



# **DECOLONIZATION: MILITARISM AND THE DYNAMICS OF THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT**

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**“For the Dutch colonial government, demands for wage increases were comparatively easy to address. What it wanted to avoid most of all was an escalation of the labor movement into a political movement that might question colonial power”.**

# DECOLONIZATION:

## MILITARISM AND THE DYNAMICS OF THE WORKING CLASS MOVEMENT

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### INTRODUCTION

Japan's surrender at the end of World War II spurred Indonesian youth initiatives urging independence movement leaders Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta to declare independence on August 17, 1945.<sup>1</sup> It marked the beginning of the Indonesian decolonization war against the 1945–1949 Dutch military offensive. Decolonization is the process of transferring colonial power in the form of institutions and territorial control in order to become a sovereign nation state; it is typically an anti-imperialist movement in developing countries.<sup>2</sup> Sukarno, Indonesia's first president and independence proclinator, stated in his speech on the ceremony of Indonesian independence in 1959, that the period between 1945–1950 was a revolution in which the people seized the newly independent nation from the imperialists and kept it.<sup>3</sup>

The Indonesian decolonization war years were a complex process in a long-standing conflict involving political and military leaders, ongoing debate about diplomacy versus armed struggle, the Republican government in Yogyakarta, communist and radical Islamic groups, and social bandits, as well as conflict between the Republican government and political elites on the Indonesian periphery.<sup>4</sup> The conflict ended in 1965 with Suharto's emergence as president of the New Order, his militaristic capitalist regime. During this era, the state abolished all of Suharto's political rivals, including the Partai Komunis Indonesia (Indonesian Communist Party, PKI) and the progressive labor movement, which was one of the vital forces in the struggle for independence and decolonization. The New Order enacted Law No. 1/1967 concerning Foreign Investment to attract funds from abroad on a massive scale,<sup>5</sup> putting an end to the decolonization process with its socialist vision.

As a qualitative study, this paper will investigate the origins of Indonesian militarism as a legacy of colonialism, as well as how colonialism influenced the labor movement, using data from a literature review and an interview with an expert and experienced labor activist. The central arguments of this paper are as follows: (1) Indonesian decolonization was a successful process of establishing a new state and transferring colonial power to Indonesians, however (2) the military leadership, as the embodiment of colonial legacies, succeeded in taking power for itself, establishing New Order, and paralyzing the workers' power, and (3) after the fall of the New Order, the influence of militarism remains sufficiently strong to prevent the working class from regaining its full political power..

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution. Occupation and Resistance 1944-1946*, London: Cornell University Press, 1972, p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> Prasenjit Duara, "Introduction: The Decolonization of Asia and Africa in the Twentieth Century", *Decolonization: Perspective from Now and Then*, edited by Prasenjit Duara, New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 2; Raymond F. Betts, *Decolonization*, London: Routledge, 2002, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> Sukarno, "Penemuan Kembali Revolusi Kita", Jakarta: Kementerian Penerangan RI, 1959, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Gert Oostindie, Ireen Hoogenboom, and Jonathan Verwey, "The Decolonization War in Indonesia, 1945–1949: War Crimes in Dutch Veterans' Egodocuments", *War in History* vol. 25, no. 2, p. 255.

<sup>5</sup> Mukthi, M.F, "Riwayat Masuknya Modal Asing Ke Indonesia", *Historia*, 28 August 2015, <https://historia.id/politik/articles/riwayat-masuknya-modal-asing-ke-indonesia-DWVy1/page/5> (last accessed 19 March 2023)

## COLONIAL MILITARY LEGACY

In an armed revolution, the role of the military becomes important because of the necessity of fighting by taking up arms, regardless of whether soldiers have official military training or are recruited from the general population. The Tentara Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Army, TNI) personnel started with Dutch-trained soldiers from the Koninklijke Nederlands-Indische Leger (Royal Netherlands East Indies Army, KNIL), Japanese-trained soldiers from the Pembela Tanah Air (Defenders of the Homeland, PETA), and militias (laskar),<sup>6</sup> all of which competed with each other to gain influence and military leadership in the decolonization process.

The KNIL was formed in 1830 after the Diponegoro War, in which the Netherlands suffered heavy losses and needed troops to secure the Dutch East Indies region. The KNIL recruited indigenous people, mainly Javanese and Ambonese, and provided remuneration and basic military training.<sup>7</sup> The few former KNIL soldiers had more training and experience than other elements of the newly formed Indonesian army, however their leadership were considered unfavorable due to their origins as the Dutch colonial army.

The Japanese occupation came with the promise of independence, which attracted many nationalists and collaborators, some of whom participated in Japanese initiatives in the interest of preparing for Indonesian independence.<sup>8</sup> Many Indonesians were recruited to serve in functional organizations and the army reserves as Japan's position weakened over the course of World War II. The occupying Japanese authorities formed the PETA on October 3, 1943 to strengthen the Japanese army. PETA soldiers were trained in a very short time, without sufficient combat skills and experience, yet they were likely sought after for their compensation. PETA was less an army than a paramilitary that was trained, heavily influenced, and politicized by the values and cruelty of Japanese fascism.<sup>9</sup>

The large number of former PETA soldiers facilitated their increased representation in the military leadership. The role of the PETA in fighting for Indonesian independence is widely recognized and has been inflated to the point of describing it as the people's army. In fact, PETA soldiers had to oversee local inhabitants who were required to work as *rōmusha* (forced labor) for the construction of Japanese war facilities and related projects, as native women were being used as *jugun ianfu* (comfort women) for Japanese soldiers. Those who refused to compromise tended to rebel against the Japanese, as when 360 PETA soldiers rebelled under the leadership of Supriyadi on February 14, 1945 in Blitar, East Java.<sup>10</sup>

Competition within the military leadership between the left and the former colonial army was tense and cold. The leftists criticized the leadership system of the TNI, which had a diploma

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<sup>6</sup> Ulf Sundhussen, *Politik Militer Indonesia 1945-1967: Menuju Dwi Fungsi ABRI*, Jakarta: LP3ES, 1986, pp. 21-22.

<sup>7</sup> A.J.K. Meijerman, "Controlling the Colony: Military Practices and the Monopoly of Violence in the Belgian Congo and the Netherlands Indies: A Comparison", MID Thesis, Wageningen University, 2019, pp. 24-23.

<sup>8</sup> Nino Oktorino, *Konflik Bersejarah - Ensiklopedi Pendudukan Jepang Di Indonesia*, Jakarta: Elex Media Komputindo, 2013, p. 46.

<sup>9</sup> Joyce Lebra, *Japanese-Trained Armies in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2010, p. 74; Matanasi, Petrik, "Tentara PETA Adalah Paramiliter Berbayar", *Tirto.id*, 16 January 2017, <https://tirto.id/tentara-peta-adalah-paramiliter-berbayar-cg24> (last accessed 19 March 2023).

<sup>10</sup> Oktorino, *Konflik Bersejarah*, p. 14.

requirement and was therefore dominated by former colonial soldiers. Amir Sjarifudin, a communist and the Minister of Defense, proposed that the army had to be democratized through democratic political education and a democratic promotion system, and that the army had to follow the government's political line.<sup>11</sup> Hatta's military reconstruction and rationalization program drastically reduced the 463,000-member army in order to decrease the government's expenses. This mostly meant getting rid of soldiers who were affiliated with the left.<sup>12</sup>

This military rationalization intensified the outbreak of the Madiun Affair on September 19, 1948, which, according to David Charles Anderson, is "best understood as an internal crisis of military politics", rather than an unsuccessful leftist effort to revolt.<sup>13</sup> The rebellion was defeated and ended with the execution of the PKI's leaders, including Musso and Amir Sjarifudin. This event not only extinguished one variant of the idea of civil supremacy over the military but also bolstered the notion that the army should actively participate in politics rather than merely serve as a passive instrument of the government. This perspective later came to be recognized as the dual function of the army.<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately, Indonesia's subsequent military transformation lacked both leftist influence and Dutch-inherited liberal democracy, both of which envisioned the military's subordination to a civilian government. Instead, the Indonesian military inherited much of its outlook from the inadequately trained, inexperienced PETA and its fascist values, which included rejecting civilian authority over the military.<sup>15</sup> The idea of military supremacy came from the Japanese occupation training, which emphasized "spirit" rather than military skill and equipment, a lack of discipline and centralization, an anti-Western orientation, and tense civil-military relations with respect to civilian leaders' diplomatic approach to independence. PETA saw itself as a revolutionary nationalist vanguard, developing an esprit de corps and absorbing the concept of military nationalism with respect to the military's right and obligation to play an active role in government affairs.<sup>16</sup>

The communists were able to regain their footing after the Madiun Affair. In 1950, the PKI consolidated under the leadership of young communists, with D.N. Aidit as chairman. The party proved to be the fourth most popular in the 1955 elections, winning 16 percent of the vote. Even 30 percent of the country's soldiers voted for the PKI, which upset many army leaders.<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, from 1958 to 1965, the army expanded its powers to become a state within a state with the assistance of training, advice, and funding from the United States.<sup>18</sup>

During the confrontation with the Dutch over West Papua, the trade unions under the influence of the PKI and the Partai Nasionalis Indonesia (Indonesian Nationalist Party, PNI) nationalized

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<sup>11</sup> Soe Hoek Gie, *Orang-orang di Persimpangan Kiri Jalan*, Yogyakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 1999, pp. 92-93.

<sup>12</sup> Gie, *Orang-orang*, pp. 200-201.

<sup>13</sup> David Charles Anderson, "The Military Aspects of the Madiun Affair", *Indonesia*, no. 21, Apr., 1976, Cornell University Press, p. 53.

<sup>14</sup> Hartono, Rudi, "Amir Sjarifuddin dan Konsep Tentara Rakyat", *Berdikari Online*, 15 July 2013, <https://www.berdikarionline.com/amir-sjarifuddin-dan-rakyat-tentara/> (last accessed 19 March 2023).

<sup>15</sup> Ruth McVey, "The Post-Revolutionary Transformation of the Indonesian Army." *Indonesia*, No. 13, Apr., 1971, Cornell University Press, p. 136.

<sup>16</sup> John Chang Hoon Lee, "'A Spirit of Destruction': The Origin of the Indonesian Military's Institutional Culture", Master's Thesis, Cornell University, 2013, pp. 20-14.

<sup>17</sup> Achmadi Moestahal, *Dari Gontor ke Pulau Buru*, Yogyakarta: Syarikat, 2002, p. 143; Soemarsono, *Revolusi Agustus*, Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 2008, p. 62.

<sup>18</sup> John Roosa, *Dalih Pembunuhan Massal*, Temanggung: Kendi, 2008, p. 252.

Dutch companies. The TNI leadership then took control of the nationalized companies as part of a maneuver to undermine communist influence and allow the military to place its officers in state enterprises. It was the beginning of the military business complex's expansion and a critical step in strengthening the army through control of economic assets.<sup>19</sup>

The Thirtieth of September Movement (Gerakan 30 September, G30S), an attempted coup d'état in 1965 that began with the assassination of six Indonesian Army generals, put an end to communists and progressive nationalists. The coup attempt was thwarted, the PKI was scapegoated as the mastermind without an adequate trial, and were used as a pretext for the genocide of over 1 million people and the imprisonment and political exile of more than 12,000 others. For John Roosa, the real purpose of the mass killings was to destroy the power of the peasants and workers who were moving towards land reform and nationalization of many foreign companies.<sup>20</sup> The mass killing and political exile also got rid of the progressive intellectuals who potentially could have built Indonesia up during the post-colonial era.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, the military's role in the decolonization war, as well as its populist character, were mythologized in order to justify the military's role in politics and the economy. Paramilitary groups were justified as representatives of the people, but in fact were used as a political tool and "partner in arms" as well as a vehicle for spreading anti-communist propaganda.<sup>22</sup> Anti-communism became a general narrative that was used to attack political opponents and suppress popular resistance. This is also an indication of the extent to which the New Order had inherited anti-communist sentiment.

## RISE OF THE NATIVE LABOR MOVEMENT

The establishment of the Indonesian labor movement must be examined in order to gain a historical understanding of its inherited values and how progressive groups, as an inseparable element, radicalized the labor movement. In the Indonesian context, highlighting the role of the left and the working class is necessarily important, as the story of their role has been erased to enforce anti-communist politics since 1965.

After the 1870 Agrarian Law was passed in the Dutch East Indies, economic liberalization and capital expansion created the social conditions that gave rise to the Indonesian working class. The Dutch colonial government ended its monopoly on the plantation, abolished forced labor, and replaced it with a wage system, forcing peasants to become laborers.<sup>23</sup> Foreign capital

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<sup>19</sup> Bilveer Singh, "The Indonesian Military Business Complex: Origins, Course and Future", Working Paper No. 354, Strategic and Defense Studies Centre, The Australian National University, 2001, p. 15; Bondan Kanumoyoso, *Nasionalisasi Perusahaan Belanda Di Indonesia*, Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 2001, p. 57; M.C. Ricklefs, *Sejarah Indonesia Modern 1200-2004*, Jakarta: PT. Serambi Ilmu Semesta, 2007, p. 516.

<sup>20</sup> John Roosa, "Identitas Bangsa Indonesia Berubah Total Sesudah 1965", interview by M. Zaki Hussein, *Indoprogess*, 17 September 2012, <https://indoprogess.com/2012/09/wawancara-2/> (last accessed 15 March 2023).

<sup>21</sup> Wargadiredja, Arzia Tivany, "Tragedi G30S Menghapus Satu Generasi Intelektual Indonesia", *Vice*, 30 September 2017, <https://www.vice.com/id/article/pakmpn/gestapu-menghapus-satu-generasi-intelektual-indonesia> (last accessed 17 March 2023).

<sup>22</sup> Made Supriatma, "Kegarangan Bisa Disetel", *Tirto.id*, 16 January 2017, <https://tirto.id/kegarangan-bisa-disetel-cg3b> (last accessed 15 March 2023).

<sup>23</sup> Edi Cahyono, *Pekalongan 1830-1870: Transformasi Petani Menjadi Buruh Industri Perkebunan*, Jakarta: Labour Working Group, 2001, p. 6.

flowed into the East Indies and was invested in the mining, plantation, and manufacturing sectors. Takashi Shiraishi refers to this as the “age of capital”.<sup>24</sup>

With capital expansion came proletarianization, which expanded education for natives in order to fill clerical and petty official positions on the labor market. Education was part of the “Ethical Policy” that the Dutch government introduced in 1901 with the stated purpose of raising native living standards.<sup>25</sup> The Dutch colonial government opened more schools for native people. Education, like a double-edged sword, produced educated native youths who gained nationalist and anti-colonial consciousness, and began to spread ideas in native newspapers that were critical of colonial oppression and supported the establishment of native organizations.<sup>26</sup>

Opposition to colonialism grew out of conditions in which peasant lands were expropriated for conversion into plantations; roads and irrigation were built at the expense of higher taxes, including through forced labor; and, as people became more and more dependent on plantations, they increasingly concentrated around them. Many sought representation in movement organizations because traditional authorities often defended the interests of the colonial government and used their power to help themselves.<sup>27</sup> People preferred organizations that were able to answer problems resulting from colonial oppression.

Sarekat Islam (Islamic Union, SI), which began as a merchant’s union in 1911 and grew in popularity after becoming a mass organization a year later, captured the grievances of peasants and laborers and turned them into a political movement. Trade unions also grew as a direct consequence of ongoing proletarianization. The Vereniging van Spoor- en Tramwegpersoneel (Association of Railway and Tramway Personnel, VSTP), a railworkers’ trade union founded in 1908 that welcomed both Dutch and native workers as members, was the most important one. Henk Sneevliet, a Dutch communist, joined the VSTP in 1914 and had a significant role in radicalizing it. That same year, he also founded the Indische Sociaal-Democratische Vereeniging (Indies Social Democratic Association, ISDV) in order to spread socialist ideas.<sup>28</sup> By the time he was exiled in 1918, he had already influenced the native youths who played prominent roles in Sarekat Islam and would subsequently establish the Partai Komunis Indonesia (Indonesian Communist Party, PKI) in 1920.<sup>29</sup>

Semaun was a member of the ISDV and became the chairman of Sarekat Islam’s Semarang branch in 1917.<sup>30</sup> While in that position, he was an active leader among striking workers and co-founded the PKI. In his report, Semaun estimated workers’ participation in strikes between 1917 and 1921<sup>31</sup> as follows:

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<sup>24</sup> Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Semaun, “An Early Account of the Independence Movement”, *Marxist.org*, 1922, p. 51, <https://www.marxists.org/history/indonesia/Semaun1922TheIndonesianMovementintheNetherlands.pdf> (last accessed 16 March 2023).

<sup>26</sup> Shiraishi, *An Age*, 1990, p. 32.

<sup>27</sup> Ruth McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism*, Jakarta: Equinox Publishing, 2006, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> McVey, *The Rise*, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> John Ingleson, *In Search of Justice: Workers and Unions in Colonial Java, 1908-1926*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 52; Soe Hoek Gie, *Di Bawah Lentera Merah*, Yogyakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 1999, pp. 15-16.

<sup>30</sup> Gie, *Di Bawah*, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> Semaun, “An Early”, p. 73.



Organization	Number of striking workers				
	1917	1918	1919	1929	1921
Vakgroep SI	300	-	-	-	-
HAB	-	3,000	4,000	3,000	3,000
Typografenbond	-	500	1,000	5,000	-
VSTP	-	500	1,000	5,000	-
PFB	-	-	30,000	50,000	1,000
Others	-	3,000	30,000	50,000	50

Sarekat Islam Surabaya founded the Perserikatan Pegawai Pegadaian Boemiputra (Natives Pawnshop Employees Association, PPPB) and Sarekat Postel (Postal Trade Union), while the Personeel Fabrieks Bond (Factory Workers Trade Union, PFB) was organized by Sarekat Islam of Yogyakarta.<sup>32</sup> In 1919, under the umbrella of Sarekat Islam, Semaun and his fellow progressives Alimin and Suryopranoto established a labor federation that would later be known as the Persatuan Pergerakan Kaum Buruh (Union of the Workers' Movement, PPKB). Within a matter of months, local leaders of the railworkers' union, the pawnshop workers' union, and the sugar factory workers' union established PPKB branches throughout Java.<sup>33</sup>

Despite internal divisions — for example, Sarekat Islam split in 1917 and the PPKB split in 1920 — World War I and the economic downturn of 1921 led to an increase in the number of progressive organizations and strikes.<sup>34</sup> In this case, these divisions could be interpreted as a crystallization leading to more radicalization in response to the economic crisis. The inflation rate rose, but workers' wages remained stagnant and businesses began implementing cost-cutting measures. In the years 1920–1925, Sarekat Islam Semarang organized strikes in response to the crisis.<sup>35</sup>

The colonial government responded to this awakening of national consciousness by increasing its surveillance of native people. The Kantoor Inlichtingen (Office of Intelligence) was formed in 1914 under the auspices of the KNIL to obtain information about the activities of Japanese agents in the Dutch East Indies. A separate intelligence service, the Politieke Inlichtingen Dienst (Political Intelligence Service, PID), was established in 1916 to monitor internal threats to colonial power, particularly from radical organizations.<sup>36</sup> The PID recruited local people in factories, workplaces, villages, religious organizations, and political parties to serve as informants. In 1920, the PID was estimated to employ around 300 informants in Surabaya alone.<sup>37</sup>

For the Dutch colonial government, demands for wage increases were comparatively easy to address. What it wanted to avoid most of all was an escalation of the labor movement into a political movement that might question colonial power.<sup>38</sup> The labor movement was strictly controlled by the Dutch East Indies government, which increased penalties for persdelict (press offences) and exiled radical activists in the hope of cutting ties between labor and radical

<sup>32</sup> Shiraishi, *An Age*, pp. 109-110.

<sup>33</sup> Ingleson, *In Search*, p. 127.

<sup>34</sup> Soegiri DS and Edi Cahyono, *Gerakan Serikat Buruh*, Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 2003, p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Sazalil Kirom, "Buruh dan Kekuasaan: Dinamika Perkembangan Gerakan Serikat Pekerja di Indonesia (Masa Kolonial-Orde Lama)", *Avatara*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2013, p. 12.

<sup>36</sup> Allan Akbar, *Memata-Matai Kaum Pergerakan*, Jakarta: Marjin Kiri, p. 26.

<sup>37</sup> John Ingleson, *Workers, Unions and Politics: Indonesia in the 1920s and 1930s*, Leiden: Brill, 2014, p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> Ingleson, *Workers*, p. 45.

intellectuals in order to extinguish the nationalist struggle and national liberation movement. By doing so, the colonial government was able to maintain its power in the colony.

The PKI's insurrection ended in failure in late 1926 and early 1927. The party was banned, and thousands of its members were imprisoned or exiled to Boven Digul, West Irian. The majority of the PKI's trade unions were outlawed, and their members were arrested, exiled, and imprisoned. The Partai Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Party, PNI) filled the political vacuum in 1927 until it was banned in 1930.<sup>40</sup> In the years that followed, the trade unions were rebuilt, especially after the end of the economic depression in 1936. The colonial government, which had included native representation in the colonial parliament, the Volksraad, since 1918 restricted political avenues exclusively to this parliament and increase the number of native parliament members. Labor unions were allowed within limited confines for economic demands and against discrimination in wages and poor working conditions.<sup>41</sup> Those who fought for independence beyond the lines set by the colonial government campaigned for a perspective of non-cooperation in politics.

Indonesia's native struggle against Dutch colonialism ended with Japan's initial victory over the Allies and the signing of the Kalijati Agreement. Under Japanese colonization (1942–1945), native organizations were disbanded and replaced with paramilitary-pro-government organizations. These were intended to help maintain influence of Empire of Japan in its colony and to serve as a reserve army force in the war against the Allies in World War II. The promise of independence led many Indonesian nationalist leaders to collaborate with the Japanese occupation. As a result, the independence movement became divided. One faction consisted Japanese collaborators who were part of organizations formed by Japanese administration and believed in Japan's promises, while the other faction comprised anti-Japanese fascist movements that moved underground.<sup>42</sup>

Romusha (forced labor) was imposed on the Indonesian people, sometimes as punishment for those who resisted. During this occupation, workers in the labor movement avoided working as romusha and helped one another acquire food.<sup>43</sup> It was clearly a confusing situation, given that the Japanese occupation seemed to be offering independence and strengthening Indonesian national identity, while the cruelty of the Japanese military police, the Kempeitai, which also served as a secret police force, was unbearable on a daily basis.

In their conflict with the working class and national liberation movements, the Japanese and Dutch colonial military and police forces left a legacy of focusing on internal rather than external threats. The tendency of the New Order military regime to strengthen the army and use its intelligence apparatus to monitor popular movements was clearly in evidence later, without inheriting any of the spirit of decolonization to become an independent nation. The regime invited foreign investment on a massive scale, which shows that, while political power may change, the interests of capital will continue to be served as in the colonial period.

## AFTER INDEPENDENCE

After the Proclamation of Independence on August 17, 1945, the newly opened democratic space enabled the growth of free labor unions. Laskar Buruh Indonesia (Indonesian Workers

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<sup>39</sup> Gie, *Di Bawah*, p. 22.

<sup>40</sup> Ingleson, *Workers*, p. 41.

<sup>41</sup> Ingleson, *Workers*, pp. 265-269.

<sup>42</sup> Ricklefs, *Sejarah Indonesia*, p. 412.

<sup>43</sup> Ratna Saptari, "Bangsa dan Politik Perburuhan Dalam Proses Dekolonisasi", in *Dekolonisasi Buruh Kota Dan Pembentukan Bangsa*, ed. Ratna Saptari, Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia and KITLV, 2013, p. 28.

Soldiers, LBI) was formed in December 1945 to arm workers against the Dutch military offensive.<sup>44</sup> Tanjung Priok dockworkers demanded the nationalization of Dutch companies to improve their working conditions in the new republic. Workers also faced internal strife due to differences in ethnicity, working status, and feelings of inferiority because they were not able to replace Dutch technicians.<sup>45</sup> During this phase, workers defended independence while building self-confidence as workers in a newly independent nation.

Barisan Buruh Indonesia (Indonesian Workers' Ranks, BBI) was established on September 15, 1945; it later transformed into the Gabungan Serikat Buruh Indonesia (Indonesian Trade Union Association, GASBI).<sup>46</sup> On November 29, 1946, GASBI merged with the Gabungan Serikat Buruh Vertikal (Vertical Trade Union Association, GSBV) to form the Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia (Central All-Indonesian Workers Organization, SOBSI).<sup>47</sup> After the Madiun Affair broke out, many SOBSI leaders who were PKI members were arrested, imprisoned, and killed. SOBSI went through challenging times when 19 of its 34 member unions left the organization.<sup>48</sup> However, it was not banned by the government, and it continued to grow and become the most significant labor union with around 2,661,970 members in 1956, or 60 percent of all unionized workers nationwide, with 39 affiliated labor unions that came from the forestry, shipping, air force, postal, cigarette, and public sectors, according to the Labor Ministry.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to SOBSI, which was closely connected to the PKI, other trade unions were also formed with their own political alignments, including Serikat Buruh Islam Indonesia (Indonesian Islamic Workers' Union, SBII), which was influenced by Masyumi, the Islamic party, and Kesatuan Buruh Kerakyatan Indonesia (Indonesian People's Labor Union, KBKI), which was linked to the Partai Nasionalis Indonesia (Indonesian Nationalist Party, PNI). Nevertheless, it is undeniable that SOBSI played an important role in nationalizing foreign companies in 1958,<sup>50</sup> which, ultimately, were not managed by the workers themselves but rather handed over to the military.

By 1962, the number of SOBSI members was estimated to be nearly 3.3 million. Other leftist organizations also had large numbers of supporters, including the Barisan Tani Indonesia (Peasants Front of Indonesia, BTI: 5.7 million), Gerakan Wanita Indonesia (Indonesian Women's Movement, GERWANI: 1.5 million),<sup>51</sup> Pemuda Rakyat (People's Youth: 1.5 million), and the PKI (2 million). With this large member base, the Communist Party seemed likely to make significant gains if elections had been held. But, as Max Lane explains, the positive aspects of parliamentary democracy were gradually stripped away as there were no more elections under the "Guided Democracy" system (1959-66), which increasingly consolidated power in the hands of President Sukarno, rather than the popular vote.<sup>52</sup>

The power struggle at the elite level reached its peak in 1965 with a victory for the army and the tragic massacre of over a million people. SOBSI was disbanded and prohibited, and many members were unaware of SOBSI's recent affiliation with the PKI, and some joined merely by paying membership fees without active political involvement, let alone knowing or being

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<sup>44</sup> DS and Cahyono, *Gerakan Serikat*, p. 27.

<sup>45</sup> Saptari, "Bangsa dan", p. 32.

<sup>46</sup> Kirom, "Buruh dan", p. 13.

<sup>47</sup> DS and Cahyono, *Gerakan Serikat*, p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> Saptari, "Bangsa dan", p. 34.

<sup>49</sup> Alih Aji Nugroho, "Serikat Buruh dalam Pusaran Neoliberalisme", *Kebijakan Publik Dalam Pusaran Perubahan Ideologi: Dari Kuasa Negara Ke Dominasi Pasar*, edited by Wahyudi Kumorotomo and Yuyun Purbokusumo, Yogyakarta: Gajah Mada University Press, 2020, p. 319.

<sup>50</sup> Kirom, "Buruh dan", p. 13.

<sup>51</sup> Ricklefs, *Sejarah Indonesia*, p. 534.

<sup>52</sup> Lane, Max, "Sukarno Yang (Di)Kalah(Kan) Total." *Historia*, 1 July 2011, <https://historia.id/politik/articles/sukarno-yang-di-kalah-kan-total-DpzoP/page/1> (last accessed 16 March 2023).

involved in the murder of the main military generals. This sudden mass slaughter occurred without trial, and most victims were unaware of its cause, primarily because not everyone had access to radio or television for information.<sup>53</sup> Amidst the confusion among ordinary people about the events unfolding, the massacre was swiftly and efficiently executed without significant resistance. This involved paramilitary forces and members of rival organizations to the PKI, as depicted in Joshua Oppenheimer's documentary film, 'The Act of Killing'.

## UNDER DICTATORSHIP

Suharto's dictatorship (1968–1998) was based on fabricated narratives of communist evil and widespread anti-communist propaganda on a massive scale for more than three decades. This perspective was constantly drilled into people's heads through books, museums, movies, national ceremonies, and memorials. As far as the New Order was concerned, the PKI was portrayed as the the mastermind behind the G30S, a narrative that John Roosa describes as a 'supreme fact'. Anti-communism became the state religion, as though nothing were more dangerous than communism, despite the physical obliteration of the party in 1965.<sup>54</sup> Workers were strictly monitored because it was among them that communist ideology could take root and gain influence.

Suharto declared that class struggle was inappropriate for Indonesian workers, and commemorations of May 1 were banned and replaced with February 20 as Labor Day. The term *karyawan* (creator) replaced *buruh* (labor) in official jargon.<sup>55</sup> In English, *karyawan* is more accurately translated as "creator" or "artist" than "employee". The New Order regime was adept at using euphemisms as one of its strategies for maintaining power. Given that anti-communism was the state religion, anyone who was considered a threat to the Suharto regime was accused of being a communist.

ABRI's dual function strengthened the army's role as both a military force and a significant entity in Indonesian politics and business. The bureaucracy was controlled by the *Golongan Karya* (Functional Groups, also known as *Golkar*), which civil servants were required to join, while the political parties were consolidated into two parties, the *Partai Persatuan Pembangunan* (United Development Party, PPP) for Muslims, the *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia* (Indonesian Democratic Party, PDI) for secular-nationalist, and *Golkar* (a mass organization that was allowed to participate in elections), and civil society organizations were consolidated into functional single organizations based on *Pancasila*,<sup>56 57</sup> for example the *Himpunan Kerukunan Tani Indonesia* (Indonesian Farmers Harmony Association, HKTI), *Komite Nasional Pemuda Indonesia* (Indonesian National Youth Committee, KNPI), *Dharma Wanita* for wives of civil servants, and the *Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia* (All Indonesian Trade Union, SPSI) for workers.

Similar to the Japanese colonial approach of establishing functional Indonesian organizations to serve their political interests.

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<sup>53</sup> Saptari, "Bangsa dan", pp. 41-42.

<sup>54</sup> Roosa, *Dalih Pembunuhan*, p. 9.

<sup>55</sup> Matanasi, Petrik, "Sejarah Orde Baru Melarang Peringatan Hari Buruh", *Tirto.id*, 1 May 2020, <https://tirto.id/sejarah-orde-baru-melarang-peringatan-hari-buruh-ePji> (last accessed 17 March 2023).

<sup>56</sup> Antonio Camnahas, "Orde Baru: Rezim Pengendali Kaum Buruh", in *Bosan Menjadi Orang Indonesia (Keluhan Kritis Transformatif)* seri 43/1/1999, p. 70-71, [http://repository.stfkledalero.ac.id/584/1/Orde%20Baru\\_Rezim%20Pengendali%20Kaum%20Buruh.pdf](http://repository.stfkledalero.ac.id/584/1/Orde%20Baru_Rezim%20Pengendali%20Kaum%20Buruh.pdf) (last accessed 17 March 2023).

<sup>57</sup> *Pancasila* (Five Principles), the Indonesian state philosophy, comprises belief in the one and only God; just and civilized humanity; the unity of Indonesia; democracy guided by the inner wisdom resulting from deliberations among representatives; and social justice for all the people of Indonesia. The New Order version of *Pancasila*, which emphasized one god and the unity of Indonesia, prohibited communism and opposition.

The only officially recognized trade union between 1985 and the end of the Suharto regime in 1998 was the Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia (All Indonesian Trade Union, SPSI), and its leadership also consisted of active soldiers. Strikes were strictly limited by a requirement that the Panitia Penyelesaian Perselisihan Perburuhan (Committee for the Settlement of Labor Disputes, P4-D) be notified no later than seven days before the start of a strike. Company management was permitted to coordinate with the local government, Polisi Resor (Regional Police Station, or Polres), and Komando Distrik Militer (Military District Command, KODIM), which meant that the army could intervene in strikes.<sup>58</sup>

Nonetheless, workers continued to resist injustice and fight for better working conditions, despite the massive repression. According to the Ministry of Manpower, there were 276 demonstrations, taking up the equivalent to 1,300,001 working hours, in 1995. The following year, these figures increased to 350 cases, equivalent to 2,796,488 hours, with the dominant issue being the problem of low wages.<sup>59</sup> Labor resistance can be viewed as inherent part of the nature of the working class, and it begins with economic demands and struggles.

Simultaneously, the intellectuals who helped establish the independent trade unions also started non-governmental organizations. The Serikat Buruh Merdeka Setia Kawan (Free and Comradely Loyalty Trade Union, SBMK) and Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia (Indonesian Prosperity Trade Union, SBSI) were formed in the early 1990s. The SBSI, which was backed by Suharto's opposition politicians, managed to organize a national meeting in April 1992. SBSI chairman Muchtar Pakpahan was arrested for organizing labor demonstrations and accused of being a communist.<sup>60</sup>

In 1994, a group of progressive students called Solidaritas Mahasiswa Indonesia untuk Demokrasi (Indonesian Students Solidarity for Democracy, SMID) formed the Persatuan Perjuangan Buruh Indonesia (Indonesian Workers' Struggle Center, PPBI) and published the Bendera Buruh (Workers Banner) newspaper, which was the same name as the publication of the Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia (Central All-Indonesian Workers Organization, SOBSI).<sup>61</sup> After establishing contact with workers in early 1991, the PPBI organized the Great River garment factory workers strike on July 18, 1994. It involved 10,000 workers, making it the largest labor action since 1965. The other student and labor alliance protests organized by the PPBI were the Sritex textile factory workers' demonstration in Solo, which involved 14,000 workers on December 11, 1995; the demonstration by 5,000 workers at PT Indo Shoes, PT Ganda Guna, and PT Kingstone June 18–19, 1996; and a strike in ten factories in the Tandes industrial zone, Surabaya, which was estimated to have involved 10–20,000 workers.<sup>62</sup> The latter was the first strike during the New Order era to shut down an industrial area.

SMID and PPBI activists co-founded the Partai Rakyat Demokratik (People's Democratic Party, PRD) on July 22, 1996 as a transformation from of the Persatuan Rakyat Demokratik (People's Democratic Union), which had been founded in 1994. Just five days later, the New Order regime singled out the PRD, accusing it of orchestrating the attack on the Partai Demokrasi Indonesia (Indonesian Democratic Party, PDI) head office on Jalan Diponegoro, which subsequently led to two days of riots in Jakarta. Again, in keeping with the New Order mantra, PRD activists were also accused of being communists and banned. PRD activists were arrested, kidnapped, tortured, and killed. Four of them never returned, including prominent worker and poet Widji Thukul, and one was found dead in a forest in East Java. The PRD went underground and engaged in illegal political activity until Suharto fell in May 1998.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 69.

<sup>60</sup> DS and Cahyono, *Gerakan Serikat*, p. 44-46.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 47.

<sup>62</sup> Max Lane, *Unfinished Nation: Ingatan Revolusi, Aksi Massa Dan Sejarah Indonesia*, Yogyakarta: Djaman Baroe, 2021, p. 230, 224, 210-211.

The founder of the PRD, Danial Indrakusuma, explained:

The PRD adopted a new strategy by concentrating its members in Jakarta and scattering them in subdistricts of Jakarta to organize the urban poor. The PRD shifted its focus to students and the urban poor in Jakarta, believing that anti-militarist sentiment would agitate them and lead to the acceleration of Suharto's fall.<sup>63</sup>

This strategy sparked an inevitable debate within the party, which was oriented toward Marxism-Leninism. The shift from workers to the urban poor was based on the idea that, at the time, the urban poor were the "flammable weeds". It was a strategy that responded to the needs of the objective situation.

## AFTER REFORMASI

In July 1997, the value of the rupiah plummeted and the Jakarta stock exchange collapsed. Indonesia experienced a banking crisis that quickly spread to company bankruptcies, the loss of middle-class savings, and layoffs in the millions.<sup>64</sup> With the worsening economic crisis and the shooting of Trisakti University students by Indonesian Army soldiers on May 12, 1998,<sup>65</sup> demands for reform became increasingly unstoppable. Students who occupied the DPR/MPR Building (the Indonesian parliament) that May demanded that Suharto be tried, the dual function of ABRI abolished, and corruption, collusion, and nepotism eradicated. Suharto announced his resignation on May 21, 1998, and the reform process (Reformasi) began.

Few workers were involved in the Reformasi movement, if any, and it is possible that only trade union leaders were present. Thousands of workers mobilized later during the economic actions demanding the reinstatement the Ministry of Manpower Decree No. 15/2000 regarding termination of employment and the restitution of severance pay in multiple cities in May and June 2001.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, the poor quality of democracy in Indonesia can be attributed to the labor movement's ineffectiveness within the democracy movement as a result of the gap between labor activists and pro-democracy groups, as well as the failure of progressive trade union leaders to transform the old labor unions.<sup>67</sup> During the New Order era, and the influence of Pancasila industrial relations and repression on workers significantly hindered the transformation of workers organizing from economic issues to the organization on democracy-related issues. The PRD indirectly acknowledged the limited potential for workers to advocate for democracy during this period by strategically shifting focus from organizing industrial workers to mobilizing the urban poor in Jakarta, the capital, to hasten Suharto's overthrow. This shift was based on an assessment highlighting the strong anti-military and New Order sentiment among the urban poor and their strategic residence in the center of power.. A commitment to patient deep organizing and time seem to be the keys to the labor movement's recovery, however, that took years.

The path to recovery began with the enactment of Presidential Decree No. 83/1998 in June 1998, ratifying ILO Convention No. 87 concerning freedom of association and the protection

<sup>63</sup> Danial Indrakusuma, interview via WhatsApp call, 11 February 2023.

<sup>64</sup> Ricklefs, *Sejarah Indonesia*, p. 650.

<sup>65</sup> Mydans, Seth, "The Fall of Suharto: The Overview; Suharto, Besieged, Steps Down After 32-Year Rule in Indonesia", *The New York Times*, 21 May 1998, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/21/world/fall-suharto-overview-suharto-besieged-steps-down-after-32-year-rule-indonesia.html> (last accessed 17 March 2023).

<sup>66</sup> Muhtar Habibi, "Gerakan Buruh Pasca Soeharto: Politik Jalanan di Tengah Himpitan Pasar Kerja Fleksibel", *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik*, vol. 16, no. 3, p. 205.

<sup>67</sup> Olle Törnquist, "Workers in Politics", *Centre Tricontinental*, 25 February 2008, <https://www.cetri.be/Workers-in-politics?lang=fr> (last accessed 17 March 2023).

of the right to organize. This decree granted trade unions greater space for establishment and independent growth. Moreover, and assistance from trade unions and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) influenced the expansion of unionism in Indonesia. Subsequently, the SPSI underwent a split, resulting in the establishment of the Konfederasi Serikat Pekerja Indonesia (Confederation of Indonesian Trade Unions, KSPI), among other things. The old SPSI still exists, while its fragmented organizations consolidate and strive to grow.

KSPI-affiliated trade unions are generally weak in organizational development, with the one exception being Federasi Pekerja Metal Indonesia (Federation of Indonesian Metal Worker Unions, FSPMI). The FSPMI developed differently. After a series of restructurings, it centralized its economic base, allowing it to secure membership fees as a source of independent financing and build its own office and facilities. The FSPMI seemed to become so stable that it was able to grow at a faster pace than other trade unions, leading the labor movement in 2012 and the founding of the labor party today.

In general, the SPSI fractional trade unions retained the SPSI's exclusivity, are not good at mobilizing workers despite having formal large member rolls, and are less sensitive to unjust structural state policies.<sup>68</sup> Their large number of members stems from their less critical attitude, and they serve no supervisory function within the companies, so employers are more likely to allow them to unionize, as Damiri, chairman of Federasi Serikat Buruh Demokratik Kerakyatan (Federation of Popular Democratic Labour Union, FSEDAR) explained:

The yellow trade unions are allowed to exist because they agree to collaborate with employers and put pressure on their own members. FSEDAR, as a red trade union, was considered too critical, and that is why we initially always established a trade union at work clandestinely.<sup>69</sup>

Reformasi does not automatically transform the awareness and actions of the SPSI and the trade unions that inherited the SPSI's characteristics. Transforming them into social democratic trade unions also takes years, and this is the most logical path for the majority of trade unions, due to the existing material and ideological conditions: the demonization of communism made it more difficult for the working class to embrace socialist consciousness.<sup>70</sup>

Despite having much smaller memberships compared to the SPSI and its splinter unions, left-wing trade unions were the driving force behind the most of demonstrations and strikes that did happen between 1998 and 2012. The PPBI changed its name to the Front Nasional Perjuangan Buruh Indonesia (National Front for Workers Struggle Indonesia, FNPBI) in 1999. Initially, the government refused to acknowledge and register the FPBI because it declined to declare Pancasila as the organizational principle. The FPBI was only recognized in September 2000. The FNPBI was indeed very political, emphasizing mass mobilization and involving itself in broader issues than organizing problems in factories.<sup>71</sup> A long-term organizing strategy that is applied beyond the factory base will indeed have an impact on decreasing labor power, but it must also be noted that the tendency to move beyond the factory base may have been a result of the greater repression that progressive trade unions faced. Danial Indrakusuma explains:

<sup>68</sup> Launa, "Buruh Dan Politik", *Jurnal Sosial Demokrasi*, vol. 10, no. 4, p. 12.

<sup>69</sup> Damiri, interview via WhatsApp Call, 10 February 2023.

<sup>70</sup> Danial Indrakusuma, "Danial Indrakusuma: Saat Ini, Muncul Konsep, Kesadaran dan Tindakan "Tutup Kawasan", "Tutup Tol", dan "Solidaritas Antarpabrik". Sebuah Kemajuan!", interview by *Majalah Sedane*, 27 September 2012, <https://majalahsedane.org/danial-indrakusuma-saat-ini-muncul-konsep-kesadaran-dan-tindakan-tutup-kawasan-tutup-tol-dan-solidaritas-antarpabrik-sebuah-kemajuan/> (last accessed 15 March 2023).

<sup>71</sup> Ford, *Workers*, p. 168.

It should not be forgotten that leftist trade unions face great obstacles to developing in Indonesia because they face even greater repression and oppression from the state and the stigmatization of communism. Employers also tend to refuse to recognize them with various tactics. The bureaucracy and employers still operate based on the old New Order industrial relations, which emphasized the harmonization of Pancasila.<sup>72</sup>

Since 1999, there have been a number of splits in organizations that the PRD influenced, and many PRD cadres have left the party. In 2019, the PRD itself changed its principles from populist social democracy to Pancasila to avoid the communist stigma.<sup>73</sup> Former PRD members built or joined other initiatives, including NGOs, trade unions, and political parties. The emergence of the Konfederasi Kongres Aliansi Serikat Buruh Indonesia (Congress Alliance of Indonesian Trade Unions Confederation, KASBI) can be included in this line. At its peak, KASBI claimed to have around 130,000 members.<sup>74</sup>

In 2006, the Aliansi Buruh Menggugat (Labor Alliance Demand, ABM) succeeded in bringing together 49 labor unions from 16 provinces, which could mobilize 30–50,000 workers in Jakarta alone, and formulating broader demands, including nationalization and debt cancellation.<sup>75</sup> The government's plan to revise the Manpower Law (labor law) was met with opposition from trade unions in general. The Konfederasi Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia (Confederation of All Indonesian Trade Unions, KSPSI) and the Konfederasi Serikat Pekerja Sejahtera Indonesia (Confederation of Indonesian Prosperity Trade Unions, KSBSI) celebrated May Day 2006 with a large protest to reject the revision of the Manpower Law, while their leadership emphasized that May 1 was not Communist Day.<sup>76</sup>

On May 3, 2006, around 100,000 workers (mainly KSPSI members) protested the labor law revision at the DPR/MPR Building (parliament) and tore down the DPR's fence.<sup>77</sup> In his statement apologizing for the incident, KSPSI chairman Syukur Sarto explained that this action was the first celebration of May Day by to take to the streets, given that the KSPSI usually celebrates May Day indoors.<sup>78</sup> Mobilization in the street was one of the differences between leftist trade unions and the SPSI splinter trade unions in the early years of Reformasi. Danial Indrakusuma says:

Before 2010, in many cases, left-leaning trade unions took to the streets to celebrate May Day and made their demands known to the public. Meanwhile, the other trade unions that represented old ideas refused to celebrate May Day by taking to the streets, but limited themselves to indoor May Day fiestas. This distinction disappeared after the rise of the labor movement in 2012.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Danial Indrakusuma, interview via WhatsApp call, 11 February 2023.

<sup>73</sup> CNN Indonesia, "23 Tahun PRD Dan Stigma Neo-PKI Yang Tak Kunjung Henti", CNN Indonesia, 22 July 2019, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20190722111142-32-414305/23-tahun-prd-dan-stigma-neo-pki-yang-tak-kunjung-henti> (last accessed 17 March 2023).

<sup>74</sup> Max Lane, *An Introduction to the Politics of the Indonesian Union Movement*, Singapore: Iseas - Yusof Ishak Institute, 2018, p. 122.

<sup>75</sup> Detiknews, "31.000 Buruh Siap Demo 1 Mei", Detiknews, 23 April 2006, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-580478/31000-buruh-siap-demo-1-mei> (last accessed 17 March 2023).

<sup>76</sup> Arifin, Syarif, "Massa Buruh Robohkan Gerbang Gedung DPR", *Majalah Sedane*, 29 April 2016, <https://majalahsedane.org/may-day-hari-libur-dan-jam-kerja-peringatan-dan-perayaan-1-mei-di-indonesia-dari-1918-hingga-2015/> (last accessed 16 March 2023).

<sup>77</sup> Antara News, "Massa Buruh Robohkan Gerbang Gedung DPR", Antara News, 3 May 2006, <https://www.antaranews.com/berita/32949/massa-buruh-robokkan-gerbang-gedung-dpr>, (last accessed 19 March 2023).

<sup>78</sup> Liputan6, "Ketua KSPSI Menyesalkan Demonstrasi Anarkis", Liputan6.com, 3 May 2006, <https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/122202/ketua-kspsi-menyelaskan-demonstrasi-anarkis> (last accessed 19 March 2023).

<sup>79</sup> Danial Indrakusuma, interview via WhatsApp call, 11 February 2023.



The communist stigma attached to May Day celebrations had left its mark, as demonstrated by self-proclamations that they were not communist in order to avoid that stigma. Formal recognition of May 1 as a national holiday by Presidential Decree No. 24 in 2013 can be understood as its end. The decree, which was a major indicator of the progress the Indonesian labor movement had made, came about thanks to the labor movement that arose in 2012.

Since 2010, trade unions in general have more visibly embraced mass actions as a form of resistance than they had previously. This culminated in a nationwide strike on October 3, 2012. The major labor mobilizations that paved the way for the rise of the labor movement in 2012 were as follows:

Time	Activity	Mobilization	Demand
May 2006	Demonstration at the national parliament building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30,000 ABM workers</li> <li>• 100,000 KSPSI workers</li> </ul>	Cancel the revision of the Labor/Manpower Law
November 25, 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strike in the Kawasan Berikat Nusantara (Nusantara Bonded Zone, KBN) Cakung, North Jakarta</li> <li>• The first strike in the reform era to paralyze the industrial area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First strike initiated by the Forum Buruh DKI Jakarta (Labor Forum of Jakarta), second strike by Forum Buruh Lintas Pabrik (Cross Factory Labor Forum, FBLP)</li> <li>• 80 thousand workers, mostly women who work in textile factories.</li> </ul>	Increase in the minimum wage from around IDR 1.1 million to IDR 1.4 million
October 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• -Demonstration at the national parliament building into the night</li> <li>• Breaking down the main gate of the DPR Building, workers entering the courtyard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thousands of workers who are members of the Komite Aksi Jaminan Sosial, (Social Security Action Committee, KAJS)</li> <li>• Most of the mobilization came from FSPMI</li> </ul>	Pass the BPJS bill
January 27, 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labor strikes in seven industrial areas</li> <li>• Paralyzed industrial areas</li> <li>• Closing toll roads and causing an extensive traffic jam</li> </ul>	Estimated at more than 1 million workers	Reject the employer association's lawsuit canceling the Rp400,000 wage increase. Workers' demands were met.

Time	Activity	Mobilization	Demand
March 27, 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workers joined students in protesting increased fuel prices</li> <li>Ended in chaos, but protesters' demands were met</li> </ul>	More than ten thousand participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reject increase in fuel prices</li> <li>Workers' demand met</li> </ul>

The 80 thousand KBN Cakung workers' strike was the first large-scale strike to paralyze an industrial zone. It occurred in November 2010, and was led in part by the Forum Buruh Lintas Pabrik (Cross-Factory Labour Forum, FBLP).<sup>80</sup> The majority of factories in this area are garment and textile factories that employ women. Women workers had experience striking on a large scale, which they repeated on January 9, 2012 with the same demand: an increase in wages.<sup>81</sup> It was widely known that prominent FBLP leaders and organizers were members of the left-wing party Partai Pembebasan Rakyat (People's Liberation Party, PPR).<sup>82</sup>

After workers who joined the KAJIS succeeded in pushing for passage of the Badan Penyelenggara Jaminan Sosial (Social Security Administering Body Law, BPJS) in 2011, the labor movement advanced demands for wage increases and the abolition of outsourcing the following year. Unlike the BPJS, which was a divisive issue among labor unions, wage increases and the elimination of outsourcing seemed to be the glue that held the labor movement together for a massive mobilization from January to October 2012.

After Law No. 13/2003 on Manpower was passed, the work force quickly became flexibilized through the use of contract workers and outsourcing. The short duration and flexible status of work resulted in reduced bargaining power and wages for workers, which in turn led to the subsequent choice of street politics.<sup>83</sup> Since it was founded in 2010, the FSPMI's rank and file in Bekasi have also learned new ideas and strategies from the political economy course taught by Danial Indrakusuma, the founder of PRD, who has been active in the movement since 1974. His work within the union can be described as a continuation of his previous organizing work<sup>84</sup> based on the objective conditions of workers' dissatisfaction with low wages and outsourced working conditions, thereby bringing the two strata of the working class together and revealing their strength.

That strength came from the combined campaign to raise wages and stop outsourcing. It was able to bring together both permanent and temporary workers in a struggle, leading to large mobilizations. Danial Indrakusuma explains:

<sup>80</sup> Jumisih, "Mogok KBN".

<sup>81</sup> Yanuar, Ikhwan, "Buruh KBN Cilincing Mogok, Kerugian US\$2 Juta", Viva News, 9 January 2012, <https://www.viva.co.id/berita/metro/278609-buruh-kbn-cilincing-mogok-kerugian-us-2-juta> (last accessed 19 March 2023).

<sup>82</sup> The PPR is a party that broke off from the PRD when the PRD's electoral party, the Partai Persatuan Pembebasan Nasional (National Liberation Party of Unity, PAPERNAS), was believed to have collaborated with a bourgeois party to participate in the 2009 election. The PRD's political initiatives were often labeled "communist" and violently attacked by paramilitary groups, such as the Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defenders Front, FPI) attack on the Papernas congress on 19 January 2007. The FPI systematically organized attacks on Papernas activities in various regions in the name of fighting communism (Hearman, Vannesa, "Indonesia: Anti-Communism in the Age of Reformasi: The Case of Papernas", *Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal*, 20 May 2008, <https://links.org.au/indonesia-anti-communism-age-reformasi-case-papernas>, (last accessed 19 March 2023)).

<sup>83</sup> Habibi, "Gerakan Buruh", p. 205-207.

<sup>84</sup> Lane, *Unfinished Nation*, pp. 462-463.

The unity between permanent workers and temporary workers was emphasized by the metal trade union FSPMI as the backbone of the 2012 movement.<sup>85</sup>

Today, Danial Indrakusuma says that advocating the interests of contract laborers and outsourced workers should still be one of the main programs of trade unions. Damiri reflects on his experience as a worker who was drawn into the whirlwind of mass mobilization during that period, says:

My colleagues and I, as Kobelco workers, joined FSPMI because only FSPMI seemed to be active in defending contract labor and outsourcing and mobilized a large number of people in these actions.<sup>86</sup>

The effectiveness of the labor action in 2012 was also attributed to direct face-to-face actions between workers and companies in the industrial zones. Although these actions did not qualify as strikes in terms of halting production at the workplace, the movement of a substantial number of workers in industrial areas disrupted and, in some cases, halted specific production and supply chains, as exemplified by the situation at Samsung.<sup>87</sup> During this period, labor actions not only succeeded in increasing wages significantly, but also ended the unprecedented increase in fuel prices. Workers regained some of the mobilization experience that had long been forgotten during the New Order and some level of social-democratic consciousness.<sup>88</sup> Women workers showed courage and an ability to mobilize in significant numbers that had not existed since the start of the New Order era.

Mobilizations declined substantially in November 2012 due to an agreement among trade union leaders, employers, and the government to stop strikes and demonstrations in industrial zones.<sup>89</sup> Trade union leadership justified the withdrawal of the movement citing attacks by paramilitaries (preman), who organized into multiple groups working as private security.<sup>90</sup> The official authorities covertly supported this practice, effectively dispersing strikes and demonstrations while instilling fear among workers' families, as Damiri explains:

In the current labor struggle, many obstacles come from the military and police, who guard the company and act arrogantly towards the workers. They also allow thugs to carry out repression, and what is most worrying is when they terrorize working families.<sup>91</sup>

Although the masses of workers showed their will to fight back against thuggery when around 10,000 of them, armed with sticks, mobilized in Bekasi to defend the Rumah Buruh (Workers' House), their meeting center, on October 29th 2012<sup>92</sup> the FSPMI took serious measures to stop the radical elements by banning the political economy classes and expelling radical members.<sup>93</sup>

Trade union leaders appear to have tried to compensate for the decline in mobilization by introducing "go politics", meaning participation in elections, as a safer way to gain more power.

<sup>85</sup> Danial Indrakusuma, interview via WhatsApp call, 11 February 2023.

<sup>86</sup> Damiri, interview via WhatsApp call, 10 February 2023.

<sup>87</sup> Abu Mufakhir, "Workers' Struggle in the Electronics Industry in Indonesia: The Case of Samsung Electronics Indonesia", *Labour Rights in High Tech Electronics: Case Studies of Workers' Struggles in Samsung Electronics and Its Asian Suppliers*, edited by Asia Monitor Resource Centre, Hong Kong: Asia Monitor Resource Centre, 2013, p. 71.

<sup>88</sup> Lane, *Unfinished Nation*, p. 469.

<sup>89</sup> Rinn, Sherr, "Indonesian Unions Divided on next Steps", *Redflag*, 20 August 2012, <https://redflag.org.au/article/indonesian-unions-divided-next-steps>, (last accessed 19 March 2023).

<sup>90</sup> Choir, Miftachul, "Capital's Repressive Apparatus: Privatised Violence against Labour in Indonesia", *Asian Labour Review*, 27 February 2023, <https://labourreview.org/capitals-repressive-apparatus/> (last accessed 20 March 2023).

<sup>91</sup> Damiri, interview via WhatsApp call, 10 February 2023.

<sup>92</sup> Lane, *Unfinished Nation*, p. 446.

<sup>93</sup> Lane, *An Introduction*, p. 66.

The most controversial was the KPSI's support for the famous military leader of the New Order, Prabowo Subianto of the Gerindra Party, in the 2014 presidential election without considering the danger to democracy and Prabowo's involvement in kidnapping activists in 1998.

The party's support for Subianto resulted in a break with pro-democracy activists and organizations and ultimately did nothing to advance workers' rights, although some trade union leaders did manage to win seats in national and regional parliaments. For one example, KSPSI leader Andi Gani supported Joko Widodo's successful campaign for president commissioner of PT. Pembangunan Perumahan, a state-run housing development corporation.

Meanwhile, the government succeeded in forcing the passage of the Job Creation Law, which reduced working conditions by taking advantage of the weak popular resistance during the Covid-19 pandemic. After failing to confront anti-working class policies, 50 trade union federations withdrew their support for Gerindra and other political parties and established their own labor party to participate in the next election, with the KSPI itself as the new party's main driver.<sup>94</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The Indonesian military was influenced by the Japanese occupation, which planted some fascist values, but was weak in military professionalism. This can be regarded as a peculiarity of colonialism's legacy in Indonesia. The liberal democratic values of Dutch colonialism, as well as the left-wing effort to democratize the army and place it under civilian control were sidelined in the decolonization process. The labor movement inherited an anti-imperialist character that had the potential to aid Indonesia's development in the post-colonial period. Nonetheless, the decolonization process, which had anti-imperialist characteristics, was stopped by the New Order military regime, which imposed tight control on workers.

The New Order stripped Indonesian decolonization of its anti-imperialist character and established an anti-communist narrative as part of the national identity, emphasizing military oversight of the country's internal affairs to prevent popular resistance to capital exploitation and oppression. The working class was severely affected by government repression and official anti-communist propaganda for more than three decades. In 2012, social democratic and leftist influences accelerated the working class movement's revival, although it had been slow at the beginning of Reformasi. History also shows that the key to advancing the working class movement is unity between progressive intellectuals and the masses of the working class, rather than conforming to the state-mandated ideology. The challenge is providing a strategy for dealing with the remnants of militaristic New Order approaches in the form of violence, anti-communist laws, and stigmatization that authorities have taken against workers' mobilization in their everyday struggle and politics.

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<sup>94</sup> Firmansyah, M. Julnis, "Partai Buruh Tarik Dukungan Pekerja Dari Gerindra, Begini Tanggapan Ahmad Muzani", Tempo, 17 January 2023, <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1680378/partai-buruh-tarik-dukungan-pekerja-dari-gerindra-begini-tanggapan-ahmad-muzani> (last accessed 20 March 2023).

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