

East Java rally against Omnibus (labour) Law postponed due to corona virus

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Surabaya — Protests against neoliberal labour reforms have been postponed. Thousands of people from labour, student and non-government organisations who are part of the East Java Movement Against the Omnibus Law (Getol) have cancelled a protest action which was planned to be held on Monday March 23 in order to prevent the spread of the corona virus (Covid-19). As an alternative, the groups held an audience with the East Java provincial government at the Grahadi State Building in the East Java provincial capital of Surabaya.

Getol representative Fatkhul Khoir, who is also the secretary general of Indonesian Workers Solidarity Struggle (SPBI), said that during the meeting they raised several demands, one of which was urging the government to immediately halt deliberations on the Draft Omnibus Law on Job Creation.

"Our demands were that for the moment the government halt deliberations [on the law] or at least, revoke the Draft Omnibus Law", said Khoir speaking at the Grahadi building.

Furthermore, Khoir also said that given that the country is in the midst of the corona epidemic, it would be impossible for them to mobilise people in large numbers.

"Thus we have cancelled the action, today we went to the Pemprov offices on the initiative of and an invitation from the Pemprov", he said.

Protecting factory workers

Aside from urging the government to postpone deliberations on the Omnibus Law, Getol also asked for clarity from the provincial government on policies to protect workers because they are still working in factories amid the corona epidemic.

"The problem is how then in the factories which ipso facto we know are the manufacturing industries, there are large concentrations of people (workers) taking place", he said.

Based on SPBI monitoring, many companies are continuing with production and have not given their workers any leave. The worse thing however, is that this is not being accompanied by preventative efforts by companies to stop the spread of corona.

"We managed to go around several companies, where our members are for example, they have yet to provide adequate health equipment such as hand sanitizers and there are still no masks for example, these are not being provided by companies", he said.

They are also urging the East Java provincial government to immediately issue a regulation on work safety. They are also asking the government not to just prioritise economic factors.

"This [situation] I think is very fragile, meaning the government shouldn't just think in economic terms but how to make public safety the main issue, that is what should actually be happening", said Khoir.

Not to mention if the situation gets worse and workers are forced to take leave. He is also asking the provincial government to closely regulate all companies so they provide workers with their rights.

"If workers are sent home by companies because of the corona pandemic, then what rights will they have, there is no comprehensive policy on this", he said.

The Getol representatives were able to meet directly with East Java Deputy Governor Emil Dardak. Responding to the workers' demands, Dardak claimed that the provincial government through the labour office has already circulated an appeal to companies in East Java.

"A circular has been sent out by the labour office head aimed at making the work environment safer for workers. It has to be admitted however that the challenge is the implementation", said Dardak.

The challenge, said Dardak is the difficulties on the ground where several companies have had difficulties obtaining liquid disinfectant, alcohol for hand sanitizers and masks.

In order to overcome the scarcity, Dardak claimed that the government is looking to get supplies of masks and protective clothing from other countries and they are forging communication with the Chinese Consulate General.

"Like masks, so earlier we had a breakthrough (in communication) with the Chinese Consulate General on whether production there has begun to recover, to be able to supply raw materials for masks, also protective clothing", he said. (frd/pmg)

P.S.

[Translated by James Balowski. The original title of the article was "Demo Tolak Omnibus Law di Jatim Ditunda karena Corona".]

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