

Indonesia: The Struggle for Political Alternative of the Poor

in response to Dita Sari Interview with Green Left Weekly entitled "Indonesia: The struggle against underdevelopment"

Thursday 13 March 2008, by [ARIANE Zely](#), [TRISNANTI Dian](#) (Date first published: 12 March 2008).

2007 saw an unprecedented split in Indonesia's most well known radical party - the People's Democratic Party (PRD). The split spans the PRD from top to bottom. The following interview is with Zely Ariane - the spokesperson for The Political Committee of The Poor - People's Democratic Party (KPRM-PRD). It is a response to Dita Sari Interview with *Green Left Weekly* 735 entitled "Indonesia: The struggle against underdevelopment" [1].

1. When was the KPRM-PRD formed?

Zely Ariane: KPRM was formed in November 2007 as the result of a consolidation of PRD members from ten provinces that reject the coalition politics [currently being pursued by the PRD-Papernas leadership] and are ready to struggle to build a political alternative of the poor. The KPRM-PRD held its public declaration on the 31 January, 2008 in Jakarta.

2. Where are its main bases? What is the KPRM-PRD's main program of activities now and into the near future?

Zely Ariane: Our strongest bases are in Jogjakarta, Jakarta, North Sumatra, East Java and Kalimantan Timor. The original basis for the split in the PRD was that the majority of the PRD leadership could not tolerate a difference of opinion, or opinions rejecting the coalition tactic in the 2009 elections.

Our primary activity at the moment is to struggle for a politics of the poor that is neither co-opted nor co-operative with the remnants of the old regime (Suharto's New Order) such as the military, the pro neo-liberal government and the fake reformists. We are concentrating at the moment on consolidating a new political mass organisation that will unite like minded political groups and individuals from PRD, Papernas and some other mass organisations. This new organ will soon be formed in order to struggle for a politics of the poor and to push towards completion of the national democratic revolution in Indonesia.

We can not let go of the political wreckage that exists in PRD at the moment. We are especially focused on relating to the mass bases who mostly do not understand and have not been involved in the party's political decisions. As an example, the decision to support the Democratic Renewal Party (PDP) was taken in secret and is unknown by the party's mass base because the internal situation in

the PRD, Papernas and even the mass organisations has become increasingly difficult for campaigning - room for debate has been completely closed. So to win back these organisations requires an external pressure. That is the reason we plan to form a new political mass organisation that at the same time can function as our political identity.

We are forging unity of left democratic groups and a women's liberation groupings from the democratic left spectrum - to become the vanguard in developing the feminist movement. We are establishing the frameworks and making lively efforts to mark International Women's Day and also unifying efforts to create a Venezuela Solidarity Group.

3. Who are the elected leaders of the KPRM-PRD?

Zely Ariane: Our new temporary structure only has a spokesperson (myself); we can not create a completely new leadership structure because we are still campaigning for an extraordinary congress of the PRD to correct the political line of the PRD and create a new leadership through constitutional and democratic means.

4. Referring to the People's Democratic Party - National Liberation Party of Struggle (PRD-Papernas) tactical orientation to the 2009 Indonesian election PRD-Papernas leader Dita Sari told *Green Left Weekly*, "we can have input criticism and ideas from comrades all over the world about our 'controversial' tactic." And that "We want other comrades to understand and debate about it" ["Indonesia: The struggle against underdevelopment", Interview with Dita Sari, *idem.*]. Your People's Democratic Party grouping, The Political Committee of the Poor (KPRM-PRD) has recently split with the PRD-Papernas over this question. It would help comrades overseas to understand the issues if we could get your comments on the PRD dispute.

Zely Ariane: Firstly, I want the reader to understand that Dita Sari's group forced a split within the PRD and then froze some organisational sections of the PRD, Papernas, and also the mass organisation which support Papernas, and then expelled the members who debated and were not in favor of what she called a 'controversial tactic'. So I think her statement calling for debate on the tactic is only window dressing.

5. You describe KPRM-PRD sometimes as those from the PRD who oppose a parliamentarist and opportunist orientation. In her Oct 2007 Green Left interview Sari stated "What we are trying to do now is campaign for our program among the mass base of this Islamic party [Reform Star Party - PBR] that we are targeting for a coalition." Sari continued "We are looking for the tactics to reach the masses. The masses are not only in the social movements and their groups. Most of the masses are not touched by the social movements. We are thinking about how to find a way to reach the masses: in what way, what is the instrument, what media, what's the bridge to the masses? Then we saw this opportunity with the Islamic party [PBR] that offered us a coalition." Can you outline how you see the PRD-Papernas leadership's orientation?

Zely Ariane: This is what we called a very contradictive position and sounds more like justification rather than a response to the objective situation. It is Ok (and of course necessary) to propagandise to the mass base of PBR—or any other Islamic party, but the large portion of the people who are already opposed to the economic devastation of Indonesia by Neo-liberal policies do not march within the PBR. The spontaneous and fragmented mobilisation occurs everyday in what we call the "second spectrum" of the movement - that is the new social and spontaneous movement which arose particularly after the Suharto dictatorship fell. This grouping learned the method of mass action from the student mobilisation to overthrow Suharto. This spectrum of the movement should be a

priority for us - not the 2,4 million votes for PBR which is not real in terms of political mobilisation. According to their logic, why doesn't Papernas seek to reach the 24 million voters in favor of [former president Suharto's] Golkar Party or 21 million in favor of PDI-P or the relatively 'clean' parties like the Justice and Prosperity Party (PKS) which is also an Islamic base party with 8.3 million votes?

The main bridge and instrument to reach the masses is through a united front between the left and social movements. We can find such a bridge to masses particularly among what we call the "first spectrum" of the movement. We categorise the first spectrum as the layer of movement who came out of the 1980's and 1990's and the upsurge of 1998. The first spectrum has proved itself able to play a leading role in the national movement today. Some of them were involved in the project of building the United People's Movement Conference (KPGR), which was our main united front orientation prior to the KP-Papernas [Preparation Committee of Papernas] congress. It involved elements such as Friends of the Earth Indonesia (WALHI), Working People's Association (PRP), the Consortium of Agrarian Reform (KPA) and others. Today work among these same forces should be prioritised, with the principal of understanding of each other's capacity and consciousness. A regular conference on tactics and strategy would be a very good program among the movements to mediate the differences and enhance the maturity of each of political perspective.

Dita Sari campaigned that the current PRD-Papernas 'mass action' program has not been disturbed by the 'coalition project'. This is a tricky statement. Last August the PRD proposed to the Papernas presidium that 'coalition work is a priority for Papernas and its mass base'. That required the political forces within Papernas (or collaborators outside Papernas) be used as a machine, in order to advance the electoral coalition work. All mass work and mass action were to be directed toward the coalition project, and were to be carried out only within the electoral districts relevant to Papernas' registration bid. In the Papernas presidium, Dita Sari had also argued that mass action has been achieved, and the primary work today is how to get into power. At the protest organised by Urban Poor Union (SRMK) in the middle of August 2007, Dita Sari's speech reiterated that enough mass action had taken place already because it only benefits the sitting parliamentary members. "It is time to get into power and stop begging on the street" she said.

Mass action organised by the current PRD-Papernas and its organisations is only a tool to advance their bargaining position for an electoral coalition. It is what we call in Our Stance as channeling mass action only into parliamentary politics. We reject this kind of politics. Political work in parliament should be a tool to advance and widen extra-parliamentary mobilisation - not the reverse.

6. The PRD-Papernas criticises the KPRM-PRD orientation as abstentionist towards the elections. What is your orientation to the 2009 elections?

Zely Ariane: Our principal orientation will be to compete for hegemony against the bourgeoisie political parties. What does this mean? There was a 30% abstention in the 2004 election. Whatever the reason for abstention it proved the need for alternative political forces. Abstention from the bourgeois elections occurred against the backdrop of the unstoppable spontaneous and economic protests of the people. These mostly economic movements in some ways currently have a very pragmatic orientation to the ruling elites and their mainstream parties, but they provide the basis for expanding radical left politics. If we succeed in uniting with the other like minded elements of the movement, we are confident that the 2009 election can be conquered by a more popular agenda, and it would not be impossible to organise the sentiment [that caused abstention in 2004] into political mobilisation. This might be in the form of a boycott, popular referendum or an alternative election, etc. These are the political stages which will destroy the illusion of the people in the ruling elites; and build up their confidence in their own political strength.

We feel disappointed about the recent tactics of Papernas in local elections. In Lampung for

example, the Regional Leadership of Papernas supported the candidacy of a rotten politician and retired police deputy, M. Alzier Dianis Thabranie from [former President Suharto's] Golkar Party as well as retired Police Federal Commisaris of Dr. H.M. Sofjan Jacob [2]. In Central Java Papernas supported Popi Darsono—a businesswomen who has a long close relationship with Golkar Party; in East Java Papernas supported Bu Syam, an independent candidate from the Democrat Party—the party of President Susilo Bambang Yudoyono. In North Sumatera the Indonesian National Front for Worker's Struggle (FNPBI) supported the Mayor of Langkat, H. Syamsul Arifin SE, also from Golkar as a candidate for Governor. All of this was done using the justification that these politicians supposedly agree with Papernas' pro people platform - but politicians tend to say things before elections that they don't really mean.

The KPRM-PRD will not compromise on this. We reject to the politics of subordination; politics that are co-opted under the fake reformist flag. We reject mixing with rotten politicians and using the justification that it is all 'to reach the masses, in order to get onto a 'bigger political stage'. Our late comrade Wiji Thukul clearly stated his position on the politics of cooption. He rejected the invitation to perform his poetry at the anniversary of the Suharto era Arms Forces of the Republic of Indonesia (ABRI) in Solo. He stated poets consistent and honest in their work could not declare 'Resist! Resist!' while hand in hand with the enemy of the people. The PRD congress in 2005 decided that one of the four enemies of the people are the fake reformists.

7. In motivating the PRD-Papernas' orientation Sari told Green Left she wished "to remind comrades that [the PRD] made an alliance with the bourgeois Gus Dur [Abdurrahman Wahid] regime [2001-2002], which had a more democratic character" than its political opponents comprised of remnants of Suharto's New Order regime and the military who were then pushing their way back onto the political stage. Do you think that is a fair comparison?

Zely Ariane: Dita Sari probably forgot to tell the GLW reader, that Gusdur is far different with Burzah Zarnubi and PBR. We supported the politics of mobilising people to oppose the remnants of New Order regime—Golkar and the Army, and Gusdur through National Awakening Party (PKB) also did that. We established The Alliance of Golkar Dismissal (ABG) with many democratic and social movement organisations. At the same time, we organised many protests against the Gusdur regime when it raised the price of fuel in 2001. None of these tactics were similar to the plan for a coalition that Dita Sari supports. Unlike the PRD tactics towards Gusdur, which involved open criticism of that regime, Papernas recently kept their mouth shut when key electoral ally (PBR) announced its plan to also ally with the PKPB - the Concern for the Nation Functional Party. PKPB is chaired by Raden Hartono, a former Suharto army commander and ex-official of Golkar, the party which backed his regime. He proudly calls himself a Suharto lackey: "With an extraordinary boldness I want to affirm that I am a Suharto lackey", Hartono told party followers during a campaign rally in March 2004. On March 14 Hartono admitted to Detik.com that he missed the greatness of the New Order government under Suharto's leadership adding that "The establishment of PKPB has also obtained Suharto's blessing". Suharto's eldest daughter Siti "Tutut" Hardiyanti Rukmana was chosen as the PKPB's presidential candidate in the last elections with Hartono pledging that he would bring the good old days back to the country if she were elected as president. PBR also rejects the popular demand that 20% of National Government budget be allocated to education spending [as per the 1945 constitution].

8. How does KPRM-PRD relate its understanding of united front work to the current debate in the PRD?

Zely Ariane: We very much support the united front or coalition tactic to broaden our campaign. As we understand it, the united front should be based on a political platform (which can be maximum or

transitional—that is democratic and popular—but should be real in practice); it should not be contradictory to the principal line of future socialist struggle; it should be based on political mobilisation of the people. A united front should not prevent us from having a free hand and mouth to propagate our own program and to criticise the inconsistency of our ally. We should perform loyally towards the united front agreement and be more critical when it is violated by the ally. These main principal of united front has been completely abandoned by the current Papernas and PRD leadership.

9. At the Latin America, Asia Pacific International Solidarity Conference (LAAPISC) in Melbourne in October 2007, Sari gave a workshop on “Building Progressive Alliances with Islamic Organisations.” In this workshop Sari argued that repressive violence inflicted on the left by fundamentalist Islamic forces was severely limiting the ability of Papernas to operate openly. The workshop included images of a Papernas congress being attacked in Kaliurang on January 19, 2007, an anti-communist rally and seminar in 2007, plus leaflets and placards comparing Papernas to the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) which was massacred between 1965-67. In motivating the possible alliance with the PBR, Sari told the workshop the best way to gain a hearing from Islamic people was in coalition with an Islamic organisation.

What is your assessment of repression faced by the left and social movements in Indonesia today? How should the left respond?

Zely Ariane: The left in Indonesia would still have hard times campaigning openly, particularly given the recent developments towards the restoration or revitalisation of New Order remnants—Golkar and the Army. But the situation has not become worse than under the Suharto regime. We can handle the paramilitary counter revolutionary agenda with many methods of campaigning, from moderate to radical types—depending on our capacity and the capacity of the social movements. The scenario must not be allowed to limit the program of Papernas. Never give up on the program of Tripanji [3]. The left must never subordinated its identity to the fake reformists. We should mobilise Papernas together with the other left forces to oppose the anti-communist campaign in a well managed plan. We have to openly resist any kind of anti-democratic action and counter revolutionary ideas. Revolutionary ideas have a wonderful place in this country, with their own organisation. It has never happened in our history that an Islamic party can be used to propagate revolutionary ideas. Even Sarekat Islam, which was successfully radicalised by the PKI in 1912 to oppose colonialism, was far different with recent Islamic instruments. We can revolutionise Islamic ideas with many academic and scientific works, but we can not hide under the counter revolutionary instrument of Islam. We should face up and resist. Through the reformasi movement we won the political space that made mass action a widespread reality. Now we should win back revolutionary ideas - socialism with the mass action.

10. According to *Green Left* Sari explained “One of Papernas’ main campaigns is to overcome underdevelopment and push to build the national economy and industry, relying more on our national economic resources, rather than being dependent on foreign investment. We want the workers to support this economic program and put their immediate demands into [its] framework.”

This part of the Papernas program, Sari said, compelled it to consider the possibility, of limited tactical alliances with owners of small and medium-sized businesses. "They are also harshly attacked by foreign investment and the government’s policy. Their distribution and their networks are being smashed to make way for foreign investment.

Zely Ariane: We should understand the very clear and concrete, basic and immediate problem of

underdevelopment in Indonesia today. It is imperialism that completely destroyed the capacity of national industry (or in Marxist terms the “force of production”). In Indonesia today the amount of money spent on developing human resources and human capacity has been extremely low, even compared with Bangladesh, to a level not adequate for building a sovereign economy.

Foreign investment (both government and private, in trade, industry and service) functions only as an instrument for foreign capital accumulation in the non productive and very speculative areas, which is nothing to do with the development of productive forces and national industry. Indonesian governments, from Suharto to Susilo Bambang Yudoyono, together with all instruments in the Trias Politica of liberal democracy [the legislative, executive and judicative instruments] are ‘loyal’ collaborators of imperialism.

The anarchism of foreign capital which is not controlled by the national government is the source of workers’ problems today. The theory is that profits and capital will be reinvested and revitalise the productive forces. This only really works in the imperialist countries. Profit made in Indonesia by foreign capitalists is immediately sent home, with the support of domestic free market policies. Even if the multinationals were to be audited there are no domestic laws on the portion of profit to be reinvested in the domestic productive sector. That is the basis of anarchical industrial competition; One industry ‘develops’ on the destruction of another similar industry—particularly by destroying industry which absorbed many workers. This is happening already in our manufacturing industries. That is why the imperialists need domestic policies which guarantee labor market flexibility. The direct consequences are the destruction of national productivity and massive unemployment. These are the main industrial campaigns of workers in Indonesia today, because they hit more workers and also hit the reserve army of labour.

Those problems are the root of the price hikes and the falling purchasing power of Indonesian people today—most sharply in the sector of agriculture which has been abandoned completely by foreign capital [4]. So the issue is not as simple as to say that we should relying more on our national economic resources—rather than being dependent on foreign investment. It is logically correct, but the critical questions that need to be answered clearly are these: In order to be independent how would we build the national economy? Where would we get the money? Who should take control of the foreign investment and the sources of domestic revenue?

11. What is the political role of the small and medium size capitalists that Sari sights as possible tactical allies and the political role of the Indonesian capitalist class in general in the context of Indonesia’s national oppression?

Zely Ariane: It is unclear what small and medium capitalists Dita Sari refers to and in what situation. Of course we should bring together all the forces which have been disenfranchised by the capitalist system, we have to march together to win back our rights - but who are these forces? As we struggle for national liberation—not nationalism—the main ally which we should unite is the lowest strata of capitalist society—the poor people (workers, peasant, unemployment, unpaid housewives, etc) which today receive a very small portion of society’s wealth. In Indonesia the gap between the middle strata and the lowest strata of our society is getting wider, and this middle strata has not yet become radical—although to some extent they are also impacted by the anarchy of foreign capital - but we understand, given the nature of the capitalist economy, at the moment of crisis that gap will narrow while the gap between the middle and upper strata of society will widen.

This understanding gives us a principal line to fight for democratic and popular (also concrete) programs to benefit the poor. We established Papernas as a political instrument of the poor to fight for the national industrialisation, which is primarily funded by the money currently allocated to foreign debt payments and the nationalisation of mining industries (under the control of the people).

This was what we called Tripanji (the three banners) of the People's Liberation. Since the split took place, we hardly heard about Tripanji from Papernas - especially the nationalisation campaign. The nationalisation of the mining industry seems to have changed into a demand for reviewing the contracts of mining industries [5]. Of course we do not oppose contract review, royalties negotiation or transfer of technology, but I believe we used to agree that those policies are part of nationalisation—the transactional negotiation under the program of nationalisation under the people's control.

PERTAMINA (the government owned mining company) was under the control of Indonesian government in the Suharto era. A large portion of the royalties went to the government. But it was nothing to do with the welfare of the people; it only benefited Suharto and his domestic capitalist cronies. We should not put aside the demand of nationalisation under people's control, because it will be a critical point in fighting for national liberation. Papernas should be free to campaign on the nationalisation issue, because it reflects its political identity. Once Papernas put aside this main demand, it destroyed the potential of Papernas to put forward an alternative or a way out of the crisis. Has Papernas compromised its program with the national bourgeoisie sentiment in order to gain support from them? If indeed, I believe it is very dangerous for the struggle of national liberation.

We should learn from the nationalisation campaign of the mining industry in Bolivia in the period of 2004-2005. The workers and social movement mobilised to reject privatisation and demand nationalisation which finally resulted in Morales' party Movement towards Socialism (MAS) being elected and implementing this demand.

P.S.

* Zely Ariane is the spokesperson for the Political Committee For The Poor - People's Democratic Party (KPRM-PRD). Interview conducted by Theresia Dian Septi Trisnanti.

* The Political Committee For The Poor - People's Democratic Party (KPRM-PRD). Part of the PRD who rejects the opportunist parliamentary tactics of the PRD's leadership majority. Organised to raise campaigns on the importance of alternative politic of the Poor.

<http://kprm-peoples-democratic-party.blogspot.com>.

<http://kprm-prd.blogspot.com>

Footnotes

[1] See <http://www.greenleft.org.au/2007/735/38075> or on ESSF website: [Indonesia: The struggle against underdevelopment](#)

[2] *Radar Lampung*, Monday, 24 September 2007.

[3] The Tripanji or the "Three Banners of National Unity" was originally 1. Repudiation of the foreign debt! 2. Nationalise the oil and mining industry under people's control! 3. Build the national industry for people's prosperity

[4] Except the agricultural big business such as palm oil and rubber.

[5] This is the case in the interview with *Green Left Weekly* 735 entitled "Indonesia: The struggle

against underdevelopment”.