

# Indonesia's New Left Party - Resisting The Neo-liberal Earthquake

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**Farmers protesting in Jakarta at government rice imports that they say will ruin small rice growers and undermine the country's food security. Students marching through Bandung against the government's failure to allocate 20 per cent of the national budget to education. Local residents blocking the Surabaya toll road in East Java to protest at the continuing spill of hot, toxic mud from an unregulated gas exploration well, which has destroyed homes and devastated the region's economy for the last four months.**

These are just a few of the many protests and struggles in different parts of Indonesia in recent days. All of them responses to the social and economic earthquake caused by the last decade of neoliberal policies. And the list could easily go on, to include workers demanding the minimum wage in Surabaya, evicted street traders in South Sumatra or fishing communities in North Maluku demanding protection of their fish stocks from big foreign commercial fleets.

Not to mention the victims of the real, Yogyakarta earthquake, who are still demanding the authorities make the payments they promised to rebuild their homes (see previous article on Natural and Unnatural Disaster).

It is precisely the energy behind this array of struggles, as well as their extreme fragmentation, that a new left party in Indonesia, PAPERNAS, is intended to address. The National Liberation Party of Unity is an initiative taken by the main revolutionary left political organisation in Indonesia, the PRD (People's Democratic Party), together with five social movements that are led by the PRD, including the Indonesian National Front for Workers Struggle (FNPBI) and the Urban Poor Union (SRMK), and three independent social movements, including the Indonesian Buddhist Students Association (Hikmahbudhi).

PAPERNAS is due to have its founding conference on 26-29 November. However around 1500 people, most of them women, many from the Urban Poor Union, turned out for a pre-launch meeting in Jakarta in July. The new party aims both to bring together these multiple local and sectoral struggles, and to give them a political expression in the run up to the next national elections in 2009.

Dominggus Oktavianus is General Secretary of the FNPBI union federation and chairperson of the new party. He told Socialist Resistance that it is these economic issues that really concern Indonesia's poor majority. And that is why PAPERNAS will concentrate its campaigning on the so called "Tri Panji" (Three Banners) of struggle - repudiation of the foreign debt; nationalisation of the oil, gas and electricity industries; and implementation of a national-planned industrialization program.

For Dominggus, the growth of religious fundamentalism and communal tensions, which occupy so much more space in the media, are issues that concern mainly Indonesia's middle class. But he recognizes that they also feed on the absence of any clear alternative coming from the left.

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