

Indonesia: Anti-communism in the age of reformasi: the case of Papernas

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May 20, 2008 — In 2006, some long-term Indonesian activists in the People's Democratic Party (PRD), such as Dita Sari and Agus Jabo'' Priyono, reflected on how the post-1998 reformasi movement would respond to the 2009 general election. In June 2006, a number of activists and organisations, including eight national organisations such as the Indonesian Buddhist Students' Association (HikmahBudhi), the National Students' League for Democracy (LMND) and the Urban Poor Union (SRMK) met in Jakarta to agree to establish Papernas (the National Liberation Party of Unity). Around 40 local groups of farmers, workers, students and advocacy groups in Flores, Sumatra, Maluku, Java and Kalimantan also supported this initiative. PRD activists have made Papernas their key political project in the last few years, which also has created debates and splits inside the PRD over the question of electoral alliances in coming elections. The PRD had contested the first post-reformasi elections in 1999, achieving 78,000 votes nationally. The low result reflected the financial and logistical difficulties for small parties, as well as the impact on voters of the New Order government's ban on, and black propaganda against, the party in the late 1990s. In the preparations for the 2004 election, the PRD set up the People's United Opposition Party (POPOR) to contest the election, however its registration was, according to a 2003 POPOR media release, thwarted by corruption in the bureaucracy responsible for managing the registration process, as well as intimidation by the military against party officials. {{{PRD's history}}} The PRD was officially founded in Jakarta on July 22, 1996. Prior to this, the People's Democratic Union and its predecessor, the Indonesian Student Solidarity with Democracy (SMID), had been active in the student movement, as well as attempting to organise workers in the large industrial estates surrounding Jakarta, Surabaya and Medan. Under President Suharto, the PRD was banned from July 1996, when the government scapegoated it for masterminding the July 27 incident'' (dubbed a riot'' by the government) at the headquarters of Megawati Sukarnoputri's Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI) in Jakarta. In fact, soldiers and hired thugs masquerading as PDI supporters attacked people protesting the government-inspired removal of Megawati as PDI leader, seized the offices. They knifed and bludgeoned anyone who was in or around the building, which resulted in hundreds of people being killed. The government also accused the PRD of trying to establish a new communist organisation. Some key PRD leaders, such as Budiman Sujatmiko, Wilson, Anom Astika, Petrus Hariyanto and Garda Sembiring, were imprisoned, sentenced to between 18 months' and 13 years' jail. They were released in 1999 by President Habibie. Dita Sari, a prominent woman leader of the party, had been imprisoned since July 8, 1996, for organising a rally of factory workers in Tandes, on the outskirts of Surabaya. The PRD being its key founder has led to Papernas being associated

with communism'' by both Islamic and military-linked vigilante groups.
Alliances for 2009 election

Having contended with the bureaucratic requirements of contesting elections with POPOR in 2003, the PRD realised the need for serious work if any political formation is to pass the registration process set by the government. Papernas chairperson Agus Jabo'' Priyono views the tough electoral laws as the chief obstacle for the party in contesting elections. He refers to the provisions of the law, where political parties must have a branch in 66% of provinces and 75% of districts in Indonesia before it can be registered and contest the elections. PRD activists turned towards the setting up of Papernas structures to comply with these regulations and succeeded in conducting a massive outreach exercise. Yet the linking of Papernas with communism poses difficulties for the party in forging electoral alliances with other smaller parties, alliances that it would need to contest the elections, since it looks unlikely that Papernas would be able to contest on its own. Papernas leader Dita Sari has coordinated the Alliance of Political Parties, a grouping of at least 20 smaller, yet to be registered political parties, including Papernas, Hanura and the Renewal Democratic Party (PDP), which protests the government's electoral law provisions. Papernas was declared as a party in Kaliurang, Central Java, on January 18-19, 2007, at its founding congress, attended by 370 people from 23 provinces. Congress delegates elected AgusJabo'' Priyono as chairperson, Haris Sitorus as general secretary and Dita Sari as its presidential candidate for the 2009 election. Papernas' three key demands are: nationalise the mining industry; abolish the foreign debt; and construct a national industry for the people's welfare. These are grouped under the 'Tripanji (Three Banners) of the People'. The use of the term Tripanji has invited comparisons with the same term used by the banned Indonesian Communist Party, the PKI, in the 1960s.

While dealing with the bureaucratic hurdles of registration and setting up new branches, Papernas has organised rallies around the country to popularise itself and its program. It continues to mobilise its affiliate organisations to support the demand of nationalisation of the mining industry. On February 25, the National Students' League for Democracy (LMND), a Papernas affiliate, occupied the offices of Exxon Mobil in Jakarta, contrasting the large profits of the company to poor education funding and infrastructure in Indonesia. The Indonesian Centre for Labour Struggle (FNPBI) held a mock fuel queue outside Exxon Mobil on March 12 to symbolise the irony of an oil-rich nation whose people have no access to those resources. Papernas has also held rallies around mining issues in Sumatra, Flores, Sulawesi and Maluku. On May 12 and 13 in the Riau and Batam Islands off the coast of Sumatra, Papernas held rallies to press the demand for nationalisation, which were attended by more than 2000 people. The party is currently preparing to focus their agitation on the price rises of fuel. Fuel is set to rise in price at the end of May or early June 2008.

Anti-communist attacks

The Kaliurang Papernas congress was disrupted on January 19, 2007, when hundreds of people grouped under the Indonesian Anti-Communist Front (FAKI) and the Mosque Youth Friendship Forum (Forum Silaturahmi Remaja Masjid) Yogyakarta protested against the congress and demanded the forcible break-up of the meeting. They argued Papernas was trying to revive communist ideas. Some of the slogans and banners carried by protesters stated that Papernas was haram (forbidden under Islamic law). They demanded that the government uphold the law banning Marxism-Leninism. The 1966 People's Consultative Assembly decree banning Marxism-Leninism is

still in force today and provides some legal standing for these anti-communist protests.

Papernas' focus on organising workers, farmers and the urban poor in demanding their rights has drawn connections for the party's detractors, such as the Defenders of Islam Front (FPI), between Papernas and the PKI. Papernas' program includes free health care and education, disbanding the territorial command structure of the military, rejecting privatisation of oil, gas and electricity, and employment creation through a national industry. Its opponents like the FPI have focused on Papernas' concerns with ensuring legal rights for prostitutes and other workers dealing in vice' and the restitution of the rights of the 1965 ex-political prisoners, who under the Suharto's New Order were stigmatised and discriminated against. Anti-Papernas attacks and harrassment across Java by groups like the FPI, the thug organisation Betawi Brotherhood Forum, the Anti-Communist Front and local-level committees such as the Muhammadiyah Youth of Sidoarjo, as well as attacks in Sulawesi and Kalimantan have been well-organised and systematic. {{Rise in anti-communist statements and activities}} Between 2005-2007, attacks against organisations, individuals and public gatherings associated with the left became more frequent. Those targeted included Papernas, bookstores such as Ultimus in Bandung, the website Rumah Kiri, groups of ex-political prisoners such as the Foundation to Investigate Victims of the 1965-55 Killings (YPKP). The Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (Kontras) devoted a section of its 2006 human rights report on anti-communist discourse and activities, consisting of 19 separate incidents, including statements and activities by the police and military. The Attorney-General's Department banned history textbooks based on the 2004 revised curriculum in March 2007 for not mentioning PKI involvement in the 1948 and 1965 coup attempts. In March 2008, anti-communist organisations such as CICS (Indonesian Centre for Community Studies) in East Java, headed by high school teacher Arukat Djaswadi, and the Anti-Communist Front protested the National Human Rights Commission's decision to set up a working group to investigate the 1965-66 mass killing of leftists. The problematic relationship between the PRD and the security forces is evident once more in the case of Papernas. A police permit for the Papernas founding congress issued by Yogyakarta Police was revoked before the congress. The police cited three reasons for revoking it, including that in their view that the use of Tripanji was identical with the PKI' and that Papernas did not use the word Pancasila in its application for a permit. The Papernas Central Leadership Committee alleged that the police would not issue a permit, due to intervention and pressure from the local military command (Korem).

When the Papernas rally on education and investment laws in Central Jakarta was attacked by up to 2000 people throwing rocks and metal poles in March 2007, the police did not stop the attack, arguing that the attacks took place in the South Jakarta police jurisdiction. In Palu on May 13, three Papernas activists were beaten up by a group of 30 people including a soldier, Private Makmur Palu 132/Tadulako sub-district military command. In Lampung on September 3, 2007, guarded by two water cannons and a company of the Mobile Brigade, the Forestry Department prevented Papernas from using its hall for a Papernas meeting. Hundreds of people were forced to meet outside the hall.

In Balikpapan, Kalimantan on May 17, the offices of the KPRM (Committee of the Politics of the Poor), a group that split off from the pro-Papernas wing of the PRD were also attacked and according to the media release by the KPRM, police and intelligence agents joined the attack.

The case of Papernas shows the difficulties of dealing with the New Order legacy, from 1965 to, as recently as the 1996 anti-PRD propaganda. After 10 years of reformasi, parties with a left platform

face challenges from the anti-communist values that exist in society as well as opposition from the security forces and government. However, left activists have more room to organise today than they ever did under Suharto.

P.S.

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