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THE PROGRESSIVE STEPS OF "GAPI" AS A MAJOR NATIONALIST FEDERATION, 1939–1941

Luthfi Ridzki Fakhrian

Doctoral Program, Department of Social Welfare, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia
luthfiridzkifakhrian@gmail.com
**Corresponding author*

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ABSTRACT

The rejection of the Soetardjo Petition and the rising threat of global fascism triggered political consolidation among nationalists in the Dutch East Indies during the late 1930s. Amidst these dynamics, the Indonesian Political Federation (GAPI) emerged as a space for collective struggle across political organizations. This study aims to analyze the progressive steps of GAPI as a major nationalist federation in fighting for the political rights of the Indonesian people from 1939 to 1941. This research employs the historical method consisting of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography through literature review and historical document analysis. The findings indicate that GAPI successfully consolidated eight major nationalist organizations to advocate the main slogan "Indonesia Berparlemen" (Indonesia with Parliament) through the Indonesian People's Congress. Despite facing rejections and rigid restrictions from the Dutch colonial government, GAPI catalyzed mass political awareness and established the Indonesian People's Council (MRI) as a permanent representative body. In conclusion, GAPI served as a transformative milestone in the history of the national movement, shifting the struggle strategy from individual sectoral movements to a solid collective federative action.

Keywords: *GAPI, Indonesia Berparlemen, Volksraad, nationalism, national movement.*

INTRODUCTION

Socio-political dynamics in the Dutch East Indies during the 1930s were characterized by structural inequality and colonial repression, which severely restricted civil rights and public welfare (Kusumawardani & Faturochman, 2004). From a social welfare perspective, fulfilling public welfare cannot be decoupled from fundamental political rights and civil sovereignty. The restriction of organizational space by the colonial government following the 1926/1927 uprisings and the rejection of the Soetardjo Petition in 1938 served as crucial turning points, making movement figures realize the fragility of individual, sectoral struggles (Yolanda & Hartanti, 2021). On the other hand, escalating global tensions due to the international fascist threat demanded a joint advocacy front capable of bridging public protection with more democratic political restructuring. Within this landscape, the birth of the Indonesian Political Federation (GAPI) in May 1939 marked an essential manifestation of macro-level advocacy and collective action across mass organizations.

Various studies on the nationalist movement during the late colonial era have been extensively conducted by prior scholars. Fithriyyah (2012) captured the revitalization of political parties within the framework of democracy enforcement, yet did not specifically

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analyze the federative mechanism of organizational action. Meanwhile, studies by Yolanda and Hartanti (2021) focused on conventional historical descriptions of GAPI's development and the "Indonesia Berparlemen" (Indonesia with Parliament) campaign within the Volksraad. Furthermore, recent scholarship has continued to evaluate late colonial political consolidation, yet largely remains confined to the institutional boundaries of the Volksraad (Andayani et al., 2026; Mumekh et al., 2026). These studies tend to position GAPI merely as a reactive political response without deeply exploring its structural welfare advocacy dimension in mobilizing cross-ideological mass consolidation across Islamic, secular, and left-wing spectrums.

This academic research gap is precisely what this study aims to address. Most historiographies of the national movement place the 1939–1941 period as a passive "twilight" phase of the colonial movement. However, by integrating social welfare perspectives regarding social movements and public policy advocacy—specifically by operationalizing macro-level advocacy as a framework where political coalitions act as instruments to demand structural equity and systemic policy shifts, the fact that GAPI successfully consolidated eight major organizations such as Parindra, Gerindo, PSII, and PAI demonstrates a strategic transformation from a fragmented movement into systematic social-political advocacy consolidation. GAPI did not merely demand "Indonesia Berparlemen" as a political slogan, but laid the foundation for a representative parliament to secure the social, economic, and political rights of the people through the Indonesian People's Congress (KRI) and the Indonesian People's Council (MRI) (Ginting, 2004). Through this interdisciplinary approach bridging historiography and social welfare science, this study contributes a novel interpretation: it shifts the historical framing of GAPI from a mere reactive political alliance to an early prototype of a national welfare coalition that actively bridged ideological divides to secure socio-economic justice.

Therefore, this study critically analyzes the progressive steps of GAPI as a major nationalist federation within the framework of collective action and socio-political advocacy from 1939 to 1941 to achieve a specific research objective: uncovering the structural welfare dimensions behind its federative movement. To fulfill this objective, the focus of analysis systematically centers on three main issues: first, examining the socio-political background and structural binding factors that drove GAPI's federative advocacy consolidation; second, evaluating GAPI's propaganda strategies and mass mobilization in advocating the "Indonesia Berparlemen" demand alongside the improvement of the people's socio-economic conditions amid colonial repression; and third, assessing the implications of GAPI's federative movement as a precursor to sustainable socio-political advocacy leading up to the Japanese occupation of Indonesia..

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative historical research method integrated with a macro-level social advocacy analysis framework to investigate the federative pergerakan of GAPI between 1939 and 1941. Theoretically, macro-level social advocacy in this study is defined as collective actions taken by coalitions to influence structural policy changes.

The analytical indicators used include the formation of inter-organizational coalitions, the execution of mass mobilization strategies, and the formulation of structural demands regarding civil rights and socio-economic equality. The research design follows four sequential operational stages of the historical method: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Notosusanto, 1978). Rather than merely discussing method theories, each stage was executed through specific analytical actions tailored to uncover the structural advocacy and collective action dimensions of the movement.

During the heuristic stage, primary and secondary historical data were collected through targeted archival and documentary retrieval from specific repositories, notably the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia (ANRI) and the National Library of Indonesia (Perpusnas). Primary sources gathered include official proceedings of the Volksraad (*Handelingen van den Volksraad*), resolutions of the Indonesian People's Congress (KRI), charter documents of GAPI, and published political memoirs from key contemporary actors, such as Sjahrir et al. (1949). Secondary data were compiled from academic monographs and peer-reviewed journal articles focusing on late colonial political history and social movement dynamics.

In the source criticism stage, both external and internal evaluations were conducted to establish source validity. External criticism verified the physical authenticity and provenance of archival materials, ensuring the documents originated from the designated 1939–1941 period. Internal criticism evaluated the credibility and accuracy of the information by cross-examining colonial state reports against nationalist press releases and party records, thereby corroborating factual claims and identifying potential ideological biases.

The interpretation stage involved synthesizing verified historical facts through an interdisciplinary perspective combining historiography and social welfare science. Concepts of structural advocacy, collective action, and social movement organization were utilized to analyze how GAPI consolidated eight distinct political parties into a unified federative front. Finally, in the historiography stage, the interpreted evidence was constructed into a structured, chronological, and analytical narrative presented according to academic writing standards

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Political Catalysts and Macro-Advocacy Consolidation (1939)

The late 1930s in the Dutch East Indies marked a period of profound structural crisis where colonial authoritarianism increasingly choked the socio-political welfare of the indigenous population. The initial strategy of moderate nationalist groups, such as the Indonesian Greater Party (Parindra), centered on securing incremental political and socio-economic improvements through cooperative participation in the Volksraad. Parindra spearheaded vital community-level social interventions, including establishing trade cooperatives, micro-credit banks, and literacy programs designed to mitigate the harsh economic realities of colonial exploitation. However, the institutional limitations of the Volksraad acting merely as an advisory body subject to the Governor-General's veto

rendered these micro-level interventions insufficient against systemic colonial oppression.

The turning point occurred in mid-1938 with the formal rejection of the Soetardjo Petition by the Dutch colonial government and the Crown. The petition had humbly requested a conference to discuss gradual evolutionary progress toward self-governance within ten years under the Dutch constitution (Yolanda & Hartanti, 2021). This blunt rejection, combined with growing global anxieties surrounding fascist expansionism, exposed the vulnerability of fragmented, party-specific advocacy. Recognizing that isolated sectoral efforts could not alter the colonial power structure, Mohammad Husni Thamrin initiated a series of inter-party dialogues.

On May 21, 1939, eight major nationalist organizations including Parindra, Gerindo, Paguyuban Pasoendan, PSII, and PAI united to form the Indonesian Political Federation (GAPI). The historical veracity of this structural consolidation is directly corroborated by primary colonial intelligence reports, specifically the *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten* (PPO), which closely monitored and documented the founding meetings, noting the unprecedented cross-ideological agreements among these distinct member organizations (Poeze, *Politiek-Politioneele Overzichten van Nederlandsch-Indië Deel IV*, 1935-1941). Furthermore, the official GAPI Manifesto (*Manifest GAPI*) issued in 1939 serves as a primary constitutional document that explicitly declared its unified membership and collective structural demands. Led by a triumvirate consisting of M.H. Thamrin, Amir Sjarifuddin, and Abikusno Tjokrosujoso, GAPI represented a shift toward macro-level federative advocacy that bridged secular, Islamic, and left-wing ideological spectrums (Kahin, 1952; Poeze, 2017; Ricklefs, 2008; Utama, 2016).

Strategic Mobilization of "Indonesia Berparlemen" and Structural Welfare Demands

GAPI's foundational program transcended mere tactical political coalition building by establishing a unified framework for social movement mobilization. The federation operated on three core principles: the right to national self-determination; national unity grounded in social, political, and economic democracy; and unified collective action across the entire movement (Ginting, 2004). From a social welfare advocacy perspective, GAPI recognized that genuine public welfare, equitable wealth distribution, and protection from systemic exploitation could only be guaranteed if the colonized population possessed sovereign legislative authority.

While conventional historical studies view GAPI strictly through a conventional political lens, characterizing it merely as a defensive, reactive coalition against colonial restrictions (Yolanda & Hartanti, 2021; Simarmata et al., 2024), this study's findings extend existing scholarship by integrating social welfare dimensions. Rather than challenging previous descriptions of GAPI's political milestones, the findings build upon them to demonstrate that the push for "Indonesia Berparlemen" was intrinsically tied to structural social protection and public welfare advocacy. In doing so, this perspective bridges traditional political historiography with social movement theory, offering a more comprehensive framework than prior works that treat GAPI's political demands in

isolation from socio-economic realities (Mumekh et al., 2026; Putri et al., 2025).

To operationalize these principles, GAPI organized mass rallies across the archipelago, culminating in the Indonesian People's Congress (KRI) on December 25, 1939, in Jakarta. The congress served as a broad coalition platform bringing together over a hundred socio-political, economic, and cultural organizations. The central rally disowned superficial colonial reforms and rallied the public under the unified slogan "Indonesia Berparlemen" (Indonesia with Parliament). This demand called for a fully democratic, two-chamber parliament directly elected by and accountable to the Indonesian people. Beyond legislative demands, the congress consolidated national identity by officially adopting Bahasa Indonesia as the national language, the Sang Merah Putih as the national flag, and Indonesia Raya as the national anthem, thereby transforming abstract concepts of citizenship into a tangible collective consciousness (Kusumawardani & Faturochman, 2004).

Colonial Institutional Resistance, Visman Commission, and the Atlantic Charter Nuance

The response of the Dutch colonial administration to GAPI's structured advocacy demonstrated the rigid inflexibility of the colonial state apparatus. When nationalist representatives introduced the Wiwoho Resolution in the Volksraad in February 1940 echoing GAPI's demand for constitutional reform the colonial government delayed its response for over six months. Even after Nazi Germany invaded and occupied the Netherlands in May 1940, the colonial regime maintained that no structural political changes would be considered until after the war (Pelzer, 1943).

In an effort to defuse mounting public pressure without granting substantive rights, the colonial government established the Visman Commission on September 14, 1940, to investigate native political aspirations. GAPI and its constituent parties viewed the commission as a stalling tactic designed to bypass genuine structural reform. Disillusionment deepened further when the Dutch government-in-exile in London clarified that the Atlantic Charter which proclaimed the universal right of all peoples to choose their form of government did not mandate changes to the colonial relationship between the Netherlands and the East Indies (Pelzer, 1943). Queen Wilhelmina's ambiguous radio address in May 1941 offered vague promises of post-war re-examination without concrete guarantees. This colonial obstinacy shattered the tactical anti-fascist solidarity that nationalist leaders had extended to the Dutch, accelerating a shift among educated elites and the broader public toward radical anti-colonial sentiment (Sjahrir et al., 1949).

The Majelis Rakyat Indonesia (MRI) Experiment and the Eve of Japanese Occupation

Despite intense colonial surveillance and restriction on public assembly, GAPI advanced its organizational strategy by convening the Second Indonesian People's Congress on September 13–14, 1941, in Yogyakarta. This congress established a

permanent overarching body known as the Indonesian People's Council (Majelis Rakyat Indonesia or MRI). The MRI expanded the scope of macro-level social advocacy by institutionalizing cooperation across three primary pillars of Indonesian society: political federations (GAPI), Islamic federations (MIAI), and labor and civil service trade unions (PVPN). By unifying political action, religious mobilization, and organized labor under a single representative council, the MRI functioned as a de facto shadow parliament representing the sovereign will of the indigenous populace.

The historical evidence supporting this characterization lies in the MRI's institutional mechanisms and its assumption of representative legislative functions. Unlike loose political coalitions, the MRI operated with a structured formal presidium and conducted plenary sessions that mirrored parliamentary deliberation protocols. It actively drafted and issued representative memorandums on critical national issues—such as the demand for a fully democratic parliament and the contentious debates regarding the native militia (*inheemse militie*)—which the Dutch-controlled Volksraad failed to authentically represent (Andayani et al., 2026; Mumekh et al., 2026). By acting as the supreme deliberative body for over ninety constituent organizations, the MRI effectively bypassed the colonial advisory system and created an alternative, parallel representative structure for the colonized population.

However, the operational efficacy of the MRI was hindered by emerging internal ideological tensions and procedural disagreements among its member organizations before its strategic programs could be fully realized. These internal frictions absorbed vital organizational energy during a critical juncture of global geopolitical upheaval. On March 8, 1942, the landing of Japanese imperial forces brought an end to Dutch colonial rule, leading to the immediate dissolution of all indigenous political federations, including GAPI and the MRI. Although GAPI was forcibly disbanded, its federative experiment left a lasting legacy: it proved that diverse ideological streams could be consolidated into a unified macro-advocacy front capable of mobilizing mass support for democratic governance and social sovereignty.

The novelty of this research lies in its paradigm shift from traditional, institution-centric political historiography to a macro-level socio-welfare advocacy framework. While previous studies have predominantly analyzed GAPI through the narrow lens of political resistance and legislative debates (Rohmadi & Warto, 2019; Yolanda & Hartanti, 2021), this study reframes GAPI as an early prototype of a national welfare coalition. By demonstrating that the “Indonesia Berparlemen” campaign was fundamentally a structural advocacy effort aimed at securing systemic policy shifts and economic equity, this research fills a critical gap. It answers the recent scholarly call for more interdisciplinary historical analyses (Andayani et al., 2026; Fadlurrahman, 2026), proving that GAPI’s political milestones were intrinsically tied to the pursuit of socio-economic justice for the colonized population.

Beyond its specific historical and geographical context, the findings of this study offer broader, global utility for understanding social movements, democratic advocacy, and collective action in the Global South. The federative model pioneered by GAPI serves

as a historical blueprint illustrating how structurally marginalized populations can successfully consolidate diverse, cross-ideological factions—bridging secular, Islamic, and left-wing groups—into a unified front against authoritarian regimes (Sinaga et al., 2024). In contemporary academic discussions regarding democratic backsliding and post-colonial structural inequalities, GAPI's experience provides enduring lessons (Mumekh et al., 2026). It underscores the universal principle that true social welfare and public protection are inseparable from political enfranchisement, offering a valuable comparative framework for modern macro-level social work and political advocacy.

CONCLUSION

The Indonesian Political Federation (GAPI) marked a pivotal milestone in late colonial Indonesian historiography by transforming fragmented, party-specific advocacy into a consolidated macro-advocacy front from 1939 to 1941. Driven by systemic colonial repression, the rejection of the Soetardjo Petition, and escalating fascist threats, GAPI successfully unified eight major secular, Islamic, and left-wing organizations under the shared imperative of national self-determination and structural reform. By spearheading the "Indonesia Berparlemen" movement through the Indonesian People's Congress (KRI), GAPI demonstrated that securing social welfare, economic justice, and civil rights for the colonized population was intrinsically tied to establishing sovereign, democratic legislative power. Although the Dutch colonial administration maintained an unyielding stance symbolized by the stalling tactics of the Visman Commission and the non-applicability of the Atlantic Charter GAPI's strategic shift to institutionalize the Majelis Rakyat Indonesia (MRI) laid the foundational framework for broad-based social movement organization and cross-sectoral solidarity. Despite its abrupt termination by the 1942 Japanese invasion and unresolved internal ideological frictions, GAPI's federative experiment provided enduring lessons for macro-level social work and political advocacy, proving that collective action can bridge deep ideological divides to mobilize mass support for human dignity, democratic governance, and social sovereignty.

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