

Original Article

# The Existence of Labors in the First Election in Indonesia

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Received Date: 11 December 2023

Revised Date: 26 December 2023

Accepted Date: 03 January 2024

**Abstract:** *In the long history of the Indonesian nation, labors have fought important wars in the nation's journey. This can be seen from their role in helping various nation-building processes. This article aims to reveal the existence of labors in the socio-political situation and their involvement in Indonesia's first election in 1955. This article was written using a historical method which consists of several stages, namely heuristics, criticism, interpretation and historiography. In this article it can be concluded that there are political and economic relations between trade unions and various political elements, especially political parties. The relationship between the two has different interests where labor unions have an economic interest in getting decent wages, health insurance and opposing arbitrary actions by employers. Meanwhile, political parties make themselves a forum for channeling the aspirations of labor union votes and use them as a voting base.*

**Keywords:** *Labors, Election, Economics, Political.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The labors' movement or struggle (which is often identified with symbols hammer) in Indonesia which is very intense, of course it cannot be separated from economic problems and politics going on. Because of the struggle of labors in particular, and all levels of society Indonesia in general is to achieve national independence, achieve improvement in fate, and more broadly to ensure lasting world peace. In a practical political context, people Labor became one of the power bases for the development of political parties. This is visible with many labor organizations or labor unions joining political parties which at that time had been formed, including the Indonesian People's Labor Union which was formed by the Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI), the Indonesian Islamic Labors Union which was formed by Masyumi and the Central Organization of All Indonesian Labor (SOBSI) are affiliated with the Party Indonesian Communists (PKI).

In the period before 1950, the All-Indonesian Central Labor Organization was formed (SOBSI). The initial formation of SOBSI was due to the ideals or desires of several leadership of the labors to unite the labor unions, namely by merging the labor unions are under one umbrella. This dream was finally realized SOBSI was founded on November 29 1946. This federation was led by Surjono, Harjono, Assarudin, and Njono. Therefore, this date (November 29) is a good date historic for the development of the labor movement in Indonesia. Central All Labor Organization Indonesia is a labors' organization with communist leanings. A sign that this organization communist leaning is the election of a figure from the Indonesian Communist Party, Setiadjudi as Chairman of the I SOBSI Congress in 1947. Likewise with figures such as, Achmad Sumadi, Oei Gee Hwat, Hardjono, Maruto Darusman and others are included in SOBSI to develop Indonesian labors (Gie, 2005: 86-87).

On November 27 1948, the Indonesian Islamic Labors Union (SBII) was founded pioneered by Mr. Moh. Daljono. This labor union was formed because of the Madiun incident on September 18 1948, where labors' activities or movements became vacuumed and engulfed indecision. In this regard, Islamic leaders or figures immediately realizing how necessary it is to gather and mobilize religious labors Islam within the limits dictated by their religious teachings. Islamic figures believes that the struggle of labors is essentially inseparable from nature material (material). All forms of business must be based on trust, faith and Islamic religious beliefs.

As a labor union based on Islam, SBII is under the auspices of Masjumi Party. In 1956, when SBII was led by Mr. Jusuf Wibisono who also served as a member of the Masyumi Presidium and was Minister of Finance, total SBII members are claimed to be 275,000 people from various fields of work. SBII also has affiliate with the International Conference of Free Trade Union (ICFTU) and establish cooperation with labor movements in Islamic countries.

The description above explains that the phenomenon of combining several labor unions ideology seems to have been popular among Indonesian labors at the beginning independence. This was also done by HIMBI and Democratic Labor. Both organizations held a congress on December 10, 1952 in Surabaya. The results obtained from the congress, they agreed to merge



themselves and form a parent union labors which was later given the name Indonesian People's Labor Concentration (KBKI), and subsequently changed its name to the Indonesian People's Labor Union. According to time holding the congress, December 10, 1952 was determined as the year of its formation KBKI. Before being merged into KBKI, HIMBI and Democratic Labor themselves were not widely known among the labors' movement because these two organizations only had a limited role in among members of the Indonesian National Party (PNI). Even HIMBI itself is not actually a thing labor union, but rather one of the sections (departments) within the PNI which was deliberately formed on September 1, 1951 at the second PNI Congress in Madiun.

In subsequent developments, the above labor unions became the front line in this practical politics and all related matters such as conducting campaigns, spreading ideology and spread the vision and mission of the party he supports. The benefit that the party gets is votes labors in general elections become votes for parties that have labor unions. This matter shows that the relationship between Labor and Political Parties is very good. Objective The purpose of writing this article is to describe the dynamics of the relationship between the two when they work together to fulfill their interests, which the labors want its aspirations can be implemented by the government through political parties and political parties want labors as their voting base, especially in practical politics 1955 General Election.

This article was written using the historical method. The historical method consists of four stages, namely heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The first stage in the method history is a Heuristic. Heuristics is the stage of searching and finding historical sources. The historical sources used in preparing this article are primarily written sources in the form of books (history) which are used as references (library research). There are many books or literature that are relevant to writing this article. The second stage, stage of criticism which consists of two types of criticism, namely external and internal criticism, where is the sources that have been collected previously, tested for authenticity and credibility. After that, the third stage is interpretation. This stage is an interpretation process after the data is collected and criticized so as to produce an explanation. At this stage the facts are put together one complete unit. The final stage is historiography, which is the presentation stage from the results of the interpretation to becoming a historical writing (Prayogi, 2022).

## **II. LABORS AND ECONOMIC STRUGGLE**

The very intense movement or struggle of labors in Indonesia, of course, cannot be separated from the economic and political problems that are occurring. Because of the struggle of labors in particular, and all levels of Indonesian society in general; is to achieve national independence, achieving improvements in fate, and more broadly to guarantee lasting world peace. In this regard, it is very relevant if this chapter discusses economic conditions in Indonesia, both during the colonial period and after independence (post-independence) because the economic structure built by the Dutch East Indies greatly influenced Indonesia's economic development during the independence period.

The Dutch colonial government apparently was very "allergic" to the labors' movement, so they suppressed it in various ways. The pressure or intimidation carried out by the colonial government can be seen from the data released by the Dutch East Indies Labor Affairs Office; that throughout 1940 there were only labor strikes in 42 companies, including 30 textile companies in West Java, and only 2,115 labors participated, even though the number of labors from the 42 companies was 7,949 people. That means, only 27% of the labors went on strike. Even this strike did not cause any losses meaning for employers. They only experienced a loss of 32 working days (Cahyono, 2005:24).

Even though large-scale labors' actions no longer occurred as a result of the pressures carried out by the Dutch government, the repression against the Indonesian people and labors did not relax or weaken. Oppression against labors continues, this can be seen, among other things, from very low wages for labors and arbitrary treatment from employers. According to statistics for 1940, it was noted that on average wages for sugar factory labors are IDR 0.28 a day for male labors and IDR 0.23 for female labors. In the same year (1940), there were also recorded 407 cases of complaints from labors who received violent treatment (beatings) from administrators, assistants and plantation foremen. Finally, there were attacks by plantation labors on plantation supervisors. In 1940, there were 51 recorded incidents an attack carried out by plantation labors which resulted in the death of 2 plantation supervisors (Cahyono, 2005:24).

When Indonesia fell into the hands of Japanese colonialism in 1942, the cruel actions of the Dutch against the Indonesian people and labors were continued by Japanese fascism even more cruelly. The labors are made into economic soldiers, but in reality they are had to work the rice fields for war needs. The actual condition of labors in terms of wages, food and health, is a picture of poverty. They were sent to other areas to become romusha without receiving wages. Facing the treatment of the

Japanese colonialists which was beyond human limits, all levels of the Indonesian people immediately reacted strongly. They were determined to fight together to overthrow colonial and fascist rule.

One of the peaks of people's resistance was the outbreak of the People's Revolution in 1945 which aimed to make Indonesia an independent country. Where the economy is not dependent on foreign countries, and national industry can develop so that prosperity can be achieved and political independence is guaranteed. After going through a very long struggle and suffering many casualties, the Indonesian people finally succeeded in proclaiming their independence on August 17 1945 (Harijanto, 1989: 29).

After the birth of the Republic of Indonesia, the government began to regulate the issue of labors working in the plantations and factories it controlled. The government realizes the importance of wages for the welfare of labors. Because during colonial rule, they received low average wages and their lives were less secure. (Harijanto, 1989: 30). During the war for independence, all levels of Indonesian society worked together to fight, both during Dutch and Japanese colonialism. It is no exception that labors are involved in it. When the Indonesian nation proclaimed its independence, the labors immediately act quickly to form struggle organizations and move to take over the services, agencies and private companies from Japan and declare them as belonging to the Republic. This effort turned out to be successful, even though in several takeover incidents the labors had to "fight" against the Japanese guards. The aim of the labors in taking over government agencies and similar companies was to "realize the Proclamation of Independence". In other words, everything that is in Indonesia and is still controlled by Japan must change hands and become the property of the Republic notebene has been free from all forms of colonialism.

### **III. LABORS AND POLITICAL STRUGGLE**

Witnessing the actions of the labors, the trade union leaders immediately realized that the actions and movements of their members must be coordinated and carried out in accordance with the principles of the labor movement. To discuss the matter, on 19 September 1945 a number of labors' representatives gathered in Jakarta. They discussed matters relating to the role of labors in the struggle to establish the Republic as well formulating principles for the labor movement in accordance with the demands of the new era, the post-independence era (Tedjasukmana, 2008: 31).

At the conference which took place in Jakarta, trade union leaders agreed to form an organization that could unite and represent existing trade unions and other labors' organizations. Apart from that, the organization to be established must have the form and character of a struggle organization or a labors' front. Based on these criteria, the organization in question was formed on September 15 1945 and was named the Indonesian Labor Front (BBI). Then the BBI asked the National Committee (the Republican provisional parliament) to recognize the BBI as one the only representative of the labor movement in Indonesia. Apart from that, BBI also demanded that the National Committee only recognize representatives appointed by BBI (Sandra, 2007:57). Mr Iwa Kusuma Sumantri who served as Minister of Social Affairs in the first government of the Republic gave full support to the establishment of BBI, even Mr. Iwa Kusuma Sumantri gave his full approval when BBI planned to hold a labor congress in November 1945 (Tedjasukmana, 2008: 33).

On November 7 1945, the large labors' congress initiated by BBI was finally held in Surakarta, Central Java, and opened by Mr. Iwa Kusuma Sumantri, Minister of Social Affairs. Those attending the congress were not only delegates from BBI branches and labor unions in Java, but also delegates from labor unions from Sumatra and several other islands (Tedjasukmana, 2008: 33). In the congress, Syamsu Harya Udaya and his friends who were the leaders of the Central Committee of the Indonesian Labors' Front put forward the suggestion that BBI become a political party for the labors (labors). This suggestion put forward by Syamsu Harya Udaya and his friends became the subject of fierce debate at the congress. Many delegates opposed the suggestion. They want BBI to remain a trade union organization. In order to mediate the debate. A compromise was reached that political parties could be formed, but the existence of BBI as a labor union and mass organization must be maintained. Likewise with unionsother labors. The political party from the labors' group was finally formed and named the Indonesian Labor Party (PBI) and Syamsu Harya Udaya was elected as interim president of PBI (Tedjasukmana, 2008: 35).

At that time (in the early days of independence) labor unions were still less stable because they were not well formed and they were younger than political parties. Because of this, labor unions that are still "young" like to be used as a kind of branch or satellite by political parties that are "older". Political parties like to use or mobilize labor unions as front organizations to help the parties in campaigns, spread the party's ideology and spread the party's vision and mission. In this case, labor unions have a

major contribution in enlarging and expanding the influence of political parties in society. Tedjasukmana (2008:154) even said that the formation or creation of certain labor unions and federations was the idea and work of certain political parties.

The communists who were members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) took the initiative in forming the All-Indonesian Central Labor Organization (SOBSI) in 1946. The number of SOBSI members was around 60% of the total number of organized labors. SOBSI has a good organization and is the most efficient in terms of administration. The initial formation of SOBSI was due to the aspirations or desires of several labor leaders to unite the labor unions, namely by merging the labor unions under one umbrella. This ideal was finally realized with the founding of SOBSI on November 29 1946. This federation was led by Surjono, Harjono, Assarudin, and Njono. Hence, that date (29 November) is a historic date for the development of the labor movement in Indonesia. The effort to form one main labor union for all of Indonesia was initially only a dream and could not be fully realized, and this time (29 November 1946) it has become a reality.

The birth of SOBSI for the labor movement in Indonesia means one step of progress in its efforts to achieve consolidation. SOBSI in its struggle will work together with groups and parties of the same opinion. Regarding the form of organization, it is explained that "the basis of the organization is democratic centralism, where the central management in carrying out their obligations must be responsible to the congress." (Sandra, 2007:62).

In mid-May 1947, SOBSI held its first congress in Malang, East Java. At the congress there were representatives from 34 vertical labor organizations and regional SOBSI representatives representing horizontal labor unions. Also present at that time were representatives from overseas labor organizations, including Blokzjil and Henning from EVC and Suurhoff and Vjil Brief from NVV, both representatives from the Netherlands. Then, representatives from Australia, Healy and Ted Roach from the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Waterside Labors Federation. Taharudin was also present as a representative of the Malayan Labor Association.

At the congress, the founding principles, struggle program and organizational form were ratified. Some of the decisions taken include: 1) SOBSI became a member of the WFTU (World Federation of Trade Unions). 2) Approve the regulations from the CB SOBSI management regarding the Linggarjati Agreement. 3) Accepting the political manifesto of the government in November 1945. 4) Calling on the port labors of Australia, the Netherlands (Netherlands) and labors of other countries to continue their boycott of Dutch ships carrying weapons (tools of war) to Indonesia. Apart from that, the congress also approved 2 programs to be proposed to the Indonesian government regarding economic development and social development programs. Also at the congress it was agreed that the Indonesian Labor Laskar had originally been independent included in SOBSI as part of the defense. After holding the congress, the first step taken by SOBSI was primarily to carry out internal consolidation. Even after SOBSI received an invitation from WFTU to attend the general assembly in Prague, Czechoslovakia. This invitation from WFTU clearly received great attention from the SOBSI management with the consideration that by participating in the general assembly, the voices of Indonesian labors would be able to be heard internationally. To attend the WFTU session in Prague, SOBSI sent Setiadjid and Oei Gie Hwat.

As a member of WFTU, SOBSI can be said to play a relatively important role, even Njono, who served as General Secretary of SOBSI, was trusted as Vice President of WFTU. The political atmosphere and warfare against Dutch troops during the War Independence turned out to have a big influence on the existence of SOBSI as a labor federation which could be said to be very strong. When Indonesia and the Netherlands signed the Renville Agreement in 1948, opinions emerged among the people who agreed and rejected the Renville Agreement. This similar feeling also echoed among the labor movement, and this reached its peak when SOBSI held its third Presidium Meeting on August 22 1948. At this meeting there was an agenda to determine their attitude towards the Renville Agreement. In this regard, several labor unions who are members of SOBSI rejected the Renville Agreement, and there were several who agreed or accepted it. As a result of these differences in political views, coupled with the Madiun incident on 18 September 1948 led by Muso, of the 34 labor unions that were members of SOBSI, 19 of them declared their withdrawal from membership.

#### **IV. THE LABORS AND ITS EXISTENCE IN FIRST ELECTION IN INDONESIA**

The Madiun incident (18 September 1948) was a humanitarian tragedy driven by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and SOBSI was considered involved in this incident. This was the reason why the labor unions withdrew from SOBSI. They do not justify SOBSI being involved in an event that is very sad for the nation Indonesia see that's SOBSI's actions as actions that could plunge the organization into the abyss of danger. After this very shocking event, labor movement activity was completely

absent. That time was a vacuum. Leaders and members of labor unions are filled with fear that the government will take action against them (Cahyono, 2005: 28 and Harijanto, 1989: 81).

In order to restore the vacuum in labors' activities, the Ministry of Labor immediately provided information and advice that the existence of labor unions would be of great benefit in every field of work. The information from the Ministry of Labor was welcomed by the labors with feelings of relief, and they began to revive organizations that had been dormant for a long time. This was also used to reactivate SOBSI. In 1951, under the leadership of D.N Aidit, the PKI established close ties with SOBSI. In its later journey, communist influence was very dominant and exclusive within SOBSI. Communist ideology is also embedded in the bodies of labor unions affiliated with SOBSI, especially SARBUPRI (Plantation Labors' Union), SBG (Sugar Labors' Union), SBPP (Port and Shipping Labors' Union), SBKA (Railway Labors' Union), PERBUM (Union Oil Labors), and SBIM (Metal Industry Labors Union) (Tedjasukmana, 2008: 43). Later, based on records at the Ministry of Labor, in 1956 SOBSI members had reached 2,661,970 people.

The nationalists under the auspices of the Indonesian National Party (PNI) initiated the formation of the Indonesian People's Labor Union (KBKI) on May 12 1953. The aim of the nationalists in forming the KBKI was none other than to stem the movement and activities of SOBSI with a communist ideology which continued to develop and grow stronger. Also formed was the Indonesian Islamic Labors Union (SBII) on November 27 1948, which was initiated by the Party Masjumi. Thus, the ideology or understanding of SBII as a Muslim labor union, is based on the ideals and teachings of the Holy Qur'an which calls on all Muslims to live in peace and uphold social justice. Like the socialists and nationalists, the Masyumi Party's aim in forming SBII was to balance SOBSI which was dominated by communists. These facts provide an illustration of the aims and objectives of political parties in Indonesia in forming these labor unions. Political parties view trade unions as the vanguard in their struggle to achieve political power.

After political parties initiated and formed labor unions as front organizations for these parties, of course relations developed between them for the sake of common interests. The relationship between trade unions or federations and political parties takes various forms. They work together with each other as two partners whose position can be said to be equal. In general, labor unions have their own character in politics. They want political ideals, are involved in political activities, and maintain close relations with political parties, but most of them do not declare their organizations as political parties, but rather as mass organizations (labors) who wish and aim to fight for the improvement of their lot. they are economical and demand humane treatment from employers. The desires and hopes of the labor unions are then exploited by political parties. Political party leaders involve labor unions to expand and strengthen the parties they lead.

It was also here that trade union leaders began to become active in political parties, and quite a few of them even became key figures. The aim of the labors joining a political party is to fight for their well-being and fate, among other things, they want their wages to be increased so they can live decently, to have health insurance and want to stop the arbitrary behavior of their employers. The labors' desires were strengthened by Soekarno's statement, that if the labors wanted a more prosperous life, then the labors' struggle must be tenacious and gather their strength in trade unions. When viewed from a political perspective, Soekarno's statement was a signal for labors to form political parties, or at least join political parties (Cahyono, 2005: 32)

The psychological condition of labors who are often oppressed is often used as momentum by political parties to gain vote support during general elections. For political parties, the existence of labors with their various problems is propaganda material to attract their sympathy so that they are willing to support their party. Political parties whose propaganda wants to fight for and improve the lives of labors will usually receive relatively large sympathy from labors. D.N. For example, Aidit, who was very astute and intelligent, was able to exploit the psychological condition of labors in Indonesia so that the PKI, the party he led, received a very significant vote share and made the PKI at that time one of the parties that had a relatively strong influence on the Indonesian political scene.

The PKI's position became more stable thanks to D.N.'s agitation and propaganda. Aidit among labors and farmers, so that in the 1955 General Election the PKI succeeded in collecting six million voter votes. At that time the PKI was one of the four major parties after PNI, Masjumi, and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), even though D.N. Aidit only effectively "campaigned" for the party he had led since 1953, after returning from Moscow, two years before the general elections. However, the PKI did not succeed in sitting in the cabinet formed after the general election.

The victory of the PNI, Masyumi, NU and PKI in the 1955 elections was because they were clever at launching campaigns so that they received great support or sympathy from the public. One of the community groups that has the potential to vote for political parties is the labors. What is interesting is that in this context the PKI was able to maximize the existence of labors to support their party in the 1955 elections. Long before the general election was held, the PKI had established itself in the villages among plantation labors and mining labors and had begun to gain a foothold in a number of regions in Java. SOBSI (Sentral Organization of Indonesian Trade Unions) also played a very big role for the PKI in winning the 1955 elections. Even during the campaign period leading up to the 1955 elections, the PKI put out a slogan which read: "PNI is the priyayi party, Masyumi and NU is the santri parties, but the PKI is the people's party". In other words, the existence of labors was one of the factors that enlivened the political scene in Indonesia, especially when the 1955 elections were held.

In the early twentieth century, this symbol was widely used in Europe, with various variations, such as the hammer with the shovel or the hammer and sickle with the plow, to symbolize labors, farmers and labors as a whole. In 1917, Lenin organized a competition to create a Soviet coat of arms. The winning design was a hammer-and-sickle symbol with a sword. Lenin decided to remove the image of the sword because he wanted to create the impression that his nation was a peaceful nation.

Later, Moscow artist Yvgeny Kamzolkin designed a crossed hammer-sickle image for a Labor Day poster in May. In 1918, this version was officially adopted by the Soviets. But who is this Kamzolkin? He wasn't even a communist, in fact he was a religious man. The hammer-and-sickle symbol, historically, was not intended to indicate antipathy towards religion.

In Indonesia, the birth of the PKI was not triggered by opposing religion, but rather its aim was to fight against Dutch colonialism, because communist supporters believed that colonialism could not be separated from capitalism. Many of the founders of the PKI were also members of the nationalist organization Sarekat Islam. One of them was Haji M. Misbach (1876-1926), who stated that communism and Islam were compatible. Of course, the PKI used the paluarit as its party symbol, but the use of this symbol was intended to emphasize support for the working class and their rejection of capitalism. Today, however, the hammer-and-sickle symbol is used to emphasize the idea that the PKI is a grave evil – even though the party was completely eradicated in 1965-67, when almost all of its members and even those considered sympathizers were brutally massacred. The PKI no longer exists, its members and sympathizers were brutally exterminated in 1965-67, but fear of this movement and its symbols continues to this day.

When women are forced to wear certain clothes, when labors are paid inadequately, when religious minorities are driven from their homes and when farmers are forced to work on contaminated plantations, the reaction of the authorities and officials can be very different. It may be that many people shake their heads at all this, but usually they will look away and go on with their lives. However, when someone drew a picture of labors' and farmers' work tools (a hammer and sickle), the police quickly acted, the media flocked to cover it and the whole community was dragged into mass hysteria. Indeed, the fear of the ghost of the PKI in this country is far greater than the fear of the problems that are clearly at hand. The crimes and corruption that occur every day are ignored; those who have committed mass murders in various places are still allowed to roam freely while many people are busy looking for ghosts.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

The labors in Indonesia who were active after independence (1945-1955) initially moved because of economic rather than political demands. However, in subsequent developments, the labor union movement in Indonesia has always been the target of political influence, especially regarding ideology. Many labor unions are involved in genuine political activities or are affiliated with political parties that were founded long ago. The politicians as well as political party activists often involve labor unions in their activities.

Towards the holding of the first general elections in Indonesia, which were held on 25 September and 15 December 1955, the existence of labors (labor unions) was truly utilized optimally by political parties as a political commodity in order to gain support and obtain as many votes as possible. big. The fate of labors has the connotation of concern, low wages, and always being oppressed by employers is always used as propaganda material by political parties with the aim of gaining sympathy from labors. What is most interesting is the ability of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) under the leadership of D.N. Aidit, who very cleverly was able to mobilize SOBSI (Indonesian Labor Organization Center) as a political machine to gain votes from labors. When the PKI entered the top four as the winning party in the 1955 General Election, many people said that the PKI's victory was the result of SOBSI's active role.

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