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Indonesia: Understanding Prabowo's appointment of former PRD leaders to the Red and White cabinet

Wednesday 13 November 2024, by [BALOWSKI James](#), [NEGORO Dipo](#), [SUTANTO Hadi](#) (Date first published: 5 November 2024).

President Prabowo Subianto accompanied by Vice President Gibran Rakabuming Raka inaugurated the ministers and deputy ministers of the new Red and White Cabinet for 2024-2029 at the State Palace in Jakarta on Monday afternoon, October 21.

Included among them were former cadres of the People's Democratic Party (PRD). They were Mugiyanto Sipin as the Deputy Human Rights Minister, Agus Jabo Priyono as the Deputy Social Affairs Minister, Faisol Riza as the Deputy Minister of Industry and Nezar Patria as the Deputy Minister of Communication and Digital Affairs. The next day, on Tuesday October 22, Prabowo inaugurated Budiman Sudjatmiko as the head of the National Team for Accelerating Poverty Reduction (BP Taskin).

Responding to these appointments there were perceptions, including among former cadres or activists who were in the PRD (old or new), that welcomed this with enthusiastic support or justified it as a part of the political struggle.

Some former PRD cadres, such as Ragil, went even further by manipulating the PRD's original analysis and program of struggle to justify support for the Prabowo-Gibran administration. In general there was an assumption that these former PRD cadres are a continuation of the PRD itself. Likewise, it was also assumed that PRD has not undergone any changes since it was established in 1996, so the current PRD is still the same as the old one.

In the PRD's official publication *Pembebasan* (Liberation), Issue Number II/ November 1996, an article titled "Again, Democracy is the Answer!", which was sourced from the PRD's political manifesto, it says that the solution "must be radical (rooted)". This is because the problems are also fundamental, "the authoritarian New Order (Orba) system has built a military dictatorship with the capitalist economic system that is monopolised by the Cendana Family [former President Suharto and his family]".

The article then explains the form of society and government desired post Suharto's New Order regime. There are three major parts mentioned, namely: Politics: the fullest possible democracy, economics: socialist (economic democracy) and the transitional program.

Under "Politics: the fullest possible democracy", it explains that the aim is a multi-party democracy. This is "(d)emocracy that gives citizens' the freedom to have an opinion, establish a press, establish an organisation and a political party, obtain information and study any kind of knowledge, the freedom to embrace and worship according to their beliefs, the freedom to adhere to any ideology and other universal freedoms". To carry out all of this out, the national political leadership

must be held by a "Populist Democratic Coalition".

This populist democratic coalition is an institution that takes the form of a combination of classes, sectors and groups as well as "being a true representative of the people from the village to the national level. These representatives must be trusted to and defend the interests of the ordinary people. As well as practicing a process of transparent, participatory and democratic policy making. Respecting the autonomy of the people's organisations and cooperating with these organisations in development. Building the country's defence function from outside attacks that originates from the community, not a regular armed force. Respecting human rights, the right of self-determination for the Maubere (East Timorese) nation, and opposing the colonial character that has oppressed the people of Aceh and West Papua. Abolishing ABRI's [the armed forces, now called the TNI] dwi-fungsi [dual socio-political function] and establishing an independent international justice system to complete the demands of the ordinary Indonesian people whose rights have been violated".

Under "Economy: Socialist (economic democracy)" it explains that "the economy shall be regulated by the state, for the welfare of all people, its backbone being cooperatives". It is further explained that the economic problems being faced are the "capitalist economic system that is monopolised by the president's relatives". This economic system "makes the Indonesian economy part of the global capitalist economic system (imperialism)". Natural resources and workers' labour are exploited by the imperialist countries in collaboration with indigenous capitalists.

The post-New Order economic form will be: Industrial and agricultural development that will lead to the maximum achievement of technology transfer and maximum productivity. Developing science and technology that will be directed to improve capacity in all production to provide for the people's needs. Social ownership of companies that provide vital and fundamental goods and services for the people, as well as social ownership of industrial sectors that are very important for the people's economy. Encouraging collective mechanisms among the people to increase the productivity of the people's economy. Supporting the private sector that provides a positive contribution to the development of production capacity and resources. Encouraging agrarian reform to create a modern land system and cooperative agriculture in rural areas.

"The transitional program" explains that in order to achieve all of this, the packet of five political laws passed in 1985 and ABRI's dwi-fungsi must be abolished. With the fulfillment of these two demands, "we will return to use the political system as used in the 1955 elections" which were the most democratic and thus freedom of political participation will not be obstructed. Coupled with an ABRI that is politically neutral so it cannot carry out intervention into or coercion in the political parties. "In this political climate, we propose a program of a populist democratic coalition government. This is only possible if we only go through truly democratic elections. Democratic elections: Elections that are free from the five political laws of 1985 and ABRI's dwi-fungsi...". To win these demands, a front must be built that really works, one that acts and makes alternative formulations that are not just a campaign tools.

In an article published in Pembebasan Edition 1/Year V/ July 2000 titled "Trying Suharto: The Destruction of the Old Power", it states that "indeed everywhere in the world, in every transitional process from an undemocratic system to a more democratic system it always requires the destruction of remnants of the old power who of course will continue to resist in order to obstruct the pace of reform and restore their power. The article was written by Habiburachman.

In Pembebasan Edition 19/Year V/August 2000 under the "Main Discussion" column, an article titled "Eliminating the Remnants of the New Order: Requirements for Completing the Democratic Revolution" it explains that there are three connected remnants of the New Order, namely: the

ruling Golkar Party, ABRI and Suharto and his cronies. The article reiterates that "Completing total political reform (read the democratic revolution) requires the removal of the remnants of the dictatorship that continues to consolidate in order to launch counter attacks against the new forces. As long as the remains of the New Order's power still have economic and political power, they will continue to disrupt the course of total reform".

Still in the Main Discussion column but in another article titled "The Dangers of the Fake Reformists", it explains that "the threat to the democratic revolution does not only come from the remnants of the New Order, but also from the fake reformists. These are people who have been wearing 'reformist' clothing but their actions and behaviour are anti-reformist". The article also mentions who is included in the fake reformist camp, it was: Amien Rais and Megawati Sukarnoputri. "These two people are only one example of the many fake reformists. The main characteristic of fake reformists is that they do not want the reform agenda to run its course. The completion of the reform agenda is the elimination of the remains of the New Order. They actually work together with the remnants of the New Order".

In the theory column in the same edition, Hanan Ragil Nugroho wrote an article titled "Bourgeois Democrats: They always betray". The column provides a theoretical foundation for the PRD's revolutionary strategy. First, "The democratic revolution in Indonesia for the benefit of the mass of ordinary people (the masses of the people, farmers and the small revolutionary bourgeoisie) has been halted by the inconsistent actions of the bourgeoisie".

Second, "The democratic revolution in its genuine meaning will benefit the masses of the ordinary people. This will indeed open the path to capitalism. Will crush feudalism, militarism and KKN [corruption, collusion and nepotism]. These conditions are needed for capitalism to develop, but at the same time it will provide the widest possible path for the mass of people to rule. This path is the opening up of democracy as widely as possible, especially the people's freedom to fight all forms of oppression and freedom of organisation".

Third, the article also shows what the people must do, namely: "Shared power must be built by having to remain independent of the bourgeoisie. The mass or ordinary people must remain in their own organisations, have their own programs, have their own tactics and strategies. Is a mistake for it to dissolve into the grip of the bourgeoisie".

Fourth, they, the bourgeois democrats, will continue to obscure the genuine consciousness of the mass of ordinary people so that the democratic revolution is not achieved. So, the mass of ordinary people must continue to advance the existing programs. The reformist programs offered by the bourgeois democrats must be replaced with a revolutionary program".

Perhaps the reader will feel this to be rather ironic, given that the articles we quote from above were written by former PRD cadres who are now taking a similar road to the five former PRD cadres who have joined the Prabowo-Gibran regime.

But to say that these five, including those who wrote for *Pembebasan* newspaper that I mentioned above, are representatives of the PRD is a mistake. Most of them were actually no longer in the PRD since the 2000s.

Nezar Patria was no longer active in the PRD after being abducted in 1998. He then pursued a career in the world of journalism becoming a *Tempo* journalist. Mugiyanto and Faisol Riza were active in PRD until 2001. Riza then collaborated with Wimar Witoelar who was previously the spokesperson for former President Abdurahman "Gus Dur" Wahid. After that he joined and was active in the Islamic based National Awakening Party (PKB) with Muhaimin

Iskandar.

Mugiyanto was no longer active in the PRD after a difference of opinion with PRD leadership. Together with several other PRD cadres he formed the Democratic Socialist Faction (FDS) which later transformed itself into the Democratic Socialist Association (PDS). Its activities were predominantly orientated towards non-government organisations (NGOs) that were active on human rights issues.

Budiman Sudjatmiko himself stopped being active during the impeachment of Gus Dur in 2001. He disappeared from his collective position in the PRD's Central Leadership Committee (KPP-PRD) and it was later found out that he was continuing his studies in England. After completing his studies, Sudjatmiko joined the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), which was and still is chaired by Megawati Sukarnoputri, and along with other activists established the PDI-P affiliated Volunteers for Democratic Struggle (Repdem). He was elected as a member of the House of Representatives for two periods in 2009-2014 and 2014-2019 until he crossed over and supported Prabowo in the 2024 presidential election.

We cannot hope that those who have left the PRD almost two decades will continue to carry out and represent the party's goals. Moreover, they all live in the political environment of the political elite. Whether it's in the PDI-P, the PKB, the Democrat Party or Prabowo's Greater Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra).

From these notes it can be seen that their social environment is more within political elite circles, no longer among the suffering of the people's movements. After all, one's social environment determines social conciseness, forming one's way of thinking in making decisions and acting.

Before, during the period they opposed the New Order, they were characterised as left (in opposition), but in the days that have followed we can see that their position has not been one of opposition. The same thing applies to those who worked in the NGOs or become journalists. They can just deal with human rights issues or try to write about the ordinary people's problems as neutrally as possible, but neither the NGOs or the mass media fight for the completion of the democratic revolution and or to win socialism as projected by the PRD.

"The rise and fall of the party's cadre, developing along with their party", such were the words of Indonesia's foremost novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer in response to Sudjatmiko preference for studying in England rather than continuing to work in the PRD. Likewise, maintaining one's ideology, determination, and some say maintaining one's sanity, requires constantly working in the party. We do not live in a vacuum, we live in the midst of the onslaught of ideological hegemony and the oppression of capitalism. There is no third ideology, there is only socialism or capitalism.

Thus a party, especially the revolutionary party, is not just a signboard. Primary, the party is related to ideology, a program of struggle, a political perspective and revolutionary traditions. This is the second mistake, which is not to see that the PRD itself also experienced dialectical changes. Including qualitative changes, changes in ideology, its program of struggle and political perspectives that occurred in the 2007s. Changes which resulted in Agus Jabo Priyono becoming the general chairperson of the PRD.

Priyono was in the PRD for the longest period. Since the start, when the PRD was established, Priyono was active and became one of the leaders of the PRD when it moved underground. On January 18, 1998, he was arrested after a bomb exploded in the Tanah Tinggi flats in Central Jakarta. He was released after Suharto was overthrown and after leaving prison, he remained active

in the PRD's leadership but did not appear openly in public.

In 2004 he became the secretary general of the PRD with chairperson Dita Indah Sari. This is when he appeared openly before the public and the political elite. Then in 2007 there was a split in the PRD. Priyono remained in the PRD and replaced Dita Sari as the general chairperson. During his leadership the PRD changed its fundamental principles from social democracy to the state ideology of Pancasila. According to Wikipedia, the PRD was dissolved on June 1, 2021, and continued as the People's Justice and Prosperity Party (Prima) with Priyono as chairperson.

After failing in its attempt to take part in the 2004 electoral contest, the PRD then reorganised itself. They began preparing to contest in the 2009 elections by endeavouring to put together a party front by trying to invite movement groups to become involved. They put forward the National Liberation Party of Unity Preparation Committee (KP Papernas), but this was unsuccessful in getting any movement groups to unite to form a new party to respond to the elections.

According to Wikipedia, on January 18-20, 2007, a Congress was held at the Wisma Sejahtera II Kaliurang in Sleman, Yogyakarta, which changed the Papernas KP into the National Liberation Party of Unity (Papernas). Papernas however faced difficulties fulfilling the requirements set by the law to be legally and formally recognised as a political party.

This required obtaining official approval from the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights (Kemenkumham) as a political party and then registering with the General Elections Commission (KPU) as an election participant. This requires meeting a number of structural requirements which are then verified by the Kemenkumham. After being approved as a political party, the KPU also sets requirements on the minimum number of provincial, regency/municipality and sub-district structures the party must have.

Feeling unable to meet the structural requirements, the PRD sought out other opportunities to intervene in the 2009 elections in order to take advantage of the opportunity to speak more broadly to the ordinary people. Thus they began exploring cooperation with parties that were already legal entities and had "tickets" to contest the elections.

Among them were the Bung Karno Nationalist Party (PNBK), the Pioneer Party and the Star Reform Party (PBR). But the exploration to cooperate to form a new party was unsuccessful. During this process there was a split among the PRD leadership. The majority remained in the PRD under the leadership of Dita Sari and Priyono while the others later succeeded in consolidating themselves and formed the Political Committee of the Poor-Peoples Democratic Party (KPRM-PRD). The PRD led by Dita Sari and Priyono then participated in the 2009 elections by subordinating themselves to and merging into the (PBR). This move however did not succeed in getting any PRD candidates into the legislator.

At its VII Congress in Salatiga, Central Java on March 1-3, 2010, a new principle was agreed to, namely Pancasila. The leadership arising as a result of the congress was Priyono as chairperson and Dominggus Oktavian as secretary general.

In the 2014 elections the PRD adopted the "Diaspora" tactic by putting their cadres into political parties that were eligible to participate in the elections. According to Beritasatu.com, Priyono served as the chairperson of the Gerindra Party's Central Advisory Board (DPP) Potential Mapping Division. Faced with the 2024 legislative and presidential elections, they gave birth to the Prima Party which was declared on June 1, 2021 in Jakarta with Priyono as chairperson and Oktavianus as general secretary.

From the above explanation it can be seen that there was a change in the orientation of the PRD from a movement party that prioritised a program, an uninterrupted two-stage revolutionary strategy and the method of mass action, to one that desired to be involved in power by any and all means. From entering an elite political party to uniting with political elite factions in order to taking part in election as the principal method. They tried to justify these methods with the argument of national unity. But all of this was completely contrary to the original PRD.

The old PRD explained that the completion of the democratic revolution could not be carried out by the political elite. Meanwhile one its goals was to eliminate of the remnants of the New Order. If we read Lenin's revolution strategy, then the alliances that must be built for the completion of the democratic revolution are alliances or unity between labourers and farmers, and in the context of Indonesia an alliance between workers and the ordinary people. There is nothing in the old PRD's propaganda or education that explains that the completion of the democratic revolution should be carried out through national unity with the political elite, especially with the remnants of the New Order.

In the revolutionary struggle there is also no logic that you must enter into power, including making general elections a strategy for "total reform" in order to complete the democratic revolution, let alone achieving socialism. The PRD itself once called for a general election boycott. Likewise, so did revolutionary parties like the Bolsheviks. We can read the call for a boycott of the 1997 general elections in Liberation Newspaper Number IV/ February 1997.

The involvement in general elections is a tactic that may or may not be used. In the matter of power, we must look at the contents of the power itself. Prabowo-Gibran, along with the five former PRD cadres who joined their administration, together with the Prima Party and all the former PRD cadres who supported them or supported the political elite, would not be able to fulfill the requirements set out in the "Political Manifesto of the PRD", some parts of which have not been won.

In the 2024 presidential election, Budiman Sudation and Agus Jabo Priyono (along with the Prima Party) openly supported Prabowo. It is clear that the link between being recruited as Deputy Minister of Social Affairs and the head of the National Team for Accelerating Poverty Reduction was their role in supporting Prabowo in the presidential election, and has absolutely nothing to do with their status as former PRD cadre. Even if this were so, it is certain that this was not the main reason.

In early August 2024, Mugiyanto initiated a meeting between the families of the victims of the 1997-98 abductions and Gerindra Party officials. It was reported that the victim's families received compassion amounting to 1 billion rupiah each. This can be interpreted as a "reconciliation" between the victim's families and Prabowo, who is seen as the person who was most responsible as the commander of the Army's Special Forces (Kopassus) who ordered the formation of the Tim Mawar (Rose Team) that carried out the abductions.

This "reconciliation" makeover made Prabowo appear more beautiful because it seemed as if his sins had been erased. It is reasonable to suspect that Mugiyanto's services were the main consideration for his appointment as Deputy Minister of Human Rights, moreover he had a background in working with human rights NGOs. Ironically, Mugiyanto was one of the victims of 1997-98 abductions.

The position of Deputy Minister of Industry was given to a former PRD cadre who was the chairperson of the PRD in 1998-99, namely Faisol Riza. As is known, he is a PKB politician who was previously the chairperson of the House of Representatives' (DPR) Commission VI. Also in Prabowo's Red and White Cabinet from the PKB is Muhaimin Iskandar as the

Coordinating Minister for Community Empowerment and Abdul Kadir Karding as the Minister for the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers and the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency.

It is unclear what services the PKB provided to Prabowo in order to give the positions of coordinating minister, minister and deputy minister in the Red and White Cabinet.

As is known, in the 2024 presidential election the PKB initially supported Prabowo, but later switched sides and supported former Jakarta Governor Anis Baswedan, resulting in a three-way presidential race. It is reasonable to suspect that the PKB's support for Baswedan was an effort to split the vote and voters' concentration as it would have been more difficult for Prabowo to have run against former Central Java governor Ganjar Pranowo in a two-way contest. It is therefore probable that the recruitment of Faisol Riza was because of his political background in PKB, not because he is a former PRD chairperson. Riza was also a victim of the 1997-98 abductions.

Nezar Patria holds the position of Deputy Minister of Communication and Information in Prabowo's cabinet. There is not much information on what role he played in helping Prabowo to win the 2024 presidential election. But it can also be concluded that Prabowo recognised Patria's performance when they worked together in President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's Onward Indonesia Cabinet. Patria was also a victim of the 1997-98 abductions.

Of the five former PRD cadres appointed to Prabowo's cabinet there are three abduction victims and two people who were imprisoned for their activities against the New Order. Indeed, this may well give rise to the impression that Prabowo wishes to embrace all groups even though they were once on opposite sides. However, it is too naive to link their appointments to their status as a former PRD cadre.

So those who declare that Prabowo raised the dignity and prestige of the PRD by appointing the five former leaders are truly being ridiculous. Instead, it degrades the people's movements because when viewed in terms of the PRD when it opposed the New Order, it reduces their struggle for humanity to just a series of career stepping stones. Such thinking is truly misleading.

"Now everything is a dash of this or a dash of that. Support a kidnapping general if he has a dash of nationalism, which can mean a united front blocking the onslaught of neoliberalism. If the kidnapper general is given a dash of Venezuela he could even turn into Hugo Chavez, a dash of Cuba and he transforms into Fidel Castro or Che Guevara, and a dash of a la China and becomes the embodiment of Mao".

Sudjatmiko, Mugiyanto, Patria, Priyono, Riza, Ragil, the PRD post-2007 and the Prima Party et al "have turned into Panji Tengkorak (a film character who disguises himself as a beggar and wears a skull mask), dragging a coffin while tenderly holding hands with the kidnapper general. And, in the coffin lie the bodies of [the missing and presumed dead victims of the 1997-98 abductions] Herman Hendrawan, Suyat, Wiji Thukul and Bimo Petrus" ("RIP PRD", <https://indoprogress.com/2012/07/rip-prd/>).

The People's Democratic People's Party played a revolutionary role in the struggle to overthrow Suharto. But the actions of the former PRD cadres above, or other former cadres, including the post-2007 PRD (Prima) are not a continuation of the original PRD. We should study the PRD's history, analyse its mistakes and learn from the good things that were done. Then we must build a new party to complete democratic revolution and win victory for socialism.

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