

Indonesia: An introduction to Politik Rakyat (Politik of the People)

Struggle to revitalize the political consolidation of socialists in a context of immense potential for the radical movement in Indonesia

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Who are we?

We are Politik Rakyat (Politik of the People), a new revolutionary socialist political formation in Indonesia, who fight against militarism, sexism and patriarchy, and the environmental destruction by capitalism and for socialism in the 21st century. We are a newly established group that seeks to build unity among the left and fight for independent politics of the people, against the hegemony of, and co-optation by, elitist politics and pro-capitalist political parties in Indonesia. We work in and for the movements of the people, to strengthen the movement through socialist politics and consciousness, and seek to broaden and unify the movement to challenge the capitalist state and ruling class. We are now working among workers, women, students, and communities organisations to help people's organisation and build the movements.

What are we doing so far?

Working for such immense goals with only small groups of the left-wing activists is the first and foremost challenge for Politik Rakyat. Being small is a problem, but working to build and being in the movement will help us tackle the problem. After only a year of our establishment, we are happy of what we've accomplished so far and optimistic of what we can build in the coming years.

- In the first month since its foundation (March 2013), Politik Rakyat made it a priority for itself to defend feminism and to address various attacks on feminism by strengthening its politics of women liberation. The attacks of the Indonesian capitalist regime and right wing movements against women rights are growing. We based ourselves on what we already have and what is easier to be built in our existing situation. We have a good influence among women workers and women's' organisations. Our work is to build the consciousness of women workers as women and as workers and to support the fight against sexual violence. We are helping to organise a campaign and build a conference against sexual violence. We work towards building the movement in such a way as to have real participation of women at the grass root level. The struggle against sexual violence is a priority but we also build the movement for women's right in general. We work with Perempuan Mahardhika (Free Women), the Accross Factory Labor Federation (FBLP) union, women workers community radio Marsinah FM radiostation, and Jakarta Volunteers Against Sexual Violence (Relawan KawanKu)
- We understand that without revolutionary theory there will be no revolutionary movement. But we also understand that ideas are not exclusively owned by 'the left' or can passed on without learning process and critical debate. We organise thematic discussions on the fundamental problems of Indonesian politics from a Marxist and social activists' point of view. We named it "People's Discussion". We aim for the discussion to be an open forum of learning and debate among lefts activists, as well as a platform to present alternative discussion on relevant issues. So far we

organised discussions on Elections, Military Politics, Ethnicity-Religion-Race (SARA), and Investments Politics.

- We seek to enhance the study and debate and unify the growing fight against mining resistance in the eastern part of Indonesia. We are not campaigning to reject mining completely, but to fight against mining that is detrimental to the people. Tensions and fights have been ongoing for years and our role is to help consolidate the movement and broaden the support and issues. The movement should develop their own position toward the mining. This strategy would encourage solidarity between people who lost their land to mining industry and peasantry, workers, students, women who in one way or another are directly impact by the industry. This would create the condition to recruit more people, politicizing and expanding the resistance, build creative campaign and methods for strengthening people's participation against mining. At the same time we want to introduce ideas about strategic financing for a possible future people's government and the important ecological aspects around the mining. For this we successfully initiated, together with local organisations, a conference against detrimental mining in Palu-Central Sulawesi, December 2013. The joint committee of People Network against Capitalist Mining was established, as well as a call for action on Earth Day 22 April and a regional structure.

- We played an active force in organising the national conference of workers movement that lead to the national strike at the end of October 2013. We played a particularly important role in the strike of garment and textile workers in the industrial zone in North Jakarta during the same month. We aim to unify the worker's movement in the struggle for peoples welfare, and at the same time support the idea of a worker's movement that could build a national political block (Indonesian People House) together with other sectoral movement organisations.

- We also support the campaign and resistance of Papuan people for more democracy, and also help in building solidarity support of Indonesian people to Papuan. We need to mainstream Papua's socio-political problems among Indonesian movements in order for us to learn and understand Papua as a nation, to fight for human rights and democracy, and against militarism and capitalism. We work in and support the work of National Papua Solidarity (NAPAS).

- Young people, especially students, have always been important in Indonesian politics. We are enthusiastically broadening Marxism into the student movements in form of theoretical education. We also organize live-in activities between students and the non-student communities, especially workers community. This is aimed at strengthening the student movement itself and at the same time to build a programmatic relation for students to be involved in workers organising and other communities of the people. We organised Pondok Mahasiswa (Student House—abbreviation for Week of Orientation and Popular Political Education) end of January this year and this was joined by 21 young students. We plan to organise such an activity twice a year, and August this year will be the second.

- We support and help to enhance a network of students movement to form a radical student federation at national level through the Preparatory Committee of Popular Student Federation.

- We are maintaining the relation and will continue the international collaboration with other revolutionary left currents in the world in order to learn from, and take part in, international discourse on revolutionary strategy and organisations. In this regard we are participating in Fourth International educational programs and already learned a lot in the process independently. At the same time we are introducing and building solidarity for revolution and revolutionary processes of anti-capitalist transformation in Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia for socialism in 21st century through www.amerikalatin.blogspot.com.

What are next?

Together with the networks and social organisations we have described above we are now working on the following program activities from February to May 2014:

- To continue the work of People Network against Capitalist Mining in Eastern part of Indonesia, especially to organise a local conference on the related issues in the lead up to Earth Day 2014.
- On the coming International Women's Day, we support the plan for a 'People gathering against Sexual Violence' and a theatre performance Tribute to Gerwani (the left-wing Indonesian Women Movement that was destroyed by the Suharto dictatorship).
- On the coming parliamentary election (which is April) our strategy would be to strengthen the people's voice in elections (as a group we are not participating to support any parliamentary candidacy). In April there will be two important moments: Kartini Day (21st) and Earth Day (22nd) and we would like to organise an event called "Kartini to defend the Earth". Kartini was a pioneer of women's right in Indonesia and an important symbol.
- On the coming Mayday, the Joint Committee of Popular Politic for Marsinah (abbreviated as Marsinah Torch) has called all popular movements to support the convoy of people from Jakarta down to Surabaya, East Java (going along Java island) start on 1stMay to 9thMay. Marsinah was a woman worker found dead and sexually abused and tortured in 1993 after she paid visit to the army command and asked them their reasons for detaining her fellow workers for organising strike to demand a pay rise. It aims to popularize Marsinah as a worker's hero and to demand justice. At the same time Marsinah Torch is a campaign against militarism, sexual violence, against impunity for human rights violators, and for the rights of workers.

What are these aimed at? Where's the (revolutionary) party?

- We are not 'movementists' as we been arbitrary labelled by certain sections of the Indonesian left. But we are in favour of social movements to grow as they are the source of power and opportunity to build socialist politic and consolidation.
- In our early process of building a revolutionary socialist party, which is capable of formulating and offering socialism as programmatic way out of people's sufferings—and gain support from the people, we chose not to concentrate the work on the production of intellectual propaganda. This is not because we think this is of less importance but merely because we are not able to do so. We need more engagement with other socialists and social movement's activists in order to be able to produce intellectually qualified programs and develop our position.
- We believe and are optimist for the opportunity of socialist power supported by Indonesian people. This opportunity might exists not in short term period (below 20 years), but it is very likely to grow to and not only be a minority force criticizing the ruling class.
- The democratic barrier for Indonesian people to develop their political consciousness and illusions in certain bourgeoisie politicians (as in the case of Jokowi and Prabowo) who played with popular demands, are not fundamental obstacles for socialist politics. They can be opportunities for the socialist programs to be supported. The people's desire of the people for a different politics and change, even if at this stage those are still expressed in support for demagogic bourgeois politicians, are clear. People are looking for an alternative and that can create a potential for socialist politics to present itself. But a propaganda paper is far from enough to occupy that socialist opportunity, since the advanced layers of the working class, those who fight, needed sources of socialist knowledge

from their closest environment. They need a form of paper, education, actions, organisations, alliances, the feeling of solidarity/shared emotion, etc, including personal figures they knew and believe. In other words, people will develop a socialist consciousness not only through reading but also learning it from their experiences and activities.

- We are not afraid of getting lost in the social movement and neglect the need for a political part. Our group, as well as other left groups in Indonesia, can't have the capacity to formulate concepts without directly participated in the real struggle of the people. Activists who are lacking theoretical knowledge on revolution and are not familiar with the material for revolution itself are not able to write any propaganda material that could be taken as a reference by the movement.
- For us, the initial steps based on the workers movement, people's network to resist mining, movement against sexual violence, would be a foundation for the development of socialist program in the future. In this regard, the political work will enhance the potency of the Politik Rakyat collective to develop our own theoretical understanding and experiences. Without movement, there is no progress. The development of internal capacity will provide more basis for Politik Rakyat to be able to create and/or become a strong pole of socialist consolidation—which up to now has not been achieved. But since the development of our group might lag behind the needs of the popular movements, or maybe is just too difficult for us to become a political reference for the people, we will remain open to unity with other socialist organisations. Even though our experiences in building socialist unity were never successful, we don't deny the need for such unity.
- The potential of transforming the social movement into a radical political movement in Indonesia today is present in the radicalisation of the workers movement, particularly around Indonesian Workers Confederation (KSPI)/Indonesian Metal Workers Federation (FSPMI).

Some background on the (forced) establishment of Politik Rakyat

We put this part at the end of the introduction, because we realise this is not an inspiring part in the history of the left in Indonesia.

- We should start with the People's Democratic Party (PRD), as the only open revolutionary left political party in Indonesia under the Soeharto dictator regime. PRD played a crucial role for the expansion of left and socialist political idea at the end of 90's. It contributed to the strengthening of people's movement against the pro-capitalist militaristic 'Orde Baru' regime of Soeharto up to the falling down of the regime in 1998. It also contributed to the determination of the people to continuously resist and build their social and political power, even in confrontation with the brutal military regime in Indonesia during that time.
- The capacity of the movement and its support for socialist politics and or minimal anti-capitalist's politics were growing. But unfortunately it declined after Soeharto was forced to step down. The work pattern of building movement under the dictatorship was changed and became oriented to some sort of adjustment work within the existing space of democracy. But still the political gain in term of popular support was far from what it planned: the party never grew into a mass party, the bourgeois leadership of the country was not challenged, and the electoral support for the PRD was always minor. This soon resulted in demoralisation among part the leadership, and then the whole party organisation.
- In 2008 a major part of leadership and members of PRD choose to leave socialist politics and embraced the idea they could be 'left' without an independent political organisation. They had no hesitation in becoming part of bourgeoisie politics. Part of the leadership and members of PRD who were against the capitulation were marginalised, expelled, and then consolidated into a far more

smaller force under the new name People Liberation Party (PPR).

- PPR then prioritized to the development of knowledge on class struggle, as an effort to develop the capacity of the party to do propaganda work for socialism. But this orientation failed and put so much pressure on the PPR that it was unable to move forward. The internal capacity was just too weak, in terms of people and structure. It's self-conception as the 'political vanguard's' was mostly not workable and not really evaluated in light of our experiences. The 'propaganda orientation' has failed, and political influence was not developed. Meanwhile the development of workers movement is growing outside the party's field of work and influence.

- Inside the party, the pressure caused by internal problems and inter-personal relationship were getting bigger. The expression of this internal impasse took shape, very shockingly, as attacks against feminism. Female leaders in the party were made into scapegoats and the party was divided. Some male leaders who opposed feminism came close to misogyny when they attacked female leaders. But unfortunately they were not 'man' enough to bring the debate into the party mechanism but merely spread personal intrigues [1].

- Now is more than a year since the split, and that is how old we are. It is embarrassing and has become pressure in its own right for us. In the PRD we were marginalised and then expelled, in the PPR were also marginalised and then the party was divided. Something was missing along the process: we couldn't develop healthy internal debate as an important component of socialist organisation.

- But here we are alive and kicking after all the pressure. We've learned and are trying our best not to repeat the same mistakes but to foster free debate inside the party. We are convinced of socialist politics, and at the same time even more than before convinced that feminism is an important part of the struggle for socialism.

P.S.

* 20/02/2014: <http://politikrakyat.com/2014/02/20/politik-rakyat-an-introduction/>

Footnotes

[1] You can read our official explanation related to this problem on ESSF (articke 31155), [Indonesia: Open letter of People's Politics \(Politik Rakyat\)](#).