, literally

and clearly, in the new Joint Statement Article 20 sub 1 paragraph XII of the Constitution Number 4, 1950, regarding education and instruction:

In the public schools religious instruction shall be conducted. Questionnaire forms must be eliminated because forgery is frequently practiced. We will always maintain the freedom of parents to prohibit or encourage their children to attend religious instruction, only the method will be different from the previous one. What we mean is that if without the formality of a questionnaire the student has been given religious instruction the parents are allowed to present a letter of objection if they so desire. This way will be more honest, and conflict in the carrying out of religious instruction in public schools will be reduced.

The Purpose of Religious Training and Instruction

In the elementary schools it is actually not religious instruction that is given, but religious training which is emphasized, so that it seems that conduct is more stressed than instruction. For instance, in the first grade it begins by showing the beauty of mother nature, songs describing the beauty of mother nature by mentioning Allah's name and praising The Great Prophet Mohammed with legends or stories that suit the children. The Koran is read and short and important letters are memorized and sung in beautiful melody. Songs about the life of the Great Prophet Mohammed are popularly sung in the community of Islam, such as songs from the book of Promise, on the Font, etc.

In the higher grades, students are to be frequently brought to the village mosque, not mainly to pray, but also to acquaint them with the holy place so that there will be a strong spiritual relation. In addition these students, under the system of emergency help, are to be frequently asked to clean the mosque with its garden, not forgetting the holy water font, the bathing place and the rest rooms, so that from early childhood the conviction that the place of worship and its surroundings must be clean is inculcated. Older children are to be given heavier duties, such as cleaning the web net in the holy water font, helping to paint, and cutting tree branches that reduce the splendour of the house of worship.

Basic religious instruction is to be given in concise form, and things to be memorized are to be made into simple songs. Prayer is to be practiced more than memorized.

Courses which are against child psychology, particularly those things which are not understood by the child, were usually given lavishly to the children without taking into account the consequences that are disadvantageous to education; this kind of education is to be reserved, to be used later when the time comes.

This was forgotten by the Religious teachers, so that strong protest was made by the parents, and it is this mistake which is utilized as a weapon by those who do not wish religious instruction in public schools.

Actually the duties of Religious teachers in the elementary schools are heavy, if they are to give the best instruction that fits the need of the small children according to the psychology and didactics.

Therefore the task which is entrusted by the Department of Religion to the Office of Religious Education is really not an easy one if we acknowledge the lack of teachers trained according to the development of knowledge of education in the world. We must take this into account if we are not to be the laughing stock of those who purposely look for weakness and errors of the Islamic people.

Thank God, the experiment which the Office of Religious Education conducted in the form of training for Religious teachers candidates, such as PGA, SGHA, are gradually producing fruit, although not yet satisfactory.

In lower and high secondary schools, emphasis is placed upon Religious Instruction, so that when the time comes for the children to step into the wide and free society they are likely to be well equipped to resist evil and to walk on the righteous path always. They can be expected to be good citizens, not harmful to their people and state. With conviction they base all their good deeds on the Promise, which is repeated verbally five times every day: "All my obligations, all my good deeds, my life and my death are only for Allah."

If the Islamic people have already reached that stage with conviction, surely what is longed for by every moslem will be achieved, namely a holy community, and during his lifetime he surely has without much talk, already helped the realization of what is frequently boasted about in Indonesia: "The peaceful and prosperous state is the state that is forgiven by Allah." And silently they help point out that "Islam is the way of the mighty and lofty Lord."

Up to now the Department of Religion has been responsible only for religious instruction and religious training in the elementary secondary schools; but based on the symptoms which are disadvantageous for the Islamic people, it seems likely that the Department of Religion is capable of taking the responsibility for the lectures in Islamic Religious Law in the government Law Faculty, which up to now has been given by lecturers or professors who can not be called experts on Islamic Religious Law because their knowledge of religion was acquired through books written by Snouck Hourgronje Joun Boul and others that are far from adequate, not to mention their doubtful authenticity.

However, the Department of Religion as a government organ is not mistaken in saying that lectures in government universities are also to be their responsibility toward the Community and God Almighty.

Let us hope that with God's blessing and help, the objectives of this religious instruction in public schools, which is mainly directed toward improving and raising the moral values of the Indonesian people — of late, moral rotteness has been mentioned frequently — can gradually lead to the desired result.

The efforts of the Department of Religion and its Education Council will not achieve their purpose if there is no help from the people who love their religion. Thank God, after the suggestions of His Excellency Minister of Religion, made to the recent Youth congress in Bandung, had been unanimously accepted, the decision of this Youth

Congress really became a support and encouragement for the Department of Religion to carry on its heavy task.

We hope that the help offered by the Youth Congress is not an empty promise but a good deed reflecting the moral strength of each member.

Summary of our Suggestions:

1. Give the Office of Religious Education a satisfactory budget to gradually but in quick tempo realize its plans.
2. The Joint Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture and the Minister of Religion, with its explanatory and implementing instructions, must be reexamined immediately, particularly with regard to the certainty of the position of religious instruction in general public schools and also with regard to questionnaire forms.
3. Sincere help is expected from the officials of the Department of Education and Culture.
4. From Islamic organizations, especially their youth organizations, as much help as possible is expected, particularly in giving explanations to parents, who, in to our opinion are mostly followers of Islam, so that they will use their rights for their youngsters and not be deceived by a small number of people who want to keep our Islamic Religion away from our youth.