DAENDELS’ EFFORTS TO ABOLISH CORRUPTION¹

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1. Introduction

As Indonesian people who study history, especially the colonial history of our country, we know the name of Governor General Herman Willem Daendels, and think of him as a cruel and aloof man. During his governance of 3 years 4 months (from January 14, 1808 until May 16, 1811), he made many changes to the East Indies colony. Before being sent to govern Java, he received 2 main tasks from King Louis Napoléon. The first was that he had to defend Java from the menace of the Britsh marines. The second was to make a clean government in place of the former VOC’s rulers. His efforts to abolish corruption was a step toward making a clean government.

Herman Willem Daendels was born in Hattem, Netherlands on October 21, 1762. When he studied in faculty of law in Harderwijk, together with his lecturer PA Roscam, he formed a group called ‘Patriot’, a movement against the power of Willem V or the Orange dynasty, who aligned himself with the Prussians and the British. When his father retired from the administration duties of provincial head, his friends proposed that he replace his father, but Willem V had already nominated another person to fill this position from the Orange dynasty. This decision caused the revolt of Patriot movement. This action was supported by the peasants and other citizens. The aims of the formation of the Patriot movement were to abolish slavery, to prepare farms for the peasants, to make the government clean from all kinds of crimes, and to reduce all the kinds of taxes paid by all citizens. After the arrival of the foreign military troops, Daendels, as the chief of Patriot movement decided to take refugee in Dunkerque, a city located in a Northern part of French territory.

In this city Daendels enrolled in a foreign French military troop, called the Légion Etrangère. He obtained a good reputation in this troop, after showing his

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great dedication to French army. His reputation led to him being appointed as a commandant of this military troop. When the French troops planned to occupy Netherlands, Daendels invited his friends in Gelderland to join with him to bring down the power of Orange dynasty. On January 1795, the French army reached Amsterdam. Based on the Den Haag treaty, the French army established a new republic in the Netherlands, called the Bataf Republic. Daendels played a large role on forming the army of the Bataf Republic and led it to support the French army to defend the Netherlands from the attack of Prussian and British army.

As commander of the Bataf army, his strategy to defend Den Helder against the attack of coalition of the British and Prussian army was rejected. The rejection of his strategy for the defence of Den Helder caused thousands of victims: 1,400 soldiers died and 7,000 were injured. This reality led him to retire from military activities, and he decided to become a farmer. When the existency of the Bataf Republic was threatened by the coalition of 3 big countries: The British, the Prussians, and the Russians, in 1806, Napoléon Bonaparte as a French emperor appointed his own brother, Louis Napoléon to be King of the Netherlands. The aim of the establishment of a Netherland Kingdom under the control of Napoléon Bonaparte was to safeguard the stability and the security of the European territories from the attack of the British army and its allies.

As a new King, Louis Napoléon called on Daendels to help him when the Netherland territory was attacked by the coalition. Daendels, who admired Napoléon Bonaparte and the ideas of French Revolution, accepted the order of Louis Napoléon and lead the army to defend Friesland and Groningen at the beginning of 1806. His success in chasing away the enemy led the King promote him to the rank of Colonel General in the Netherlands’ Army. The establishment of the Netherlands Kingdom placed all of the Netherland colonial territories under the authority of Louis Napoléon Bonaparte as King of the Netherlands, protected by Napoléon Bonaparte.

During the years of 1806—1807, the defence of the Netherland colony territory became difficult, particularly in the East Indies. This caused by the attack of British combat fleet on several places, such as: Cape of Good Hope (the beginning of 1806); Batavia and Surabaya (the end of 1807). After receiving a report about the fall of Cape of Good Hope, King Louis summoned Daendels and gave appointed him Governor General of Java. This appointment was based on the policy that Java was a very strategic island, not only economically but also politically. The role of Java was
very important because, geographically, the colonial government wanted to make Java a leverage point for the occupation of the rest of the Indies. Java was an important source of manpower, in that the Javanese had good physical endurance which could match that of the Hindustan soldiers managed by the British army. The king considered that the colonial government had to defend Java for as long as possible. To realize this policy, he appointed Daendels as Governor General in Java in his letter dated January 27, 1807. After consulting with The King’s elder brother, Napoléon Bonaparte, Daendels received two important tasks: to defend Java from the attack of British combat fleet and to make a clean government in the East India Colony. Finally, before leaving Europe, King Louis Napoléon spelled out of this two tasks of Daendels in 3 set of instructions, as follows: one set of instructions for the Governor General (37 articles), one set for the position of Governor General and The India Council (25 articles), and a third set of instructions for the dissolution and the formation of the India Council (6 articles).

After 10 months of maritim travel, Daendels arrived at Anyer on January 1, 1808. He went directly to Batavia to meet the Governor General Albertus Henricus Wiese. He needed 4 days to reach Batavia. In January 14, 1808 Daendels became Governor General of Java. As a new governor, he had 2 urgent tasks. He reorganized by receiving European soldiers, adding indigenous soldiers, and omitting any military hierarchy as had been done by the Napoleonic army. He also connected all villages by building the “post road”. Daendels reformed the administration, the system of indigenous government by dividing Java into 9 prefectures, created a judicial organisation, a taxation system, a financial system and a set of firm laws. As a Governor General, he was required to send reports to Ministry of Commerce and Colony periodically.

2. The aim of this paper
The aim of this paper is to describe how Daendels abolished corruption during his governance of Java.

3. Archives
This article is based on the archives of colonial period, especially those in the Staat der Nederlandsche Oostindische Bezittingen, onder het bestuur van den
4. **Daendels’s efforts to abolish corruption**

As a Governor General, Daendels was charged by Napoléon Bonaparte to make a clean governance in East India territory. The first evil that Daendels had to meet, the one that he attacked with the greatest intelligence and force, was inefficiency and corruption in the Dutch administration. Apart from the poor personal character of the officials, he found that the system was badly organised. Government and administration were confused, and the highest officials were so burdened with the care of petty details that they didn’t have the power, even if they had the will, to oversee and check the actions of their subordinates. To overcome this problem, Daendels introduced several policies to abolish corruption, as follows:

1. Government officials were forbidden to engage in business;
2. No bribes or presents were to be given to officials;
3. Weight were to be regulated;
4. Regulation of the minimum weights of trade commodities;
5. Regulation of minimum amount of commodities

4.1. **Prohibition of engaging in business**

As a new Governor General who knew the real condition of the ex VOC’s employees, Daendels made every effort to raise the salary of the employees. He considered that the corruption which existed in Java was caused by the poor state of their salaries. So as chief of India Council (Raad van Indie) he made a new standard of salaries from the lowest rank to the highest level. He applied clear regulations to termine the salaries of all officers. Before his government, only the European officers who had received a salary. At this time, the government gave all bupatis (the highest Javanese leaders) parcels or land as salary to reward their obedience to the government. In his new regulation, Daendels decided to give a monthly salary to all employers, including all bupatis and their staffs.

As stated in the *Plakaat Boek* (Chijs, 1895), consequence of the improvement of their monthly salary, so that Daendels forbad all his employers to trade in export commodities. He considered that all of his staff had to devote themselves to their
country and work for the glory of their King, Louis Napoléon. Only the government had the right to sell export commodities to the traders, not only to the Chinese and Arabic traders but also to the American and other European traders. With the raise of their monthly income, Daendels considered that his officials no longer needed to enrich themselves through corruption. He threatened to severely punish those officers who didn’t obey the regulations.

4.2 The Prohibition of bribery

Once he was established as a Governor General, Daendels recalled the Governor of the Northeast coast, without appointing a successor and centralized and simplified the government in Batavia. He greatly extended the real power of the Governor General by relieving himself of minor duties. Daendels reformed not only the scheme of administration, but also the mode of paying and promoting officials, so that a career in the colonial service could be pursued honestly and successfully. The first step toward the realisation of the abolition of corruption was to prohibit the offering of bribes or other gifts to all officials. The giving of presents to officials was regulated in 1743 and 1797. Daendels considered that giving presents was a kind of passive corruption that could influence the officials to work un honestly, and could weaken the public interest that they had to regulate. So, on February 9, 1808, India Council regulated the prohibition of giving or receiving all kinds of presents to all officials. The regents’ incomes were carefully defined to prevent the abuse of their right to demand taxes and services of the people, and they were forbidden to give or to receive presents when they made official appointments. If there were presents to the native officials that the native officials could not refuse, they must report these gifts and turn them over to the government. To improve the performance of the officials, the power and duties of each official were scrupulously described. This regulation was made in several languages, such as Dutch, Chinese and other indigenous languages, in order that all persons should know about this new regulation.

4.3 Weights and prices

Daendels knew that there was no standard system of weight in use when the people presented trade commodities to the government, and that the officials took advantage especially with the most important articles such as coffee and pepper. To
alleviate this situation, he introduced such regulations as could free the people from abuses. On June 1, 1808, Daendels sent a regulation to the Gezaghebber and all regents in East Java, prohibiting them to several commercial agents in trade commodities. He regulated the weight and the price of coffee all over Java. Based on his instruction dated April 4, 1809, the price of one pikul of coffee of 225 pounds was to be 4 ringgits. Before this regulation, there were no standard weight for taxable product, as coffee, pepper, spices, rice, opium, etc. The people had to offer more than 225 pounds for each pikul, and the officials sold the product to the government at less than 225 pounds.

4.4 Regulation of minimum weight of trade commodities

Based on the regulation of tariffs and weights, Daendels stated that the government attended to regulate the minimum weight of more than 30 products in the government stores. For any kind of spices as ginger, pepper, and any kinds of roots, the maximum weight loss recommended was only 2 % of the total weight. For any kind of rice, sugar, salt, etc the acceptable lost weight recomended was 100 bahar for each koyang. During transportation, all officials were instructed to refuse all kinds of taxation products if the packages were broken. If the sailors or cart drivers found that something was wrong with the packaging of the commodities, they had to declare it to their supervisor or to the owner of the transportation. To avoid the damage of the taxable products, they had to store and guard them carefully. In the government storage, all the clerks had to guard products carefully to avoid damage caused by the climate, rain and heat. The responsibility for the products in government storage was entrusted to the administrators of each store.

4.5 Regulation of illegal logging

In reason to conserve the forest, Daendels regulated the exploitation of timbers, especially the trade in teak (kayu Jati). Daendels saw that the forests offered great natural riches. His travels to Semarang showed him that these riches could also stimulate corruption. The riches of the forest along North coast of Java sea, convinced him that he had to stop the illegal logging that created financial loss for the government. In Semarang he published regulations to preserve the forest. The government was the owner of all forests, so any use of wood, especially teak, had to be reported to the government. The forest was to be managed by a special
department formed for preserving the forest. Before cutting the teak trees, all officials of the department of forest had to examine and to explore the possible negative impact of this action. Permission for cutting teak trees would only be given if all the officials were ready to approve the proposals submitted for this purpose.

To reduce the illegal logging, all timbers had to be coded with the origin of the wood, such as: S1 from Surabaya; G2 from Gresik, R3 from Rembang, J4 from Juwana, S5 from Semarang, P6 from Pekalongan, T7 from Tegal, C8 from Tegal and I9 from Indramayu. All timber had to meet certain standards of length and weight. All timber had to be stored in government storage facilities and guarded by the Inspector General of Forestry. If someone was found with timber which did not show the codes as above, they had to be arrested and reported to the Inspector General of Forestry.

5. **Punishment for criminal offenses**

All acts of corruption were to be considered criminal actions. So Daendels prepared judicial means as a way of criminal offense. The Governor General and The India Council signed a law to punish corruption on February 14, 1810. This law consisted 10 articles. The articles said that this instruction was to apply to all officials in the territory of The East Indies.

Those who were careless in their duties and corrupted the state’s assets to the degree of 3,000 ringgits would be sentenced to death. Officials who caused the state a financial loss of between 15,000 till 30,000 ringgits because of their mistakes would also be executed. Those who neglected their duties and caused a loss of less than 5,000 ringgits would have their employment terminated. Those who corrupted state officials would be punished and would not be forgiven.

6. **Conclusion**

During his governorship, Daendels was successfully able to minimize corruption. He had gained his appointment not from any experience in colonial affairs, but as the reward for his military and political service under the French in the Netherlands. He was a man of energy, who saw that many things had gone wrong. So, he controlled all officials in Java very tightly. It is not surprising that he paid little regard to official rules. He followed his own ideas ruthlessly, with immediate consequences.
Daendels frightened the officials because of his character. In his time, he really was prepared to executed corrupt officials. Even so, he could not overcome all of the financial problems. He had to find much money to pay all of the soldiers, Europeans and native officials. But, until the end of his rule, he was able to find a temporary solution in selling private land.

Daendels attempted to create a standard of weight and a standard price for all trade commodities after increasing the salaries of his officials. They had to follow all of his instructions. He developed a good system of controls, so there was no chance for the officials to divert money into their own pockets.

Although many critics attacked him in his time, Daendels actually applied the two Napoleonic orders very well. As a Napoleonic soldier, he found ways to defend Java and to protect French interests in the colony of The East Indie.

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