

Indonesian party presses ahead despite intimidation

Thursday 17 May 2007, by [HEARMAN Vanessa](#) (Date first published: 10 May 2007).

Solo,

On April 29, the Indonesian National Liberation Party of Unity (Papernas) again suffered intimidation and disruption of a planned meeting in Sukoharjo, on the outskirts of Solo in Central Java. Members of the Islamic Community Militia prevented the meeting from going ahead by blockading surrounding roads and occupying the venue of the meeting. The district chief of Sukoharjo, Bambang Riyanto, asked Papernas to cancel its meeting, even though the party had obtained the necessary permits.

In response, Papernas is pursuing a complaint against the Sukoharjo police for not upholding the rights of Papernas members to hold their meeting free from intimidation, according to Kelik Ismunanto, a member of Papernas's Central Java leadership committee.

In Yogyakarta on May 1, the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and the Indonesian Anti-Communist Front (FAKI) tried to disrupt a May Day rally held by the Workers Alliance of Yogyakarta, arguing that Papernas had usurped its way into the workers' movement. However they were outnumbered by those mobilising for May Day.

Attacks against Papernas events are occurring across Java. The party's meetings have been disrupted by various Islamist groups, such as the FPI in Jakarta and several towns in East Java and Central Java. These groups claim that Papernas is "neo-PKI (Indonesian Communist Party)" and that it represents the rebirth of communism in Indonesia. Because one of Papernas's initiators was the left-wing People's Democratic Party (PRD) and the party's demands include nationalising the mining industry, abolishing foreign debt and building a national industry, radical Islamic groups have argued that Papernas represents left ideas.

The continuing existence of a prohibition on "Marxist-Leninist teachings" and communism since 1966 has given these kinds of attacks a veneer of legitimacy. Papernas's demands are also unlikely to be popular with the current government and bureaucracy, and there has been no condemnation from government leaders of the forcible closure of Papernas gatherings.

There is not unanimous hostility to Papernas within Islamic groups. Rather, there is some disquiet with the FPI's tactics of using violence supposedly in the name of Islam. There seems to be a coordinated campaign by several Islamic groups, at least in Java, to close down any Papernas gathering. In the majority of cases, Papernas members have negotiated permits with the local police to hold meetings, yet this has turned out to be meaningless. Police have told Papernas members that there is pressure from local military bases for the police not to act. One of Papernas's demands is the disbanding of the military's territorial structure, which means the military is based at every level of the local areas.

Papernas, which was formally launched in January, is in the midst of preparations for consolidating throughout Central Java. The party is preparing to contest the 2009 elections, but it still needs to

consolidate its branches and structures across the country. It is involved in talks with different parties in order to build a progressive front.

The party is also facing the prospect of a new law on political parties, currently in draft form, that according to Papernas international relations officer Katarina Pujiastuti interferes excessively with the running of parties, including a provision that party members who “spread Marxist-Leninist teachings” should not be allowed to remain members.

Papernas is discussing its next steps in facing the constant harassment from Islamic groups. It is considering encouraging those who want to act in solidarity with the party internationally to write to the National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) to protest the lack of state action to guarantee civil and political rights in Indonesia.

P.S.

From: International News, Green Left Weekly issue #709 16 May 2007.